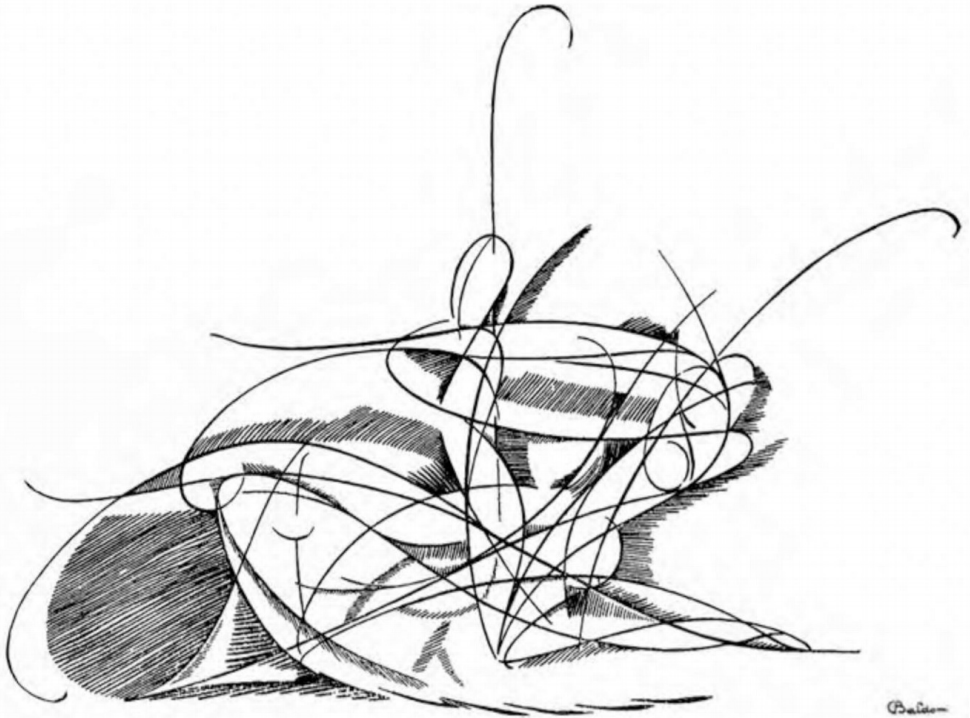


# SRI AUROBINDO

Compassionate grace  
and laughter



Palan

*Excerpts from Sri Aurobindo's works and correspondence*



Compiled by Paulette Hadnagy  
15 August 2010.

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To be spiritual only is not enough; that prepares a number of souls for heaven, but leaves the earth very much where it was.

SRI AUROBINDO

*Essays in philosophy and yoga*



## INTRODUCTION

As with my other books, this compilation is an attempt towards introducing a more integrated approach to Sri Aurobindo than is commonly done; in this case, taking into account elements that stretch far beyond the stereotyped clichés which humans tend to attribute to the Guru. In this endeavour two major aspects emerge: Sri Aurobindo's ineffable sense of humour, even under the most extreme circumstances, whatever the issue; and his graciousness and ocean of compassion, molding his language in empathy with the disciple's nature and dire needs.

The early texts in Section One, *Baroda and the Revolutionary Years*, highlight the wit, the subtle irony, the sense of divertissement of young Aurobindo Ghose. This very spirit goes on, unabated, even as years elapse. Whether distilling the quintessence of the nature of the bourgeois mentality or entering into deep political satire, ultimately, the smile remains – even when expounding matters of deep concern or the most dramatic themes – along with the hope and certainty of a bold future.

In Section Two, *Grinning with the Master*, the sobs and sighs of two well-known disciples, Nirodbaran and Dilip Kumar Roy, along with unending argumentation often in the garb of phantasmagoric pranks, are met by Sri Aurobindo's sparkling humour. Nirodbaran<sup>1</sup> was a Sri Aurobindo Ashram inmate and doctor-in-charge since the early thirties, and later on Sri Aurobindo's scribe. A descendant of the medieval Bengali saint Chaitanya, Dilip<sup>2</sup> first met Sri Aurobindo in 1924. In 1928 Pondicherry became his base until the passing of the Master.

In the Guru-disciple epistolary tête-a-tête everything turns into a joke: from medicine to poetry to the most tragic events of contemporary history. Nor do issues such as Immortality, Avatarhood, Brahmanhood and Yoga and the likes escape humorous scrutiny. Then pain, struggle, self-torture and

despondency dissolve, and only Light, Joy and Laughter remain – all permeated with the power of the Guru’s grace and His all-embracing, infinite compassion.

*Nonsense Poetry* is a selection of surrealist poems, all but one undated, which Sri Aurobindo composed between 1927 and 1947.

Paulette

Auroville, 15 August 2010

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<sup>1</sup> Nirod (1903–2006), as he was commonly known, authored several books of his voluminous correspondence with the Master, along with other writings. Nirod’s first two books of poetry were revised and commented on by Sri Aurobindo, who supported him in his pursuit throughout.

<sup>2</sup> Dilip (1897–1980) traveled extensively in Europe, researching music and giving seminars and musical performances. Romain Rolland commented on him, "He belongs to a type which is the best of aristocratic India." Returning to his own country Roy embarked on research that has reshaped the Indian way of practicing and teaching music. He composed songs in Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindi, but also in English and, retaining some popular or classical melodies, in Russian, German, Italian, and French as well. Among the many honours he received, in 1965 he was awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship for lifetime achievements, the highest honour given in India. He cut over fifty records; authored eight volumes of songs; wrote twenty-one volumes in English and forty-six in Bengali, which included novels, poems, plays, letters, reminiscences, essays etc.

# SRI AUROBINDO

## COMPASSIONATE GRACE AND LAUGHTER



Excerpts from Sri Aurobindo's works and correspondence



## **BARODA AND THE REVOLUTIONARY YEARS**

### **BURLESQUE<sup>1</sup>**

BASIL: Sure, maiden, you are wondrous beautiful.

BRIGIDA: Senor, Queen Anne is dead. Tell me the next.

BASIL: The next is, I will kiss you.

BRIGIDA: Oh, Sir, that's a prophecy. Well, death and kissing come to all of us, and by what disease the one or by whom the other, wise men care not to forecast. It profits little to study calamities beforehand. When it comes, I pray God I may learn to take it with resignation, if I cannot do better.

BASIL: By my life, I will kiss you and without farther respite.

BRIGIDA: On what ground?

BASIL: Have I not told you, you are beautiful.

BRIGIDA: So has my mirror, not once but a hundred times, and never yet offered to kiss me. When it does, I'll allow your logic. No, we are already near enough to each other. Pray, keep your distance.

BASIL: I will establish my argument with my lips.

BRIGIDA: I will defend mine with my hand. I promise you 'twill prove the abler dialectician of the two.

(...)

BASIL: Saints and angels! How is it? How did it happen? Is the sun still in heaven? Is that the song of a bird or a barrel-organ? I am not drunk either. I can still distinguish between a tree and the squirrel upon it. What, am I not Basil? whom men call the witty and eloquent Basil? Did I not laugh from the womb? Was not my first cry a jest upon the world I came into? Did I not invent a conceit upon my mother's milk ere I had sucked of it?

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<sup>1</sup> Sri Aurobindo wrote this play during his early years in Baroda (1893- 1906), where he worked as private secretary to the Maharaja of Baroda, and afterwards as Professor of English and vice-principal of Baroda College. Incomplete, *The Maid in the Mill* was first printed in 1962.[Com p.]

Death! And have I been bashed and beaten by the tongue of a girl? silenced by a common purveyor of impertinences? It is so and yet it cannot be. I begin to believe in the dogmas of the materialist. The gastric juice rises in my estimation. Genius is after all only a form of indigestion, a line of Shakespeare the apotheosis of a leg of mutton and the speculations of Plato an escape of diseased tissue arrested in the permanency of ink. What did I break my fast with this morning? Kippered herring? Bread? Marmalade? Tea? O kippered herring, art thou the material form of stupidity and is marmalade an enemy of wit? It must be so. O mighty gastric juice! Mother and Saviour! I bow down before thee. Be propitious, fair goddess, to thy adorer.

Arise, Basil. Today thou shalt retrieve thy tarnished laurels or be expunged for ever from the book of the witty. Arm thyself in full panoply of allusion and irony, gird on raillery like a sword and repartee like a buckler. I will meet this girl tonight. I will tunc her with conceits, torture her with ironies, tickle her with jests, prick her all over with epigrams. My wit shall smother her, tear her, burst her sides, press her to death, hang her, draw her, quarter her, and if all this fails, Death! as a last revenge, I'll marry her. Saints!

Collected Plays and Short Stories, *SABCL vol. 7, pp. 852-5*

## **BIRTHDAY SURPRISE: UNCLE BOROMAMA<sup>1</sup>**

My health has not been very good recently; that is to say, although I have no recognised doctor's illness, I have developed a new disease of my own, or rather a variation of Madhavrao's special brand of nervous debility. I shall patent mine as A.G's private and particular. Its chief symptom is a ghastly inability to do any serious work ... The funny thing is that I keep up a very decent appetite and am equal to any amount of physical exercise that may be demanded of me. In fact if I take care to

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from a letter to his uncle Boromama, which Sri Aurobindo wrote in Baroda on August 15, 1902 – his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday –, two months after marrying Mrinalini Devi. [*Comp.*]

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

... The improvement, which is part of a general abatement of my symptoms, I attribute to a fortnight's determined and cynical laziness. During this time I have been to Ahmedabad with our cricket eleven and watched them get a jolly good beating; which happy result we celebrated by a gorgeous dinner at the refreshment room. I believe the waiters must have thought us a party of famine-stricken labourers, dressed up in stolen clothes, perhaps the spoils of massacred famine officers. There were six of us and they brought us a dozen plentiful courses; we ate them all and asked for more. As for the bread we consumed—well, they brought us at first a huge toast-rack with about 20 large pieces of toast. After three minutes there was nothing left except the rack itself; they repeated the allowance with a similar result. Then they gave up the toast as a bad job, and brought in two great plates each with a mountain of bread on it as large as Nandanpahad. After a short while we were howling for more. This time there was a wild-eyed consultation of waiters and after some minutes they reappeared with large trays of bread carried in both hands. This time they conquered. They do charge high prices at the refreshment rooms but I don't think they got much profit out of us that time. Since then I have been once on a picnic to Ajwa with the District Magistrate and Collector of Baroda, the second Judge of the High Court and a still more important and solemn personage whom you may have met under the name of Mr. Anandrao Jadhav. A second picnic was afterwards organized in which some dozen rowdies, not to say Hooligans, of our club—the worst among them, I regret to say, was the father of a large family and a trusted officer of H.H.the Maharajah Gaekwar,—went down to Ajwa and behaved in such a manner that it is a wonder we were not arrested and locked up. On the way my horse broke down and so four of us had to get down and walk three miles in the heat. At the first village we met a cart coming

back from Ajwa and in spite of the carters' protests seized it, turned the bullocks round and started them back—of course with ourselves in the cart. The bullocks at first thought they were going to do the journey at their usual comfortable two miles an hour, but we convinced them of their error with the ends of our umbrellas and they ran. I don't believe bullocks have ever run so fast since the world began. The way the cart jolted, was a wonder; I know the internal arrangements of my stomach were turned upside down at least 300 times a minute. When we got to Ajwa we had to wait an hour for dinner; as a result I was again able to eat ten times my usual allowance. As for the behaviour of those trusted pillars of the Baroda Raj at Ajwa, a veil had better be drawn over it; I believe I was the only quiet and decent person in the company. On the way home the carriage in which my part of the company installed itself, was the scene of a remarkable tussle in which three of the occupants and an attendant cavalier attempted to bind the driver, (the father of a large family aforesaid) with a horse-rope. As we had been ordered to do this by the Collector of Baroda, I thought I might join in the attempt with a safe conscience. Paterfamilias threw the reins to Providence and fought—I will say it to his credit—like a Trojan. He scratched me, he bit one of my coadjutors, in both cases drawing blood, he whipped furiously the horse of the assistant cavalier, and when Madhavrao came to his assistance, he rewarded the benevolent intention by whipping at Madhavrao's camel! It was not till we reached the village, after a six-miles conflict, and got him out of the carriage that he submitted to the operation. The wonder was that our carriage did not get upset; indeed, the mare stopped several times in order to express her entire disgust at the improper and turbulent character of these proceedings. For the greater part of the way home she was brooding indignantly over the memory of it and once her feelings so much overcame her that she tried to upset us over the edge of the road, which would have given us a comfortable little fall of three feet. Fortunately she was relieved by this little demonstration and her temper improved wonderfully after it. Finally last night I helped to kidnap Dr. Cooper, the Health Officer of the State, and make

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

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

No rain as yet, and it is the 15<sup>th</sup> of August. My thirtieth birthday, by English computation! How old we are all getting!  
Your affectionate nephew  
Aurobind Ghose

"Autobiographical Notes", *CWSA vol.36, pp. 140-4*

## THE BOURGEOIS<sup>1</sup>

What is the bourgeois? For the word is unknown in India, though the thing is so prominent. The bourgeois is the average contented middle class citizen who is in all countries much the same in his fundamental character and habits of thought, in spite of pronounced racial differences in temperament and self-expression. He is a man of facile sentiments and skin-deep personality; generally "enlightened" but not inconveniently illuminated. In love with his life, his ease and above all things his comforts, he prescribes the secure maintenance of these precious possessions as the first indispensable condition of all action in politics and society; whatever tends to disturb or destroy them, he condemns as foolish, harebrained, dangerous or fanatical, according to the degree of its intensity and is ready to repress by any means in his power. In the conduct of public movements he has an exaggerated worship for external order, moderation and decorum and hates over-earnestness and over-strenuousness. Not that he objects to plenty of mild and innocuous excitement; but it must be innocuous and calculated not to have a disturbing effect on the things he most cherishes. He has ideals and likes to talk of justice, liberty, reform, enlightenment and all similar abstractions; he likes too to see them reigning and progressing around him decorously and with their proper limitations. He wishes to have them maintained, if

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from "The Bourgeois and the Samurai", consisting of separate passages. This text too is reproduced from unpublished manuscripts, like other pieces written during the period of publication of the daily *Bande Mataram*, 1907-1908. First published in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram series "Archives and Research", 2, no.1 (1978), it has been published successively in "On Nationalism", pp. 336-354, and in "Bande Mataram", vol. 6 and 7 of the CWSA, pp. 1091-1108. [Comp.]

they already exist, but in moderation and with moderation; if they do not exist, the craving for them should be, in his opinion, they already exist, but in moderation and with moderation; if they do not exist, the craving for them should be, in his opinion, a lively but still well-regulated fire, not permitted to interfere with the safety, comfort and decorum of life; the means adopted towards acquiring them should be also moderate and decorous and, as far as may be, safe and comfortable. An occasional sacrifice of money, leisure and other precious things for their sake, he is always ready to meet; he has a keen zest for the reputation such sacrifices bring him and still more for the comfortable sense of personal righteousness which they foster. The bourgeois is the man of good sense and enlightenment, the man of moderation, the man of peace and orderliness, the man in every way "respectable", who is the mainstay of all well-ordered societies. As a private man he is respectable; that is to say, his character is generally good, and when his character is not, his reputation is; he is all decorous in his virtues, decent in the indulgence of his vices or at least in their concealment, often absolutely honest, almost always as honest as an enlightened self-interest will permit. His purse is well filled or at any rate not indecently empty; he is a good earner, a conscientious worker, a thoroughly safe and reliable citizen. Of course there are exceptions, instances of successful and respected blackguardism, but these are the small minority. But this admirable creature has his defects and limitations. For great adventures, tremendous enterprises, lofty achievements, the storm and stress of mighty and eventful periods in national activity, he is unfit. These things are for the heroes, the martyrs, the criminals, the enthusiasts, the degenerates, geniuses, the men of exaggerated virtue, exaggerated ability, exaggerated ideas. He enjoys the fruit of their work when it is done, but while it is doing, he opposes and hinders more often than helps. For he looks on great ideals as dreams and on vehement enthusiasms as harebrained folly; he distrusts everything new and disturbing, everything that has not been done before or is not sanctioned by success and the accomplished fact; revolt is to him a madness and revolution a nightmare. Fiery self-

annihilating enthusiasm, noble fanaticism, relentless and heroic pursuit of an object, the original brain that brings what is distant and ungrasped into the boundaries of reality, the dynamic Will and genius which makes the impossible possible; these things he understands as matters of history and honours them in the famous dead or in those who have succeeded; but in living and yet striving men they inspire him with distrust and repulsion. He will tell you that these things are not to be found in the present generation; but if confronted with the living originator, he will condemn him as a learned idiot; face to face with the living hero, he will decry him as a dangerous madman, — unless and until he sees on the head of either the crown of success and assured reputation.

Such a type may give stability to a society; it cannot reform or revolutionize it. Such a type may make the politics of a nation safe, decorous and reputable. It cannot make that nation great or free. (Such is the bourgeois and it was the bourgeois of the mildest and most inefficient type who reigned in India in the nineteenth century. It was the bourgeois which University education tended, perhaps sought to evolve; it was the bourgeois which the political and social conditions moulded and brought to the front. In India the bourgeois; in Japan the Samurai, that one enormous difference explains the difference in the histories of the two countries during the second half of the last century.) [*This paragraph is within parenthesis in the original manuscript.*]

He values also the things of the mind in a leisurely comfortable way as adorning and setting off his enlightened ease and competence. A little art, a little poetry, a little religion, a little scholarship, a little philosophy, all these are excellent ingredients in life, and give an air of decorous refinement to his surroundings. They must not be carried too far or interfere with the great object of life which is to earn money, clothe and feed one's family, educate one's sons to the high pitch of the B.A. degree or the respectable eminence of the M.A., marry one's daughters decently, rank high in service or the professions, stand well in the eye of general opinion and live and die decorously, creditably and respectably. Anything disturbing to



these high duties, anything exaggerated, intense, unusual is not palatable to the bourgeois. He shrugs his shoulders over it and brushes it aside with the one word "mad" or eccentric.

It is undoubtedly this type which has dominated us in the nineteenth century. Of course the really great names, those that will live in history as creators and originators are men who went beyond this type; either they belonged to, but exceeded it or they departed from it. But the average, the determining type was the bourgeois. In Senate and Syndicate, in Legislative Council and District Board or Municipal Corporation, in Congress and Conference, in the services and professions, even in literature and scholarship, even in religion he was everywhere with his well-regulated mind, his unambitious ideals, his snug little corner of culture, his "education" and "enlightenment", his comfortable patriotism, his comfortable enlightenment, his easy solution of the old problem how to serve both God and Mammon, yet offend neither, his self-satisfaction, his decorous honesty, his smug respectability. Society was made after his model, politics moulded in his image, education confined within his limits, literature and religion stamped with the seal of the bourgeois.

The bourgeois as a distinct and well-evolved entity is an entirely modern product in India; he is the creation of British policy, English education, Western civilization. Ancient India, mediaeval India were not a favourable soil for his growth. The spirit of ancient India was aristocratic; its thought and life moulded in the cast of a high and proud nobility, an extreme and lofty strenuousness. The very best in thought, the very best in action, the very best in character, the very best in literature and art, the very best in religion and all the world well lost if only this very best might be attained, such was the spirit of ancient India. The Brahmin who devoted himself to poverty and crushed down every desire in the wholehearted pursuit of knowledge and religious self-discipline; the Kshatriya who, hurling his life joyously into the shock of chivalrous battle, held life, wife, children, possessions, ease, happiness as mere dust in the balance compared with honour and the Kshatriya *dharma*, the preservation of self-respect, the protection of the weak, the

noble fulfillment of princely duty; the Vaishya, who toiling all his life to amass riches, poured them out as soon as amassed in self-forgetting philanthropy, holding himself the mere steward and not the possessor of his wealth; the Shudra who gave himself up loyally to humble service, faithfully devoting his life to his *dharma*, however low, in preference to self-advancement and ambition; these were the social ideals of the age.

The imagination of the Indian tended as has been well said to the grand and enormous in thought and morals. ... The sense-conquering thought of the philosopher, the magnificent achievements of the hero, the stupendous renunciations of the Sannyasin, the unbounded liberality of the man of wealth, every thing was exaggeration, extreme, filled with an epic inspiration, a world-defying enthusiasm. The bourgeois had no real chance of evolution, though he existed in the rough of course, as in all civilized societies he must exist; on such a height with so rare an atmosphere, he could not grow; where such tempests of self-devotion blew habitually, his warm comfortable personality could not expand.

The conditions of mediaeval India suited him little better,—the continual clash of arms, the unceasing stir and splendour and strenuousness of life, the fierceness of the struggle and the magnificence of the achievement, the ceaseless tearing down and building up which resulted from Mahomedan irruption and the action and reaction of foreign and indigenous forces, formed surroundings too restless and too flamboyant. Life under the Moguls was splendid, rich and luxurious, but it was not safe and comfortable. Magnificent possibilities were open to all men whatever their birth or station, but magnificent abilities and an unshaken nerve and courage were needed to grasp them or to keep what had been grasped. There was no demand for the safe and easy virtues of the bourgeois. In the times of stress and anarchy which accompanied the disintegration of mediaeval India, the conditions were yet more unfavourable; character and morals shared in the general disintegration, but ability and courage were even more in demand than before and for the bourgeois there was no place vacant. (The men who figured in the revolutions in Bengal, the

Deccan, the Punjab and the North were often, like their European allies and antagonists, men of evil character, self-seeking, unscrupulous and Machiavellian, but they were at least men.) [*This sentence is within parentheses in the original.*] It was not till mediaeval India breathed its last in the convulsions of 1857 that entirely new conditions reigned and an entirely new culture prevailed with an undisputed sway wholly favourable to the rapid development of the bourgeois type and wholly discouraging to the development of any other.

The first essential condition of his development was secured him by the Pax Britannica; a fairly perfect security for his person, property and pursuits guaranteed him by the efforts of others and for which he himself has no responsibility, is to the bourgeois type as the moisture and warmth of the hothouse is to the orchid.<sup>3</sup> Ease, comfort and security are the very breath of his nostrils. But for that ease, comfort and security he must not have to struggle, to stand on the alert or to train himself to fight for its safety if threatened, its recovery if lost. For if any such call is made on him, he is obliged to develop the virtues and defects of the Kshatriya, the soldier and ruler, and the purity of his own type suffers. The second condition for his full growth was secured to him in a society in which his peculiar qualities were honoured and prized above all other qualities and received the highest substantial rewards of life, social respect, government honours, pecuniary prosperity, titles, place, distinction. Indian society under British rule has been the most favourable of all soils for forcing the growth of the bourgeois. The British rule had no call for and would not indeed tolerate the statesman and the soldier; the qualities of fearless courage, robust manhood, splendid daring, large initiative, great aspiration, comprehensive foresight, the princely spirit, the eagle mood, the lion's heart which, whatever else might fail and perish, remained always alive in India since first the Aryan set foot on Indian soil thousands of years ago were no longer needed; they were suppressed as a danger to the new state of things or died a natural death for sheer want of light, room and air. And if there was no room at all for the Kshatriya, there was hardly any for the man of pure learning, the sage, the

Sannyasin. British rule had no need for scholars, it wanted clerks; the new dispensation of Providence asked not for thinkers who would teach the people to pierce through shows to the truth, to embrace great principles, and live and die for them, but men who would be satisfied with fine and shallow surfaces and live and die content with personal ease and prosperity; English education taught our society to look on self-denial and renunciation as idleness, hypocrisy or insanity and pointed it to the successful trader or professional man as the crown of humanity. The Mahabharata and Ramayana were forgotten and replaced by Smiles' *Self Help*. Neither was there much call for the highest type of the Vaishya. British interests in the country did not require us to produce captains of industry but small shopkeepers and big middlemen who would help British trade to conquer and keep India. Thus all the great types which are nurtured on war, politics, thought, spirituality, activity and enterprise, the outgrowths of a vigorous and healthy national existence, the high fruits of humanity who are the very energy of life to a community, were discouraged and tended to disappear and in their place there was an enormous demand for the bourgeois qualities. The safe, respectable man, satisfied with ease and not ambitions of command, content with contemporary repute and not hankering after immortality, the superficial man who, unable to think profoundly, could yet pose among his peers as intellectual, who had no real culture, but wore a specious appearance of education, who, guiltless of a single true sacrifice for his country, yet bulked large as a patriot, found an undisputed field open to him. The rewards of life now depended on certain outward signs of merit which were purely conventional. An University degree, knowledge of English, possession of a post in Government service or a professional diploma, a Government title, European clothes or a sleek dress and appearance, a big house full of English furniture, these were the badges by which Society recognized its chosen. These signs were all purely conventional. The degree did not necessarily denote a good education nor the knowledge of English a wide culture or successful living into new ideas, nor the Government post administrative capacity,

nor the diploma special fitness for the profession, nor the title any merit in the holder, nor the big house or fine dress a mastery of the art of social life, nor the English clothes, European grit, science and enterprise. They were merely counters borrowed from Europe, but universally taken, as they are not usually taken in Europe or any living nation, as a sufficient substitute for the reality. Wealth, success, and certain outward signs of a facile respectability had become to our new civilized, dispossessed [*Doubtful reading*] society the supreme tests of the man.

All these were conditions unusually favourable to a rank luxuriance of the bourgeois type, which thrives upon superficiality and lives by convention. The soil was suitably shallow, the atmosphere sufficiently warm and humid. The circumstances of our national life and the unique character of our education hastened and perfected the growth. Both were characterized by the false appearance of breadth covering an almost miraculous superficiality. Our old Indian life was secluded, but lofty and intense, like a pine-tree on the mountain-tops, like a tropical island in unvisited seas; our new life parted with the loftiness and intensity along with the [...] isolation, but it boasted in vain of an added breadth, for it was really more provincial and narrow than the old, which had at least given room for the development of all our human faculties. The news of the world's life poured in on us through the foreign telegrams and papers, we read English books, we talked about economics and politics, science and history, enlightenment and education, Rousseau, Mill, Bentham, Burke, and used the language of a life that was not ours, in the vain belief that so we, would become cosmopolitans and men of enlightenment. Yet all the time India was as much and more outside the great life of the world than it was in the days of Mahomad Tughlak or Bahadur Shah. The number of men in educated India who had any vital conception or any real understanding and mastery of the great currents of life, thought and motive which sway the vast world outside, was always wonderfully small. It could not be otherwise; for the life of that world was not our life, nor was our life any part of the world's,

any more than the days of a prisoner in a gaol or reformatory are part of the free activity of society. The thunder of great wars, the grand collision and struggle of world-moving ideas and mighty interests, the swift and strong currents of scientific discovery and discussion, the intellectual change and stir, the huge and feverish pulsation of commercial competition from China to Peru, all this was to us as the scenes in the street to a man watching from his prison bars. We might take a deep and excited interest, we might almost persuade ourselves by the vividness of our interest that we were part of the scene, but if a voice within cried to us, "Out, out, you too into the battle and the struggle and the joy and stir of this great world's life," the cold iron of the window-bars and the hard stone of the prison walls stood between. The jailer might not jingle his keys obtrusively, nor the warder flourish his baton, but we knew well they were there. And we really believed in the bland promise that if we conducted ourselves well, we should some day get tickets of leave. We read and thought but did not live what we read and thought. So our existence grew ever more artificial and unreal, the fighter and the thinker in us dwindled and the bourgeois flourished and grew. Contentment with an artificial existence, the habit of playing with counters as if they were true coin of life, made the old rich flood of vitality, strong character, noble aspiration, excellent achievement run ever shallower and thinner in our veins. So we accepted and made the best of an ignoble ease.

Our education too had just the same pride in a false show of breadth and the same confined and narrow scope. In our schools and colleges we were set to remember many things, but learned nothing. We had no real mastery of English literature, though we read Milton and Burke and quoted Byron and Shelley, nor of history though we talked about Magna Charta and Runnymede, nor of philosophy though we could mispronounce the names of most of the German philosophers, nor science though we used its name daily, nor even of our own thought and civilization though its discussion filled columns of our periodicals. We knew little and knew it badly. And even we could not profit by the little we knew for advance, for

origination; even those who struggled to a wider knowledge proved barren soil. The springs of originality were fast growing atrophied by our unnatural existence. The great men among us who strove to originate were the spiritual children of an older time who still drew sap from the roots of our ancient culture and had the energy of the Mogul times in their blood. But their success was not commensurate with their genius and with each generation these grew rarer and rarer. The sap soon began to run dry, the energy to dwindle away. Worse than the narrowness and inefficiency, was the unreality of our culture. Our brains were as full of liberty as our lives were empty of it. We read and talked so much of political rights that we never so much as realized that we had none to call our own. The very sights and sounds, the description of which formed the staple of our daily reading, were such as most of us would at no time see or hear. We learned science without observation of the objects of science, words and not the things which they symbolised, literature by rote, philosophy as a lesson to be got by heart, not as a guide to truth or a light shed on existence. We read of and believed in English economy, while we lived under Indian conditions, and worshipped the free trade which was starving us to death as a nation; we professed notions of equality, and separated ourselves from the people, of democracy, and were the servants of absolutism. We pattered off speeches and essays about social reform, yet had no idea of the nature of a society. We looked to sources of strength and inspiration we could not reach and left those untapped which were ours by possession and inheritance. We knew so little of life that we expected others who lived on our service to prepare our freedom, so little of history that we thought reform could precede liberty, so little of science that we believed an organism could be reshaped from outside. We were ruled by shopkeepers and consented enthusiastically to think of them as angels. We affected virtues we were given no opportunity of assimilating and lost those our fathers had handed down to us. All this in perfect good faith, in the full belief that we were Europeanising ourselves and moving rapidly toward political, social, economical, moral, intellectual progress. The consummation of our political

progress was a Congress which yearly passed resolutions it had no power to put in practice, statesmen whose highest function was to ask questions which need not even be answered, councillors who would have been surprised if they had been consulted, politicians who did not even know that a Right never lives until it has a Might to support it. Socially we have initiated by a few petty mechanical changes a feeble attempt to revivify the very basis of our society, which [...] be equal to so high [...] a task; *[A few words in this sentence are illegible]* a spiritual renovation was hardly even attempted; economically, we attained great success in destroying our industries and enslaving ourselves to the British trader; morally, we successfully compassed the disintegration of the old moral ideas and habits and substituted for them a superficial respectability; intellectually, we prided ourselves on the tricking out of our minds in a few leavings, scraps and strays of European thought at the sacrifice of an immense and eternal heritage. Never was an education more remote from all that education truly denotes; instead of giving the keys to the vast mass of modern knowledge, as [...] soil for the qualities that conquer circumstance and survive, they made the mind swallow a heterogeneous jumble of mainly useless information; trained a tame parrot to live in a cage and talk of the joys of the forest. British rule, Britain's civilizing mission in India has been the record success in history in the hypnosis of a nation. It persuaded us to live in a death of the will and its activities, taking a series of hallucinations for real things and creating in ourselves the condition of morbid weakness the hypnotist desired, until the Master of a mightier hypnosis laid His finger on India's eyes and cried, "Awake". Then only the spell was broken, the slumbering mind realised itself and the dead soul lived again.

But the education which was poison to all true elements of national strength and greatness, was meat and drink to the bourgeois. The bourgeois delights in convention, because truth is too hard a taskmaster and makes too severe a demand on character, energy and intellect. He craves superficiality, a shallow soil to grow in. For to attain depth requires time and



energy which would have to be unprofitably diverted from his chief business of making his individual way in the world. He cannot give up his life to his country, but if she will be grateful for a few of his leisure hours, he will give in those limits ungrudging service and preen himself on his public virtues. Prodigal charity would be uncomfortable and unwise, but if he can earn applause by parting with a fraction of his superfluities, he is always ready for the sacrifice. Deep scholarship would unfit him for his part in life, but if figuring on learned societies or writing a few articles and essays, an occasional book guiltless of uncomfortable originality, or a learned compilation prepared under his superintendence and issued in his name will make him a man of letters, he will court and prize that easily-earned reputation. The effort to remould society and rebuild the nation is too huge and perilous a task for a comfortable citizen, but he is quite prepared to condemn old and inconvenient institutions and superstitions and lend his hand to a few changes which will make social life more pleasant and comfortable. Superficiality, unreality of thought and deed thus became the stamp of all our activities. ...

(...)

The new Nationalism is an attempt at a spiritual transformation of the nineteenth century Indian; it is a notice of dismissal or at least of suspension to the bourgeois and all his ideas and ways and works; a call for men who will dare and do impossibilities, the men of extremes, the men of faith, the prophets, the martyrs, the crusaders, the [... *one illegible word*] and rebel, the desperate adventurers and reckless doers, the initiators of revolutions. It is the rebirth in India of the Kshatriya, the Samurai.

On Nationalism, pp.336-354 *passim*

## POLITICAL SATIRE AND WRY HUMOUR<sup>1</sup>

### Look on this Picture, then on That

Britain, the benevolent, Britain, the mother of Parliaments, Britain, the champion of liberty, Britain, the deliverer of the slave,—such was the sanctified and legendary figure which we have been trained to keep before our eyes from the earliest years of our childhood. Our minds imbued through and through with the colours of that legend, we cherished a faith in the justice and benevolence of Britain more profound, more implicit, more a very part of our beings than the faith of the Christians in Christ or of the Mahomedan in his Prophet. Officials might be oppressive, Viceroy and Lieutenant-Governors reactionary, the Secretary of State obdurate, Parliament indifferent, the British public careless, but our faith was not to be shaken. If Anglo-India was unkind, we wooed the British people in India itself.

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<sup>1</sup> The political action of Sri Aurobindo – first initiated when still in Baroda, although covertly – stretched over an eight year span, from 1902 to 1910. He wrote, “Sri Aurobindo was prosecuted for sedition in 1907 and acquitted. ... He presided over the Nationalist Conference at Surat in 1907 where in the forceful clash of two equal parties the Congress was broken to pieces.” [CWSA, vol.36, pp.7-8] “Now Sri Aurobindo saw his opportunity for starting the public propaganda necessary for his revolutionary purpose. He called a meeting of the forward group of young men in the Congress and [they] decided then to organize themselves openly as a new political party ... He also persuaded them to take up the *Bande Mataram* daily as their party organ ... Sri Aurobindo’s first preoccupation was to declare openly for complete and absolute independence as the aim of political action in India and to insist on this persistently in the pages of the journal; he was the first politician in India who had the courage to do this in public and he was immediately successful. ... The *Bande Mataram* was almost unique in journalistic history in the influence it exercised in converting the mind of a people and preparing it for revolution.” [Ibid., pp. 54-6 passim] [*Comp.*]

If the British people failed us, we said that it was because the Conservatives were in power. If a Liberal Secretary showed himself no less obdurate, we set it down to his personal failings and confidently awaited justice from a Liberal Government in which he should have no part. If the most Radical of Radical Secretaries condemned us to age-long subjection to a paternal and absolute bureaucracy, we whispered to the people, 'Wait, wait, Britain, the true Britain, the generous, the benevolent, the lover, the giver of freedom, is only sleeping; she shall awake again and we shall see her angelic and transfigured beauty'. Where precisely was this Britain we believed in, no man could say, but we would not give up our faith. *Credo quia impossibile*;—I believe because it is impossible, had become our political creed. ...

The result is that we have a strange companion picture to that dream of a benevolent and angelic Britain,—a city of unarmed men terrorised by the military, the leaders of the people hurried from their daily avocations to prison, siege-guns pointed at the town, police rifles ready to fire on any group of five men or more to be seen in the streets, bail refused to respectable pleaders and barristers from sheer terror of their influence. Look on this picture, then on that!

“Bande Mataram”, 6 May 1907, *SABCL*, 323-6 *passim*

## **The Khulna comedy**

The result of a political case is always a foregone conclusion in this country in the present era of Anti-Swadeshi<sup>1</sup> repression ... Neither the people nor the bureaucracy really accept a conviction as proof of any offence against the law. Indeed it is more or less a matter of caprice or convenience whether one offence or another is selected. ... the problem is probably

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<sup>1</sup> Self-sufficiency. Boycott of British products and promotion of domestic-made products and production techniques. Aurobindo Ghose was one of the chief architects of this strategy. [*Comp.*]

determined by the sense of humour of the prosecuting Magistrate or by an aesthetic perception of the fitness of things. ... The prosecution is a farce, the defence is a farce, and the judgment is the most exquisite farce of all. ...

In no recent political case except Rawalpindi has the veil of law been so ridiculously thin as in the Khulna case. Partly, no doubt, this is due to the personal gifts of the prosecuting Magistrate who decided the case. Mr. Asanuddin Ahmed is a very distinguished man. The greatest and the most successful achievement of his life was to be a fellow-collegian of Lord Curzon. But he has other sufficiently respectable if less gorgeous claims to distinction. Arithmetic, logic, English and Law are his chief fortes. His mastery over figures is so great that arithmetic is his slave and not his master; it is even said that he can assess a man at Rs. 90 one day and bring him down 200 per cent in estimation the other. It is whispered that it was not only for a masterly general incompetence but also for his special gift that he was transferred to Khulna. His triumphant dealings with logic were admirably exemplified by the original syllogism which he presented to the startled organisers of the District Conference. 'I, Asanuddin, am the District Magistrate; the District Magistrate is the representative of the District; ergo, I, Asanuddin, am the one and only representative of the district. Now only a representative of the district has a right to hold a District Conference or to do anything in the name of the district, or to use any expression in which the word district occurs; I, Asanuddin, am the sole and only representative of the district; ergo, I, Asanuddin, have the sole and only right to call a District Conference.' Mr. Ahmed's English is the delight of the judges of the High Court, who are believed to spend sleepless nights in trying to make out the meanings of his judgments. In one case at least, it is said, a distinguished judge had to confess with sorrow and humiliation that he could make nothing of the English of the learned Magistrate and after reading the judgment in the present case, we can well believe the story. As for his knowledge of law, the best praise we can give it is that it is on a level with his knowledge of, say, English. Such was the

brilliant creature who appointed himself prosecutor, jury and judge in the Khulna sedition case.

Under such auspices the conduct of the case was sure to be distinguished by a peculiarly effulgent brilliancy. ...our one and only Asanuddin declared that the evidence of respectable men was not to be believed because they were respectable and graduates of the Calcutta University and partakers in the Conference; the police apparently were the only disinterested and truthful people in Khulna. But the most remarkable dictum of this remarkable man was that when one is charged with sedition it is not necessary to prove the use of any particular seditious utterances; it is quite enough for the Magistrate to come to the conclusion that something untoward might, could or should have happened as the result of the accused having made a speech. In fact, it is hardly necessary under the section as interpreted by Daniels of this kind, to prove anything against the accused; the only thing necessary is that the Magistrate should think it better for convenience official or unofficial that he should be bound over. ...

The Khulna case has been from the point of view of Justice an undress rehearsal of the usual bureaucratic comedy; from the point of view of Mr. Asanuddin Ahmed it has been a brilliant exhibition of his superhuman power of acting folly and talking nonsense; from the point of view of Srijut Venibhusan Rai it has been a triumph greater than any legal victory, a public certificate of patriotism, courage and sincerity, an accolade of knighthood and nobility in the service of the Motherland.

*“Bande Mataram”, 20 July 1907, SABCL, 484-7 passim*

## **In Praise of Honest John**

Mr. John Morley is a very great man, a very remarkable and exceptional man. I have been reading his Arbroath speech again and my admiration for him has risen to such a boiling point that I am at last obliged to let it bubble over into the columns of the *Bande Mataram*. Mr. Morley rises above the ordinary ruck of mortals in three very important respects; first, he is a literary man; secondly, he is a philosopher; thirdly, he is a politician. This would not matter much if he kept his literature, politics

and philosophy apart in fairly watertight compartments; but he doesn't. He has not only doubled his parts, he has trebled them; he is not merely a literary philosopher and philosophic litterateur, he is a literary philosopher-politician. Now this is a superlative combination; God cannot better it and the devil does not want to. For if an ordinary man steals, he steals and there are no more bones made about it; he gets caught and is sent to prison, or he is not caught and goes on his way rejoicing. In either case the matter is a simple one without any artistic possibilities. But if a literary philosopher steals, he steals on the basis of the great and eternal verities and in the choicest English.

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And so all along the line. An ordinary man may be illogical and silly and everybody realises that he is illogical and silly; but the literary man when he goes about the same business will be brilliantly foolish and convincingly illogical, while the philosopher will be logically illogical and talk nonsense according to the strictest rules of philosophical reasoning. An ordinary man may turn his back on his principles and he will be called a turn-coat or he may break all the commandments and he will be punished by the law and society,—unless of course he is an American millionaire or a member of the ruling race in India;—but the literary philosopher will reconcile his principles with his conduct by an appeal to a fur-coat or a syllogism from a pair of jack-boots; he will abrogate all the commandments on the strength of a Solar Topee. A politician again will lie and people will take it as a matter of course, especially if he is in office, but a literary philosopher-politician will easily prove to you that when he is most a liar, then he is most truthful and when he is juggling most cynically with truth and principle, then he most deserves the name of Honest John; and he will do it in such well-turned periods that one must indeed have a very bad ear for the rhythm of a sentence before one can quarrel with its logic. Oh yes, a literary philosopher-politician is the choicest work of God,—when he is not the most effective instrument in the hands of the Prince of Darkness. For the Prince of Darkness is not only a gentleman as Shakespeare discovered, but a

gentleman of artistic perceptions who knows a fine and carefully-worked tool when he sees it and loves to handle it with the best dexterity and grace of which he is capable.

(...)

Mr. Morley is a great bookman, a great democrat, a great exponent of principles. No man better fitted than he to prove that when the noblest human movements are being suppressed by imprisonment and the sword, it is done in the interests of humanity; that when a people struggling to live is trampled down by repression, pushed back by the use of the Goorkha and the hooligan, the prison walls and the whipping-post into the hell of misery, famine and starvation, the black pit of insult, ignominy and bonds from which it had dared to hope for an escape, the motive of the oppressor finds its root in a very agony of conscientiousness and it is with a sobbing and bleeding heart that he presses his heel on the people's throat for their own good; that the ruthless exploitation and starvation of a country by foreign leeches is one of the best services that can be done to mankind, the international crimes of the great captains of finance a supreme work of civilisation and the brutal and selfish immolation of nations to Mammon an acceptable offering on the altar of the indwelling God in humanity. But these things have been done and said before; they are the usual blasphemous cant of nineteenth century devil-worship formulated when Commerce began to take the place once nominally allowed to Christ and the Ledger became Europe's Bible. Mr. Morley does it with more authority than others, but his own particular and original faculty lies in the direction I indicated when drawing the distinction between the ordinary man and the extraordinary Morley. What he has done has been after all on the initiative of others; what he has said about it is his own, and nothing more his own than the admirably brilliant and inconsequential phrases in which he has justified wickedness to an admiring nation.

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Man has been defined sometimes as a political animal and sometimes as a reasoning animal, but he has become still more pre-eminently a literary animal. He is a political animal who

has always made a triumphant mess of politics, a reasoning animal whose continual occupation it is to make a system out of his blunders, a literary animal who is always the slave of a phrase and not the least so when the phrase means nothing. The power of the phrase on humanity has never been sufficiently considered. The phrase is in the nostrils of the vast unruly mass of mankind like the ring in the nose of a camel. It can be led by the phrase-maker wherever he wishes to lead it. And the only distinction between the sage and the sophist is that the phrases of the sage mean something while the phrases of the sophist only seem to mean something. Now Mr. Morley is an adept in the making of phrases which seem to mean something.

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Take for instance his phrase 'The anchor holds.' Mr. Morley complains that he who has served Liberalism so long and so well, is not allowed to be illiberal when he likes, that when he amuses himself with a little reaction he is charged with deserting his principles! 'It is true, gentlemen,' says Mr. Morley, 'that I am doing things which are neither liberal nor democratic; but, then, my anchor holds. Yes, gentlemen, I dare to believe that my anchor holds.' So might a clergyman detected in immorality explain himself to his parishioners, 'It is true I have preached all my life continence and chastity, yet been found in very awkward circumstances; but what then? My anchor holds. Yes, dear brethren in Christ, I dare to believe that my anchor holds.' So argues Mr. Morley and all England applauds in a thousands newspapers and acquits him of political sin.

But of course Mr. Morley's crowning mercy is the phrase about the fur-coat. It is true that the simile about the coat is not new in the English language; for a man who abandons his principles has always been said to turn his coat; but never has that profitable manoeuvre been justified in so excellently literary and philosophical a fashion before. Mr. Morley has given us the philosophy of the turn-coat. 'Principles,' he has said in effect, 'are not a light by which you can guide your steps in all circumstances, but a coat which is worn for comfort and convenience. In Canada, which is cold, you have to wear a fur-coat, there is no help for it; in Egypt, which is hot, you can



change it for thin alpaca; in India, where it is very hot indeed, you need not wear a coat at all... It is just so with principles, democratic and other.' The reasoning is excellent and of a very wide application. For instance, it may be wrong in England to convict a political opponent for political reasons of an offence of which you know him to be innocent and on evidence you know to be false, or to sentence a man to be hanged for a murder which you are quite aware somebody else committed, or to disregard the plainest evidence and allow a bestial ravisher to go free because he happens to be a dog with a white skin, but it is absurd to suppose that such principles can keep in the heat of the Indian sun. ...

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Mr. Morley's fur-coat is one of the most comprehensive garments ever discovered. All the tribe of high-aiming tyrants and patriotic pirates and able political scoundrels and intelligent turn-coats that the world has produced, he gathers together and covers up their sins and keeps them snug and comforted against the cold blasts of censure blowing from a too logical and narrow-minded world, all in the shelter of a single fur-coat. And the British conscience too, that wondrous production of a humorous Creator, seeking justification of the career of cynical violence its representatives have entered on in India, rejoices in Mr. Morley's fur-coat and snuggles with a contented chuckle into its ample folds. Am I wrong in saying that Honest John is a wonder-worker of the mightiest and that Aaron's magic rod was a Brummagem fraud compared with Mr. Morley's phrases? *Vivat<sup>1</sup> John Morley!*

*"Bande Mataram", 18 November 1907, SABCL, 600-6 passim*

**"... a thing of shows and political theatricals ..."**

The new politics, therefore, while it favours passive resistance, does not include meek submission to illegal outrage under that term; it has no intention of overstressing the passivity at the expense of the resistance. Nor is it inclined to be hysterical over a few dozen of broken heads or exalt so simple a matter as a

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<sup>1</sup> Free translation (Latin): long life to John Morley! [*Comp.*]

bloody coxcomb into the crown of martyrdom. This sort of hysterical exaggeration was too common in the early days of the movement when everyone who got his crown cracked in a street affray with the police was encouraged to lift up his broken head before the world and cry out, "This is the head of a martyr." The new politics is a serious doctrine and not, like the old, a thing of shows and political theatricals; it demands real sufferings from its adherents,—imprisonment, worldly ruin, death itself, before it can allow him to assume the rank of a martyr for his country. Passive resistance cannot build up a strong and great nation unless it is masculine, bold and ardent in its spirit and ready at any moment and at the slightest notice to supplement itself with active resistance. We do not want to develop a nation of women who know only how to suffer and not how to strike.

"The Doctrine of Passive Resistance", *1948 and 1966 eds.*, 45-6

### **EPILOGUE: SPY PARODY<sup>1</sup>**

I am obliged to seek the protection of publicity against attempts that are being made to prejudice my name and reputation even in my retirement at Pondicherry. A number of individuals have suddenly begun to make their appearance here to whom my presence seems to be the principal attraction. One of these gems heralded his advent by a letter in which he regretted that the Police had refused to pay his expenses to Pondicherry, but informed me that in spite of this scurvy treatment he was pursuing his pilgrimage to me "jumping from station to station" without a ticket. Since his arrival he has been making scenes in the streets, collecting small crowds, shouting Bande Mataram, showing

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<sup>1</sup> Open letter published in *The Hindu* on 24 February 1911. Sri Aurobindo commented, "The British Government and numbers of people besides could not believe that Sri Aurobindo had ceased from all political action and it was supposed by them that he was secretly participating in revolutionary activities and even creating a secret organisation in the security of French India. But all this was pure imagination and rumour and there was nothing of the kind. His retirement from political activity was complete, just as was his personal retirement into solitude in 1910." [CWSA, vol.36, pp. 64-5] [*Comp.*]

portraits of myself and other Nationalists along with copies of the Geneva *Bande Mataram* and the *Indian Sociologist* as credentials, naming men of advanced views as his "gurus", professing to possess the Manicktola bomb-formula, offering to kill to order all who may be obnoxious for private or public reasons to any Swadeshist and informing everyone, but especially French gendarmes, that he has come to Pondicherry to massacre Europeans. The man seems to be a remarkable linguist, conversing in all the languages of Southern India and some of the North as well as in English and French. He has made three attempts to force or steal his way into my house, once disguised as a Hindustani and professing to be Mr. Tilak's durwan. He employs his spare time, when not employed in these antics for which he claims to have my sanction, in watching trains for certain Police-agents as an amateur detective. I take him for a dismissed police spy trying to storm his way back into the kingdom of heaven. Extravagant and barefaced as are this scoundrel's tactics, I mention them because he is one of a class, some of whom are quieter but more dangerous. I hear also that there are some young men without ostensible means of livelihood, who go about Madras figuring as my shishyas, instructed by me to undertake this or that activity, and request people to pay money for work or for my maintenance. After this letter I hope they will lose this easy source of income. I have authorised no such youths to collect money on my behalf and have directed none to undertake any political act of any description. Finally I find myself besieged by devotees who insist on seeing me whether I will or not. They have crossed India to see me—from Karachi's waters, from the rivers of the Panjab, whence do they not come? They only wish to stand at a distance and get mukti by gazing on my face; or they will sit at my feet, live with me wherever I am or follow me to whatever lands. They clamber on to my windows to see me or loiter and write letters from neighbouring Police-stations. I wish to inform all future pilgrims of the kind that their journey will be in vain and to request those to whom they may give reports of myself my imaginary conversations, to disbelieve entirely whatever they may say.

“Autobiographical Notes”, *CWSA vol.36, pp. 265-6*

## ALIPORE THE BLISSFUL

### INCONGRUITIES OF PRISON LIFE <sup>1</sup>

They all came running like heroes, pistols in hand, as though they were besieging, with guns and cannon, a well-armed fort. I heard that a white hero had aimed a pistol at my sister's breast, but I did not see it. I was sitting on my bed, still half-asleep, when Cregan inquired, "Who is Aurobindo Ghose, is that you?" I answered, "Yes. I am Aurobindo Ghose." Immediately he ordered a policeman to put me under arrest. Then, because of an extremely objectionable expression used by Cregan, there was a little exchange of words between the two. I asked for the search warrant, read it and signed it. Finding a mention of bombs in the warrant I understood that the presence of these soldiers and policemen was connected with the Muzaffarpur killing. The one thing I did not understand was why, even before any bombs or explosives had been discovered in my house, I was arrested in the absence of a body warrant. But I did not raise any useless objections. Afterwards, under instructions from Cregan, my arms were handcuffed, and a rope tied round my middle. An upcountry constable stood behind me holding the rope end. Just then the police brought in Shrijut Abinash Bhattacharya and Shrijut Sailen Bose, hand-cuffed and rope round the midriff. Nearly half an hour after, I do not know at whose bidding, they removed the rope and the handcuff. From Cregan's words it seemed as if he had entered into the lair of some ferocious

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<sup>1</sup> Writing in third person, Sri Aurobindo stated, "In May, 1908 he was arrested in the Alipur Conspiracy Case as implicated in the doings of the revolutionary group led by his brother Barindra; but no evidence of any value could be established against him and in this case too he was acquitted. After a detention of one year as under trial prisoner in the Alipur jail, he came out in May, 1909..." [CWSA, vol.36, pp. 7-8] He wrote a series of articles in Bengali in the journal *Suprabhat* where he described his life in Alipore Jail, Calcutta. [Comp.]

animal, as if we were uneducated, wild, lawbreakers, and that it was unnecessary to speak or behave courteously towards us. But after the sharp exchange the sahib grew a little milder. Benodbabu tried to explain something about me to him. After which Cregan asked me: "It seems you are a B. A. Is it not a matter of shame for an educated person like you to be sleeping on the floor of an unfurnished room and in a house like this?" "I am a poor man, and I live like one," I said. "Then have you worked up all this mischief with the idea of becoming a rich man?" Cregan replied in a loud voice. Knowing how impossible it was to explain the love of motherland, sacrifice or the sublimity of a vow of poverty to this thick-skulled Briton I did not make the attempt.

(...)

But the Maulvi did not give up his views. I was charmed and delighted with his knowledge, intelligence and religious fervour. Thinking that it would be impertinent to speak much I listened politely to his priceless sermon and cherished it in my heart. But in spite of so much religious enthusiasm the Maulvi did not give up his profession of a "tec". Once he said: "You made a great mistake in handing over the garden to your younger brother to manufacture bombs. It was not very intelligent on your part." Understanding the implication of his words I smiled a little, and said: "Sir, the garden is as much mine as my brother's. Where did you learn that I had given it up to him, or given it up to him for the purpose of manufacturing bombs?" A little abashed, the Maulvi answered: "No, no, I was saying in case you have done it."

(...)

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.

(...)

We again got into the carriage, when a gentleman came near me and said, "I have heard that they are planning solitary confinement for you and orders are being passed to that effect. Probably they will not allow any one to see or meet you. If you wish to convey any information to your people, I shall do that." I thanked him, but since what I wished to convey I had already done through my relative, I did not tell him anything more. I am mentioning this fact as an example of my countrymen's sympathy and unsought kindness towards me. Thereafter from the court we went to the jail, and were surrendered to its officers. 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.

(...)

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". "Decrees" stood for rooms for special punishment—those who are condemned to solitary imprisonment by the orders of either the judge or the jail superintendent have to stay in these mini-caves. Even in such solitary confinement there is the rule of caste or hierarchy. Those who are heavily punished have their courtyard doors permanently closed; deprived of contacts with the rest of the human world their only point of relation with the outside world

is restricted to the vigilant eyes of the sentry and the fellow-convict who brings his food twice a day. Since Hemchandra Das was looked upon as being a greater terror for the criminal investigation department than I, he had been given this strict regimen. But in the solitary cell too there are refinements—handcuffs and iron rings round one's hand and foot. This highest punishment is meted out not only for disturbing the peace of the prison or playing rough but also if one is found frequently slack in prison labour. To harass those convicted in cases of solitary confinement is against the spirit of law, but the Swadeshi or “Bande Mataram” convicts were beyond the pale and according as the police desired benign arrangements were made for these.

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 under trial 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.

(...)

The first day in prison passed off peacefully. It was all so new that it was almost gay. Comparing it with the Lal Bazar lock-up I felt happy with my present circumstances, and since I had faith in God the loneliness did not weigh heavily on me. 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

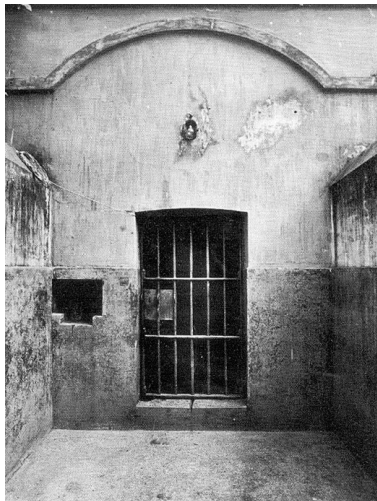
it was the Reign of Herbs. Days, fortnights and months pass by, but the same herbs, or *Shak*, lentils and rice went on unchanged. What to speak of changing the menu, the preparation was not changed a jot or tittle, it was the same immutable, eternal from beginning to end, a stable unique thing-in-itself. 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 *Shak*.

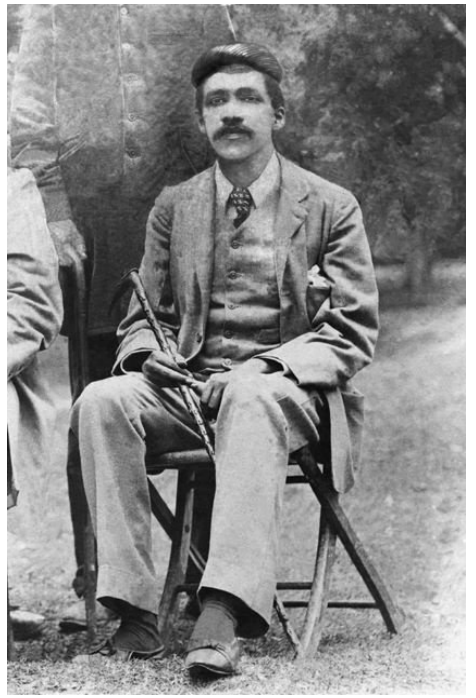
That night I went to bed early, but it was no part of the prison regulations to be allowed to enjoy undisturbed sleep, since this might encourage a love of luxury among the prisoners. Hence there is a rule that every time sentries are changed, the prisoner has to be noisily disturbed and till he responds to their cries there is no respite. Among those who were engaged in this kind of patrolling the “six decree” cells there were a few who would be no doubt remiss in their duty in this respect—among the police there was as a rule more of kindness and sympathy than strict sense of responsibility—this was especially so with the Hindustani policemen. Some of course remained obstinate. Waking us up at odd hours they would inquire about our well-being thus: “How do you do, Sir”. This untimely humour was not always pleasant or welcome, but I could see that those who were behaving like this were but carrying out orders. For a few days in spite of the annoyance I put up with this. In the end to preserve my sleep I had to scold them. After repeating this process for a few times I noticed that this custom of seeking news about my well-being stopped of itself.

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 lookedlike. 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. A trinity, it takes three forms. On the first day it was *Lufsi* in its Wisdom aspect, unmixed original element, pure, white, *Shiva*. On the second, it was the Hiranyagarbha aspect, boiled along with lentils, called kedgerree, yellowish, a medley. On the third day *lufsi* appeared in its aspect of Virat, a little mixed with jaggery, grey, slightly fit for human consumption. I had thought the Wisdom and the Hiranyagarbha aspects to be beyond the capacity of average humanity and therefore made no efforts in that direction, but once in a while I had forced some of the Virat stuff within my system and marvelled, in delightful muse, about the many-splendoured virtues of British rule and the high level of western humanitarianism. 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.

*Writings in Bengali,*  
[http://www.aurobindo.ru/workings/sa/04/0040\\_e.htm](http://www.aurobindo.ru/workings/sa/04/0040_e.htm)





# GRINNING WITH THE MASTER

## NIRODBARAN: CRYING AND PRANKS

### Avatarhood, Immortality – and Discipleship

I don't know what the devil you mean. My sadhana is not a freak or a monstrosity or a miracle done outside the laws of Nature and the conditions of life and consciousness on earth. If I could do these things or if they could happen in my Yoga, it means that they can be done and that therefore these developments and transformations are possible in the terrestrial consciousness.

*“Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo”, 9 February 1935, 135*

Why the immortal Hell should the Divine be tied down to succeed in all his operations? What if failure suits him better and serves better the ultimate purpose? ... What rigid primitive notions are these about the Divine!

*Ibid. 9 February 1935, 137*

What a wonderful argument! Since it has not been done, it cannot be done! ... Since mind is there but nothing beyond, as there is no supermind manifested in anybody, so supermind can never be born. Sobhanallah!<sup>1</sup> Glory, glory, glory to the human reason!! Luckily the Divine or the Cosmic Spirit or Nature or whoever is there cares a damn for the human reason. He or she or it does what he or she or it has to do, whether it can or cannot be done.

*Kindly excuse the impudence of the next question; it has been hovering at the back of my mind for some*

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<sup>1</sup> Urdu term meaning “Glory to God”.

*time. Can a Muthu<sup>1</sup> or a sadhak be ever a Sri Aurobindo, even if he is supramentalised? I say that it is absolutely impossible, impossible, a thousand times so.*

What need has he to be a Sri Aurobindo? He can be a supramentalised Muthu!

*If anybody comes and says “Why not?” I would answer, “You had better rub some Madhyam Narayan oil<sup>2</sup> on your head.”*

I have no objection to that. Plenty of the middle Narayan is needed in this Ashram.

(...)

Your fury or furiousness is wasted because your point is perfectly irrelevant to the central question on which all this breath (or rather ink) is being spent. Muthu and the sadhaks who want to equal or distance or replace the Mother and myself and so need very badly Middle Narayan oil—there have been several—have appeared only as meaningless foam and froth on the excited crest of the dispute. I fear you have not grasped the internalities and modalities and causalities of my high and subtle reasoning. It is not surprising as you are down down in the troughs of the rigidly logically illogical human reason while I am floating on the heights amid the infinite plasticities of the overmind and the lightning like subtleties and swiftnesses of the intuition. There! what do you think of that? However!!

*Ibid. 10 February 1935, 139-41*

*I am a little taken aback to hear that a “certain note of persiflage” dilutes the grave discussion I am having with you.*

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<sup>1</sup> An Ashram servant.

<sup>2</sup> Oil used for insanity, composed of thirteen herbs and barks. Madhyam literally means “middle”.

Look here, don't tell me that because you are a doctor, therefore you can't understand a joke. It would have the effect of making me dreadfully serious.

*I am sorry I can't detect the adulteration of the Divine philosophy with persiflage. My medical appliance is hardly capable of doing it.*

A sense of humour (not grim) ought to be a sufficient appliance.

*No doubt, I enjoy heartily the humour but I should like to be able to suck up the cream and give the rest its proper place.*

The cream = the persiflage—the rest is the solemn part or the argument.

Ibid. 11 February 1935, 143-4

*I should say that Avatars are like well-fitted, well-equipped Rolls Royce machines.*

All sufficient to themselves—perfect and complete from the beginning, hey? Just roll, royce and ripple!

*They do have plenty of difficulties on their journey, but just because they are like Rolls Royce they can surmount them—whilst the rest of humanity is either like loose and disjointed machines or wagons to be dragged along by Avatars and great spiritual personages. Floating on the heights of the Overmind, you have overlooked what this earth-bound clod crawling over low plateaus has meant.*

Great Scott! What a penal servitude for the great personages and the Avatars! And where are they leading them? All that rubbish into Paradise? How is that any more possible than creating a capacity where there was none? If the disjointed machines cannot be jointed, isn't it more economical to leave them where they are, in the lumber-shed?

I don't know about Avatars. Practically what I know is that I had not all the powers necessary when I started, I



had to develop them by Yoga, at least many of them which were not in existence in me when I began, and those which were I had to train to a higher degree. ...

*Really, Sir, you have put into my mouth what I never mentioned or even intended to.*

You may not have mentioned it but it was implied in your logic without your knowing that it was implied. Logic has its own consequences which are not apparent to the logiciser. It is like a move in chess by which you intend to overcome the opponent but it leads, logically, to consequences which you didn't intend and ends in your own checkmate. You can't invalidate the consequences by saying that you didn't intend them.

*Ibid. 13 February 1935, 149-50*

*Considerably subdued after the beating I received, I am beginning to understand what you say about omnipotence, the conditions of the game that have to be observed, latency, etc. This letter is not to dispute any of the things you have stated, but just to express that I am boiling inside with impotent rage to see how you have "unfairly" cornered me with the very arguments I was maintaining all the while. Alas! my pen derives its power only from terrestrial planes!*

You were the reporter of the discussion, so naturally you had to be the whipping boy for all sides. You can't complain of that. There must be somebody to tilt at—otherwise how the deuce is the argument to be done?

(...)

*You can cut me, Sir, or beat me, but don't forsake me. In imitation of the librarian of my College who came out with a similar appeal when the professor of English caught him smoking one day.*

Never! But beat—a lot.

*I repeat—a little pathetically—that my brain is sclerotic and psychic smoky; no intellect and no Yogic capacity, as you yourself must have realised by making “word-punctures”.*

Well, to see that they are non-evident shows you at once that they are latent and will be evident and even if they are not latent they are waiting for you in the universal! So in every blessed way you are very quite all right. Be consoled therefore.

*Rather a long letter, because a closing one. When will these two weeks be over! Give me a little extra force for doing something, just to keep me out of mischief—an idle brain is the devil's workshop. Who knows what I'll be up to!*

Man, don't talk lightly like that of the devil. He is too active to be trifled with in that way. My devils? they are only expletive.

*Ibid. 15 February 1935, 152-4*

*The Overmind seems so distant from us, and your Himalayan austerity and grandeur takes my breath away, making my heart palpitate!*

O rubbish! I am austere and grand, grim and stern! every blasted thing I never was! I groan in an un-Aurobindian despair when I hear such things. What has happened to the common sense of all you people? In order to reach the Overmind it is not at all necessary to take leave of this simple but useful quality.

*Ibid. February 23, 1935, 156-7*

*Your grandeur and austerity imposed themselves not on this commonsense-lacking poor man alone, but on others too. I will say then that common sense is highly uncommon like yogic faculties. However, I am waiting to write in detail as soon as the signal is down.*

Commonsense is exceedingly uncommon in this Ashram. Sometimes I think the Mother and myself alone have our stock left unexhausted and all the rest have sent their flying sky high. However!

*Ibid. February 25, 1935, 157*

You have won all along the line. Who could resist such a lava-torrent of logic? slightly mixed but still! You have convinced me (1st) that there never was nor could be an Avatar, (2) that all the so-called Avatars were chimerical fools and failures, (3) that there is no Divinity or divine element in man, (4) that I have never had any true difficulties or struggles, and that if I had any, it was all my fun (as K.S. said of my new metres that they were only Mr. Ghose's fun); (5) that if ever there was or will be a real Avatar, I am not he—but that I knew before, (6) that all I have done or the Mother has done is a mere sham—sufferings, struggles, conquests, defeats, the Way found, the Way followed, the call to others to follow, everything—it was all make-believe since I was the Divine and nothing could touch me and none follow me. That is truly a discovery, a downright knock-out which leaves me convinced, convicted, amazed, gasping. I won't go on, there is no space; but there are a score of other luminous convictions that your logic has forced on me.

(...)

*What your view comes to, put in a syllogism, is this:  
Since I have done it and I am an Avatar, every other  
blessed creature can do it.*

This is idiotic. I have said “Follow my path, the way I have discovered for you through my own efforts and example. Transform your nature from the animal to the spiritual, grow into a higher divine consciousness. All this you can do by your own aspiration aided by the force of the Divine Shakti.” That, if you please, is not the utterance of a madman or an imbecile. I have said, “I have opened

the Way; now you with the Divine help can follow it.” I have not said “Find the way for yourself as I did.”

(...)

*Well, Sir, it will have no go with me, my heart won't leap up at such a divine possibility, such a dream of Paradise!*

Your heart not leaping up does not make my statement a falsehood, a non-sequitur or a chimera.

*My fellow-brothers may venture to reach there through such a thin hanging bridge but if they do, I am afraid, it will be into a fool's Paradise.*

The fool being myself, eh? For it is my Paradise and it is I who call them to it.

*The difficulties you face, the dangers you overcome, the struggles you embrace would seem to be mere shams.*

*[Sri Aurobindo underlined “mere shams”].*

Truly then what a humbug and charlatan I have been, making much of sham struggles and dangers—or, in the alternative, since I took them for realities, what a self-blinded imbecile!

(...)

The Divine in the body is not subject to death or failure? Yet all those claimed to be Avatars have died—some by violence, some by cancer, some of indigestion etc., etc. You yourself say that they were all failures. How do you reconcile these self-contradictory arguments?

*You say, “A physical and mental body is prepared fit for the divine incarnation by a pure or great heredity and the descending Godhead takes possession of it.”<sup>1</sup>*

Like my heredity? It was “pure”? But of course I am not a divine incarnation. Only why put all that upon me whom it does not fit?

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

*To his beloved children created in his own image the Divine says with gusto, "I send you through this hell of a cycle of rebirths. Don't lose heart, poor boys, if you groan under the weight of your sins and those of your ancestors to boot. I will come down and take hold of a pure heredity with no coating around me and say unto you—come and follow my example."*

Who gave this message? It is your own invention. The Divine does not come down in that way. It is a silly imagination of yours that you are trying to foist on the truth of things. The Divine also comes down into the cycle of rebirths, makes the great holocaust, endures shame and obloquy, torture and crucifixion, the burden of human nature, sex and passion and sorrow and suffering, manifests many births before he reveals the Avatar.

(...)

*I don't know if Avatars ever play the part of the rogue or the eternal sinner.*

*[Sri Aurobindo underlined "rogue or the eternal sinner".]*

Krishna was a rogue and a sinner even in his Avatar life, if tales are true! don't you think so?

(...)

*I prophesy that your message will reverberate in the rarefied atmosphere evoking a loud rebellious echo from human hearts.*

I admit that you have successfully proved that I am an imbecile.

(...)

*There are some who claim that they are here and remain here by their soul's call. But I am not one of those fortunate ones. Where they hear the soul's call, I hear the calls of a thousand devils and if it were not for your love—well, no,—for your Power (which I firmly believe in), I would end up myself by being one*

*of those devils. I hope you will believe that this is not a conceited statement.*

It is very conceited. To be a devil needs a considerable personal capacity or else a great openness to the Beyond. If you had said, I can only be an ordinary human being, that might be modest.

*We don't mean to give you a compliment when we say these things.*

Of course not. It is the reverse of complimentary, since you prove me to be an ignorant and mistaken fellow of an Avatar, who merrily wastes his time doing things which are of no earthly use to any human being—except perhaps Arjuna who is not here.

*We say that the Sun is a thing apart, not to be measured by any human standards.*

The Sun's rays are of use to somebody—you say all my acts and life and laborious opening of the way I thought I had made for spiritual realisation, are of no use to anybody—since nobody is strong enough to follow the path, only the Avatar can do it. Poor lonely ineffective fellow of an Avatar!

(...)

All this is trash and humbug? Christ and Buddha were fools? Myself even a bigger fool? ... All that any one can do is to lie helpless and wait for the divine Omnipotence to do something or other. The whole spiritual past of man becomes a fantastic insanity, with the Avatars as the chief lunatics. That is the materialist point of view; but I am unable to envisage it as a basis for sadhana.

*Ibid. 6 March 1935, 165-73 passim*

Let me make it clear that in all I wrote I was not writing to prove that I am an Avatar! You are busy in your reasonings with the personal question, I am busy in mine with the general one. I am seeking to manifest something

of the Divine that I am conscious of and feel—I care a damn whether that constitutes me an Avatar or something else. That is not a question which concerns me.

Ibid. 7 March 1935, 177

*Amal and myself firmly believe that those whom you have accepted, are absolutely immune to death.*

[Sri Aurobindo underlined twice "accepted".] Too comfortable a doctrine. It brings in a very tamasic syllogism. "I am accepted by Sri Aurobindo. I am sure of supramentality and immune from death. Therefore I need not do a damned thing. Supramentality will of itself grow in me and I am already immortal, so I have all time and eternity before me for it to happen—of itself". Like that, does it sound true?

Ibid. March 27, 1935, 194-5

*My logic again, Sir: Sri Aurobindo is bound to become wholly supramental and is being supramentalised in parts. If that is true—and it is—well, he can't die till he is supramental—and once he is so, he is immortal.*

It looks very much like a non-sequitur. The first part and the last are all right—but the link is fragile. How do you know I won't take a fancy to die in between as a joke?

*Now, if that is accepted, then those whom you know for certain as would-be supramentals and have been accepted as such, are immortal—follows as a corollary.*

Again the fallacy comes in in the "would-be". A "supramental" may be immortal, but why should a W.S.<sup>1</sup> be immortal?

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<sup>1</sup> Would-be supramental.

*It may be a "comfortable doctrine "but that's my philosophy of sadhana. What is the good of the Avatar if we do everything by ourselves? We have come to you and taken shelter at your feet so that you may, as the Gita says, deliver us from all sins...*

But what if the Avatar gets frightened at the prospect of all this hard labour and rushes back scared behind the veil?

*After all what's the use of so much austere sadhana? The supramental is bound to come down and we shall lie flat at the gate and he can't pass us by.*

[*Underlining "he can't pass us by".*] Why not? Why can't he float easily over you and leave you lying down or send for the supramental police to chivy you out and make you pass through a hard examination in an Epicurean austerity before you are allowed inside?

*This is not really a joke. You may beat me for my semi-Epicurean attitude, but I do believe that those who can stick to the last from Anilbaran to N, will have the supramentalisation.*

N also!!! Great illogical heavens! Obviously if N becomes a supramental, everybody can! No doubt about that logic.

*Ibid. March 30, 1935, 196-7*

## **Mulishness and Divine Forbearance**

And what do you make of the free choice and the necessity of assent? Supposing the Divine does intervene and you say "Damn you I don't want you—you are a nuisance and a lie. I want my own inspirations and the satisfaction of my ego," and supposing you kick the Divine in the face when he stoops to help you and even when he lifts you up and sends the Black Force away, you



call it back each time and rush back to embrace it. What then?

“Nirodbaran’s Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo”, *November 12, 1933, 28*

*Yes, I am mad, Sir, and impatient too; and who can be and remain otherwise unless and until one is divine oneself?*

Ummm! Don’t you think there are enough people in that condition already here without the Ashram doctor adding himself to the collection?

*Ibid. April 8, 1935, 209*

My insistence on the supramental is of course apo-diaskeptic. Don't search for the word in the dictionary. I am simply imitating the doctors who when they are in a hole protect themselves with impossible Greek. Peace, supramental if possible, but peace anyhow—a peace which will become supramental if it has a chance. The atmosphere is most confoundedly disturbed, that is why I am ingeminating "peace, peace, peace!" like a summer dove or an intellectual under the rule of Hitler. Of course, I am not asking you to become supramental offhand. That is my business, and I will do it if you fellows give me a chance, which you are not doing just now (you is not personal, but collective and indefinite) and will do less if you go blumming into buzzific intensities. (Please *don't* consult the dictionary, but look into the writings of Joyce and others).

(...)

*And if you have to wait for absolute purity of nature before the Supramental can come down, I should say that you will have to go on waiting and waiting!*

Whose nature? It is I who have to bring it down. Do you mean to insinuate that I am impure? Sir, I raise my blameless head in dignified remonstrance.

*Ibid. April 9, 1935, 210-11*

*It is you who will bring down the Supramental, certainly. But my question was whether it will come anyhow, in spite of all our resistance.*

I presume it will come anyhow, but it is badly delayed because, if I am all the time occupied with dramas, hysterics, tragic-comic correspondence (quarrels, chronicles, lamentations,) how can I have time for this—the only real work, the one thing needful? It is not one or two, but twenty dramas that are going on.

*Ibid. April 11, 1935, 212*

*One material point. Can you sanction 3 pice worth of milk from the dairy, for an afternoon cup of tea?*

Very revolutionary and hair-raising proposal, but you can do it and risk the loss of hair.

*Ibid. April 12, 1935, 213-4*

*What is this revolutionary invention of yours? Tea a cause of loss of hair? I am sure all the tea plantations over the world will send up loud lamentations if this theory be true! But, how can one accept it?*

It was not the tea but the 3p milk and the cause and effect were psycho-physical, so there is no difficulty in accepting the theory.

(...)

*What are the things, if any, that have a chance of getting manifested in me—poetry, prose, philosophy, etc., or medicine? I am asking for a yogic prophecy.*

Why bother your head? When the supramental comes, and you bloom into a superman, you will just pick up anything you want and become perfect in it with a bang.

*By the way Mother told D, it seems, that she would look as young as a girl of 16 in ten years time. That*

*would obviously mean the descent of your Supermind in the physical and its transformation.*

I don't know. As you know Time has only one lock of hair (too much tea drinking) and the difficulty is to catch it.

*Ibid. April 13, 1935, 214-5*

*I have heard that even N had a terrible attack recently. He almost left the Asram! D wanted to commit suicide, and H is in revolt! How many underground tragedies!... And all these despite your continuous day and night fight!*

There are only 2 or 3 in the Asram to whom this word "even" would apply. I won't mention their names lest the devil should be tempted to try with them also. A solid mind, a solid nervous system, and a steady psychic flame seem to be the only safeguard against "terrible attacks".

(...)

*Since the descent of the Supermind will quicken up all the processes, why not take an axe of retrenchment and cut off all impeding elements ruthlessly so that among a very few chosen disciples, the whole work may go on most concentratedly and rapidly? When the miracle is achieved, all of us will flock again and achieve everything as by a miracle!*

How? I am not Hitler. Things cannot be done like that. You might just as well ask the Mother and myself to isolate ourselves in the Himalayas, get down the supramental, then toss everybody up in a blanket into the Supreme. Very neat but it is not practical.

*Won't it be very practical and useless spending so much time on individual dramas and hysterics? [Sri Aurobindo underlined "useless".]*

You mean practically useless?

*Ibid. April 20, 1935, 222*

Rubbish! Mother did not think anything about it at all. Why the hell or heaven or why on earth or why the unearthly should she be displeased? You all seem to think of the Mother as living in a sort of daylong and nightlong simmering cauldron of displeasure about nothing and anything and everything under the sun. Lord! what a queer idea!

Ibid. *May 10, 1935, 237*

*Sometimes I feel that if the Divine loves all equally, even then D and myself, for example, transgressing some vital rules of the Asram, will not be equally treated. In my saner moments I have tried to look at it more rationally.*

That does not stand. Sometimes you might get nothing except perhaps an invisible stare; sometimes I might say "Now, look here, Nirod, don't make an immortal ass of yourself—that is not the transformation wanted." Still another time I might shout "Now! now! What the hell! what the blazes!" So it would depend on the occasion, not only on the person.

Ibid. *June 9, 1935, 256*

*I am at the end of a long poem; have been working at it for many hours, but could not extract anything.*

But what did you extract? Not even words? What a constipation!

*I thought what a waste of time! Should one sit down to write without any inspiration seeming to drop?*

I suppose you have to go on sitting down, until the inspiration gets converted and drops as soon as you sit.

*You can't say that there is no application. But is it the right method, I ask ?*

Try, try again—as the spider said to Bruce.

*Previously I was sleeping like a dog and now I am working like a bull.*

The Bull is the mother animal.

*A flood of energy is there, but to what purpose?*

*O Force, Force,*

*Can you ever break this coarse*

*Tough stuff?*

Well, if you can achieve poetry like that in English, what may you not do in Bengali?

Ibid. June 15, 1935, 262

*Well, Sir, have I covered a few milestones on the journey to the Infinite?*

Move on, move on!

*Some time back you wrote to me: "Never has there been such an uprush of mud and brimstone as during the past few months. However the Caravan goes on and today there was some promise of better things." What about the uprush of mud? Has it settled down, and are people now floating in the flood of the Supramental?*

It is still there, but personally I have become superior to it and am travelling forward like a flash of lightning, that is to say zigzag but fairly fast. Now I have got the hang of the whole hanged thing—like a very Einstein I have got the mathematical formula of the whole affair (unintelligible as in his case to anybody but myself) and am working it out figure by figure.

As for people, no! they are not floating in the supramental—some are floating in the higher mind, others rushing up into it and flopping down into the subconscious alternately, are swinging from heaven into hell and back into heaven, again back into hell ad infinitum, some are sticking fast contentedly or discontentedly in the mud, some are sitting in the mud and dreaming dreams and seeing visions, some have their legs in the mud and their head in the heavens etc., etc., an infinity of combinations,

while many are simply nowhere. But console yourself—these things, it seems, are inevitable in the process of great transformations.

Ibid. August 16, 1935, 287-8

*Divine Love concretising itself? Or the Divine itself elated at the thought of an impending big deal?*

What great expectations! Besides I'm not Roosevelt. I am only going ahead, therefore visibly cheerful though not yet demonstratively exuberant.

Ibid. August 20, 1935, 289

*I have three letters of yours before me, and all three require some elucidation. I think and think, but can't get anywhere. Perhaps you will say, "Make the mind silent!" But Descartes says, "Je pense, donc je suis."<sup>1</sup>*

Descartes was talking nonsense. There are plenty of things that don't think but still are—from the stone to the Yogi in samadhi. If he had simply meant that the fact of his thinking showed that he wasn't dead, that of course would have been quite right and scientific.

Ibid. September 9, 1935, 307

*My point then is that because the chicken-hearted central being—I suppose there is a hierarchy of these beings, some lion-hearted, some worm and some chicken—selected or had to select according to its own standard, that I have my own failures.*

These words don't apply to the members of the hierarchy.

(...)

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<sup>1</sup> "I think, therefore I am."

*Though the soul may repent for its misadventure, it can't take a leap into the Kingdom of Light or walk straight to its Father like the Prodigal Son...*

A leap, no! But if it has got thoroughly disgusted, it can try its chance at Nirvana.

(...)

Yet you say that it is the soul that wants all this "fun" and goes off laughing and prancing to get some more. You are funny. If the poor soul heard you, I think it would say "Sir, methinks you are a jester" and look about for a hammer and break your head with it.

*Ibid. September 10, 1935, 309-11*

*I suppose we have to go on dreaming that one day, one year, one Yuga, we shall also come to such a blissful height. Till then, Man of Sorrows is my companion, alas!*

No need at all! Call in the Man of Mirth and dismiss the other Applicant.

(...)

*However, what shall I hear from the mighty pen as a remedy to my chronic despair and impatience?*

Now look here, as to the Yuga, etc., if I can be patient with you and your despairs, why can't you be patient with the forces? Let me give you a "concrete" instance. X is a sadhak of whom it might be said that if anyone could be said to be incapable of any least progress in Yoga, X was the very person, blockishly absolute and unique in that respect. Mulish, revolted, abusive. No capacity of any kind, no experience, not a shadow, tittle or blessed pinpoint of it anyhow, anywhere or at any time for years and more years and still more years. Finally some while ago X begins to fancy or feel that X wants Mother and nothing and nobody else. (That was the result of my ceaseless and futile hammering for years). X makes

sanguinary row after row because X can't get Mother, not a trace, speck or hint anywhere of Mother. Threats of departure and suicide very frequent. I sit mercilessly and severely upon X, not jocularly as I do on you. X still weeps copiously because Mother does not love X. I sit on X still more furiously but go on pumping force and things into her. X stops that but weeps copiously because X has no faith and does not love Mother. (All this goes on for months and months). Finally one day after deciding to stop weeping for good and all X suddenly finds X was living in barriers, barriers broken down, vast oceanic wideness inside her, love, peace etc. rushing in or pressing to rush; can't understand what on earth all this is or what to do—writes for guidance. Now, sir, if my yugalike persistence could work a miracle like that with such a one, why can't you expect an earlier result with you, O Nirod of little faith and less patience? Stand and answer.<sup>1</sup>

Ibid. *September 13, 1935, 317-8*

*From what I could make out of your mysterious handwriting about this mysterious X, she must be a plucky girl. With that thrashing—if you are really capable of it—and the Mother's "hard looks" to boot, if she has stuck to you, I must say that she is exceptionally enduring too.*

I suppose X was able to stick because X had no brains. It is the confounded reasoning brain that is the ruin of you. For instead of taking the lesson of things it begins reasoning about them in this futile—shall I say asinine—way. My idea however is that X stuck because X had nowhere else to go. Of course that is the outward reason—the real one being that something unknown pinned X down here.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that Sri Aurobindo wrote X in the MS. It is not the usual editorial substitution.



*One word about this "patience", Sir, I am afraid there is a big fallacy in that. You can take 50 years to make me at least a supramental ass. And this would still be a short period for you, since in the supramental time-scale 50 years will be 50 days of ours.*

If that is so, then you will become a Supramental ass in 50 days—since my years are supramental, that follows. So what's the row about? With this glowing prospect before you!

*Ibid. September 14, 1935, 318-9*

*What is exactly the significance of 24th November? Overmental, supramental realisation or what? You say that it was something like the descent of Krishna in the material. Some say that the descent took place in you. But you are not matter, are you? Not very clear.*

Why not? Why can't I be matter? or represent it at least? At least you will admit that I have got some matter in me and you will hardly deny that the matter in me is connected or even continuous (in spite of the quantum theory) with matter in general? Well, if Krishna or the Overmind or something equivalent descended into my matter with an inevitable extension into connected general Matter, what is the lack of clarity in the statement of a descent into the material? What does logic say?

(...)

*Have you written anywhere what would be the nature of the physical transformation?*

I have not, I carefully avoided that ticklish subject.

*What would it be like? Change of pigment? Mongolian features into Aryo-Greco? Bald head into luxuriant growth? Old men into gods of eternal youth?*

Why not seven tails with an eighth on the head—everybody different colours, blue, magenta, indigo, green, scarlet, etc; hair luxuriant but vermilion and flying erect skywards; other details to match? Amen.

*Ibid. September 15, 1935, 320-1*

*Now, lend your ears, Sir, to my ailment! I was disappointed by your answer yesterday about the Supermind, for it is far from what you had in mind when you made the promise...*

I am disappointed that you could not appreciate the splendidly coloured prospects held out there.

(...)

*Supposing you were able to create a race of Supermen, then there would be two strata: Supermen and men.*

There will also be cats. Look at the Asram!

*Then the Supermen will no longer concern themselves with the lives and histories of men just as men are at present indifferent to the lives of animals?*

Men are not indifferent to lives of animals—at least not in Europe. Look at the open-air zoos—hospitals for animals—refuges for unwanted cats and dogs—live-farms, etc., etc.!

*Ibid. September 16, 1935, 322-3*

If you expect to become supramental overnight, you are confoundedly mistaken. The tail will keep the H.F. at a respectful distance and flap at you until you consent to do things in a reasonable time instead of taking 200 centuries over each step as you seem to want to do just now. More than that I refuse to say. What is a reasonable time in the supramental view of things I leave you to discover.

*Your Overmental Force seems to have utterly failed in the case of idiots like us. Where then is the*

*chance of this Mr. Supramental who is only a step higher?*

Overmind is obliged to respect the freedom of the individual—including his freedom to be perverse, stupid, recalcitrant and slow.

Supermind is not merely a step higher than Overmind—it is beyond the line, that is a different consciousness and power beyond the mental limit.

*Ibid. September 18, 1935, 324-5*

*You have admitted your failure in intellectualising me; now I am waiting to hear at any time the admission that all your attempts to make me a yogi seem to be in vain!*

Perhaps that is because for the sheer fun of it I tried the impossible, intending not to succeed—because if you had really become luminously intellectual and rational, why, you would have been so utterly surprised at yourself that you would have sat down open-mouthed on the way and never moved a step farther.

(...)

*Being an ass myself, I quite realise that to cross the "asses' bridge" is neither in my power nor do I cherish, harbour, rear any such phantasms.*

Asses seldom realise that. If they see a thistle on the other side, they try at once to go after it—so here again your logic fails.

*I don't even project my myopic vision towards the splendidly coloured horizon of the Absolute... I want only peace... If the blessed outer nature is on blazing fire, the inner would be calm, terribly calm, in a calm Pacific peace which no Atlantic aggressions can disturb...*

And yet you say you are not after the Absolute!!!

*Ibid. September 19, 1935, 325-7*

*I understand your protesting against "great" or "big" sadhaks, but why against "advanced" sadhaks? It is a fact that some are more advanced than others and so we mention X as an advanced sadhak, don't mean anything else.*

Advanced indeed! Pshaw! Because one is 3 inches ahead of another, you must make classes of advanced and non-advanced? Advanced has the same purring egoistic resonance as "great" or "big". It leads to all sorts of stupidities, rajasic self-appreciating egoism in some, tamasic self-depreciating egoism in others, round-eyed wonderings why X an advanced sadhak, one 3 inches ahead of Y, should stumble, tumble or fumble while Y, 3 inches behind X, still plods heavily and steadily on, etc., etc. Why, sir, the very idea in X that he is an advanced sadhak (like the Pharisee "I thank thee, O Lord, that I am not as other unadvanced disciples",) would be enough to make him fumble, stumble and tumble. So no more of that, sir, no more of that.<sup>1</sup>

*Ibid. September 25, 1935, 332*

*Absolutely in the physical consciousness! Don't find any trace of the psychic anywhere, Sir! Are you handling the blessed subconscious physical or what?*

I am handling the handle. Sticky! If you are absolutely in the physical consciousness so much the better. It shows you are on the way. If you were in your uproarious mental or tragic vital then there would be little chance for the psychic to emerge. But now that you are in the physical, there is some prospect of your finishing the circle M. V. Ph. Afterwards possibly there will be a chance for the line Ps. HC. S. Rejoice!

*Ibid. October 1, 1935, 336*

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<sup>1</sup> Here again Sri Aurobindo wrote X, Y, Z in the MS. .

*What are these abbreviations—Ps. HC. S.?*  
Psychic — Higher Consciousness — Supramental.

*You are trying to adopt shorthand now?*

Of course! what to do? Shorthand lessens the labour of the writer, even if it increases that of the reader. Besides, the attempt to find out what the abbs, mean should stimulate your intuition and sharpen your intelligence.

*Ibid. October 2, 1935, 336*

*Alas, cult or occult*

*Nothing do I know;*

*Blindly, blindly like an ass*

*Braying incessantly I go.*

What a beautiful poem! You wrote it yourself? It is in Dara's most modernist style.

*Ibid. October 20, 1935, 354*

But the mind or nature or mental energy—whatever you like to call it, does this in a certain way and carries on with a certain order of thoughts, haphazard intelligentialities (excuse the barbarism) or asininites, rigidly-ordered or imperfectly ordered intellectualities, logical sequences and logical inconsequences etc., etc. How the devil is an intuition to get in in the midst of that waltzing and colliding crowd? It does sometimes,—in some minds often intuitions do come in, but immediately the ordinary thoughts surround it and eat it up alive, and then with some fragment of the murdered intuition shining through their non-intuitive stomachs they look up smiling at you and say "I am an intuition, sir". But they are only intellect, intelligence or ordinary thought with part of a dismembered and therefore misleading intuition inside them.

*Ibid. October 23, 1935, 357-8*

*By the Self, I suppose, you mean the individual Self?*  
Good Lord, no. I mean the Self, sir, the Adwaita, Vedantic, Shankara Self. Atman, Atman! A thing I knew nothing about, never bargained for, didn't understand, either.

Ibid. October 31, 1935, 368

Didn't try, sir, so that's bosh. The attempt to bring a great general descent having only produced a great ascent of subconscious mud, I had given up that as I already told you. At present I am only busy with transformation of overmind (down to the subconscious) into supermind; when that is over, I shall see if I can beat everyone with the tail of the supermind or not. At present I am only trying to prevent people from making hysterical, subconscious asses of themselves, so that I may not be too much disturbed in my operations—not yet with too much success.

Ibid. November 25, 1935, 389

*I am wallowing again in the morass of the 3 Ds, now that I am free from my attendance on S.*

Stand up, man, and don't wallow! Stand up and fix your third eye on the invisibly descending Tail of the Supramental.

*If I could apply myself to some pursuits that would be obligatory!*

How to make them obligatory unless you do something which will take you to jail!

*Interest in poetry and reading has dwindled, and now I'm on the way to be a "subconscious ass".*

Why not become a conscious one?

Ibid. November 28, 1935, 390

*If poets have powerfully active sex-glands, I suppose I can also be called a poet, at any rate an embryonic one! Q.E.D. Logic, Sir! n'est-ce pas?*

No, sir—ce n'est pas ca. You are illegitimately connecting two disconnected syllogisms. 1st syllogism—all poets are sex-gland-active, Nirod is a poet, therefore Nirod is sex-gland-active. 2nd syllogism—all sex-gland-actives are poets, Nirod is sex-gland-active, therefore Nirod is a poet. The second proposition does not follow from the first as you seem illogically to think. All poets may be sex-gland-active, but it does not follow that all sex-gland-actives are poets. So don't start building an epic on your sex-glands, please.

Ibid. December 5, 1935, 396-7

A modern painter wishing to make a portrait of you will now paint at the top a clock surrounded by three triangles, below them a chaos of rhomboids and at the bottom two table castors to represent your feet and he will put underneath this powerful design, "Portrait of Nirod". Perhaps your soul will leap up in answer to its direct appeal and recognise at once the truth behind the object, behind your vanished physical self,—you will greet your psychic being or your Atman or at least your inner physical or vital being. Perhaps also you won't.

Ibid. January 6, 1936, 449

*It would mean that wherever a sincere heart is aspiring for the Divine, his aspiration reaches your ears.*

Why my ears? Ears are not necessary for the purpose. You might just as well say, reaches me by the post.

(...)

*Why should you stupefy me? Good Lord! Have you forgotten how Arjuna was stupefied, horrified, flabbergasted by seeing the Vishwarup<sup>1</sup> of Krishna whom he had thought of as his friend, guru,*

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<sup>1</sup> Supreme or universal form.

*playmate? Could I, for a moment, play all these pranks on you if I saw your Vishwarup?*

But that was because the Vishwarup was enjoying a rather catastrophic dinner, with all the friends and relations of Arjuna stuck between his *danshtrani karalani*.<sup>1</sup> But my viswarupa has no tusks, Sir, none at all. It is a pacifist *vishwarup*.

*Already people say that I have no respect for you because I write anything and everything! "Sri Aurobindo is the Lord Supreme and with Him he plays all these pranks!"*

And I return the compliment—I mean reply without restraint, decorum or the right grave rhythm. That is one reason why I indulge so freely in brackets.<sup>2</sup>

*No, Sir, I am satisfied with you as Sri Aurobindo pure and simple.*

No objection, I only suggested that I don't know who this Sri Aurobindo pure and simple is. If you do, I congratulate you.

*I am wrong about J.B., I discover. I forgot that he was put in contact with you by his photograph long ago. Who knew that you have been acting on him since then?*

You must not imagine I have been thinking solely about J all the time. When a fellow contacts, a Force goes out to him and acts according to his capacity of response, that's all.

*I have sent P's photograph also, but apparently there was no contact.*

Plenty of people have sent their photographs—some mad, some sane, some good, some bad, some indifferent. You

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<sup>1</sup> Terrible tusks.

<sup>2</sup> Replies that I was not supposed to show to other Ashramites, were enclosed by Sri Aurobindo in square brackets.



don't expect all to get the contact, do you? That would be too too even for a viswarupa.

Ibid. February 5, 1935, 479-80

*The result of Darshan in some other quarters leaves me staggered and staggered! I can't imagine such an incident taking place in the Asram—I mean, of course, N's gripping M's throat. It makes me rather aghast. Coupled with that the incident of R rushing to shoe-beat P. Good Lord! but I suppose they are all in the game!*

You seem to be the most candid and ignorant baby going. We shall have to publish an "Asram News and Titbits" for your benefit. Have you never heard of N's going for K's head with a powerfully-brandished hammer? Or of his howling challenges to C to come out and face him, till Mother herself had to interfere and stop him? Or of his yelling and hammering in a rage at C's door till Dyuman came and dragged him away? These things happened within a short distance of your poetic ears and yet you know nothing??? N is subject to these fits and has always been so. The Darshan is not responsible. And he is not the only howler. What about M herself? and half a dozen others? Hunger strikes? Threats of suicide? not to mention rushes to leave the Asram etc., etc. All from the same source, sir, and apparently part of the game.

*Difficulties of individual nature rushing up?*

Individual and general. The subconscious, sir, the subconscious. Brilliant irruptions of the subterranean Brahman into the dullness of ordinary life.

Ibid. February 26, 1936, 502

How can my opinion have any value against that of an Englishman—especially when that Englishman calls himself T?

As I said at the beginning I have no interest in T's opinions and set no value by them. Even the awful fact of his being an Englishman does not terrify me. Strange, isn't it? I have seen some lucubrations of his meant to be spiritual or Yogic and they are the most horrible pretentious inflated circumlocutionary bombastic would-be-abysmally-profound language that I have seen. For a man who talks of English style, tradition, expression, feeling, idiom, it was the worst production and most unEnglish possible. Few Indians could have beaten it. And the meaning nil.

Ibid. February 28, 1936, 507

*Please don't think that because I am silent on your "widening" theory, I have accepted it. All I may say is that you have been making a fool of me. I admit that I deserve no better, but still... well, still I am in a damn rotten state... As soon as I enter the Dispensary, it seems some black forces ride on my shoulders. I want to escape and spend a few afternoon hours away in the loneliness of Nature's company till this melancholia lasts. Can a cycle be had for the purpose?...*

Again Dilip! Can't supply a cycle for every melancholiac. Would have to buy 20 new ones immediately and then the whole Asram would turn melancholiac in order to have cycles.

Ibid. March 3, 1936, 510

*What has happened to my typescript? Hibernating?*  
My dear sir, if you saw me nowadays with my nose to paper from afternoon to morning, deciphering, deciphering, writing, writing, writing, even the rocky heart of a disciple would be touched and you would not talk about typescripts and hibernation. I have given up (for the present at least) the attempt to minimise the cataract of

correspondence; I accept my fate like Raman Maharshi with the plague of Prasads and admirers, but at least don't add anguish to annihilation by talking about typescripts.

*Ibid. March 11, 1936, 525*

*What is the use of your complaining? You have committed the grave blunder of coming into this sorrowful world with a mighty magical pen. Sri Krishna, I conjecture, may have complained about his lungs because of his incessant blowing and fluting to melt our hard hearts.*

It is an idea! Strange that none of the poets has mentioned it—a modernist poet would catch at it at once, "The Flute and the Lungs," or "Krishna's Bronchitis."

*Ibid. March 13, 1936, 525-6*

*There you are then, Sir! You admit that Mother did look a little longer than usual—that's a point gained!*

Just Jehovah, man! What of that? Can't Mother look longer without being furious?

*But quarrel over over that. . .*

*[Sri Aurobindo underlined the phrase.]*

Another ellipse? or a collapse? It sounds like a line of poetry.

*Or is it about that girl I wrote to you of long ago and got a smack?*

Consider yourself smacked this time also.

*Nothing criminal or incriminating—still enough perhaps to make the heart throb. Even my fancy is only a fancy...*

Fancy? fudge! It was only a movement of the hormones.

*A guilty conscience, a criminal conscience, well, that's about the size of it. Thrashing, fury I accept all if that was what it was for.*

It was not. As there was no thrashing and no fury, it could not be for that.

*I am obliged to sleep out for a few days because of repairs in our house. The whole building is smelling of lime, lime and lime.*

If you want to be a real Yogi, go on sniffing and sniffing at the lime till the smell creates an ecstasy in the nose and you realise that all smells and stinks are sweet and beautiful with the sweetness and beauty of the Brahman.

Ibid. March 25, 1936, 539

What a fellow! He blunders through life stumbling over every possible or impossible stone of offence with a conscientious thoroughness that is unimaginable and inimitable.

*He has sent a rupee to buy something for you. But your needs are so few and you are so strict about hygiene. At times I wonder why the Divine is so meticulously particular as regards contagion, infection. Is he vulnerable to the viruses, bacilli, microbes, etc.?*

And why on earth should you expect the Divine to feed himself on germs and bacilli and poisons of all kinds? Singular theology yours!

*So what shall I buy*

*To suit the Divine taste?*

*But aren't all same to him—paste*

*Or pudding, butter, cheese or mutton-pie?*

Good Lord! I hope you are not plotting to send any such things here! Of butter and cheese I have more than I want and pudding and mutton-pie are banished from my menu.

*I hear from all quarters that you are buried in letters... I don't know how you are ever going to keep your head above the mud of the letters, for your bhaktas, admirers are increasing by leaps and bounds. In the near future they will be millions, and*

*millions of letters heaped upon your supramental segregation, if you don't relinquish it and come out boldly!*

Come out and have millions and millions of admirers heaped upon my promiscuity? Thank you for nothing! The letters can be thrown into the W.P.B.<sup>1</sup> more easily than the admirers can be thrown out of the window.

*Ibid. March 27, 1936, 540-1*

*With your silence, consciousness, overmental, partly supramental, etc., etc., it should be possible to draw from the highest plane, at the slightest pull, and it should tumble down, Sir, but it doesn't. Why not? We wonder and wonder! Could you send Alice to Wonderland and ask her to discover and divulge the secret to us—not in hints, but at length?*

The highest planes are not so accommodating as all that. If they were so, why should it be so difficult to bring down and organise the supermind in the physical consciousness? What happy-go-lucky fancy-web-spinning ignoramuses you all are. You speak of silence, consciousness, overmental, supramental, etc. as if they were so many electric buttons you have only to press and there you are. It may be one day but meanwhile I have to discover everything about the working of all possible modes of electricity, all the laws, possibilities, perils, etc., construct roads of connection and communication, make the whole far-wiring system, try to find out how it can be made foolproof and all that in the course of a single lifetime. And I have to do it while my blessed disciples are firing off their gay or gloomy a priori reasonings at me from a position of entire irresponsibility and expecting me to

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<sup>1</sup> Waste-paper basket.

divulge everything to them not in hints but at length. Lord God in omnibus!<sup>1</sup>

Ibid. March 29, 1936, 544-5

*Yes, I meant "S's baptism" by R as well as his hooliganism on the rickshaw-wala. Why, surely you have heard of it? No connection with the treatment? What connection was there between R and the rickshaw-wala? but the incident occurred!*

Well, as for S the surprising thing is that nobody baptised him before. R says, I hear, that he jumped on the rickshaw-wala in order to save N from battle, murder and sudden death, and N ungratefully misreported the whole affair!! But R has always been a violent man with much of the character of the adventurer as I wrote to you once,—so the things you write don't surprise me.

However, he has not (yet, at least) beaten David's<sup>2</sup> mother or baptised the Vice President's wife—or even Amaladasan. So I hope that a certain amount of non-connection can be expected when he is treating a case.

(...)

*By the way, what does your newspaper say about Abyssinia? It seems to be sinking into the abyss. Another black country swallowed by the whites? Prayers, entreaties to God, of no avail! The devils are too strong for God? What?*

Why all this sentimental fury? This and worse has been happening ever since mankind replaced and improved on the ape and the tiger. So long as men are what they are, these things will happen. What do you expect God to do about it? The Abyssinians have conquered others, Italy conquers the Abyssinians, other people have conquered

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<sup>1</sup> Lord God in everyone (Latin). [*Comp.*]

<sup>2</sup> Mayor of Pondicherry.

the Italians and they will probably be sat upon again hereafter. It is the Law, sir, and the Great Wheel and everything else. Keep your head cool in the heat. If you want to change things, you will have to change humanity first and I can assure you you will find it a job. Yes, even to change 150 people in an Asram and get them to surmount their instincts.

*You will perhaps say that justice and retribution will come in time.*

Good Lord, why should I say such things? Was I ever a moralist or a preacher? Justice was never the determinative factor in a war.

Ibid. April 12, 1936, 563-5

*Waiting patiently for the blue moon, should I all the while cry out "damn it, damn it!"?*

But that's another mantra. One for which the blue moon has a special dislike.

Ibid. April 22, 1936, 572

*The fellow is still dreaming of the Sup.M. Tail! He doesn't realise yet that many of us will see it after our souls have departed into the subtle planes and will have taken birth again in proper circumstances and conditions—and now one after another, so many are dropping, dropping after so many years of stay—viz. M-lal! Next X-lal, Y-lal, then Nirodlal!*

Excuse me. M-lal and Company are not running away from the Sm. Tail—they are only running after the paternal tail—as soon as they have stroked it sufficiently, they will return. All the Lals have gone like Japhet in search of their fathers and will return in June, except M who comes back, I believe, after 15 days. Two others asked for filial leave—one is perhaps still thinking of

running after P.T. But we are beginning to kick. One "leave" has been refused!

Ibid. May 17, 1936, 591

*I don't really understand these paternal and filial loves. M-lal—a fellow who has been here for 7 or 8 years and doing Yoga, runs after such a thing as a paternal tail!*

He says he has been attached to the paternal tail ever since he came here and he felt quite outraged when Mother hinted rather sharply that it was absurd to run after it.

*K-lal, after 3 years stay, goes out for the marriage of a niece. Ridiculous! Absolutely unthinkable! Who are these paters and maters and what's their place in your Yoga of surrender?*

Quite agree with you. Hear! hear!

(...)

In my idea it is simply the subconscious and sheepishness. Sheep always do what one sheep has started. K-lal started father business (it was not merely marriage) immediately 5 others sent in filial applications one after another. Subconscious in the sense that primal instincts and irrational difficulties or habitual ones are surging up, surging up, surging up.

(...)

*Are you beginning to kick? But how long will you go on doing so, Sir?*

No need to go on—The sheep movement is stopped so far as fathers are concerned. Two half-kicks and one whole one were sufficient.

*I sometimes wonder if anyone here is attaining anything at all; has anybody realised the Divine? Please don't ask me what I mean by the Divine. It is difficult to explain these things.*



Why shouldn't I ask? If you mean the Vedantic realisation, several have had it. Bhakti realisation also. If I were to publish the letters on sadhana experiences that have come to me, people would marvel and think that the Asram was packed full of great Yogis! ... But all that does not count here, because what is a full realisation outside, is here only a faint beginning of siddhi. Here the test is transformation of the nature, psychic, spiritual, finally supramental. That and nothing else is what makes it so difficult.

(...)

8 years? Amateur Yogis! Those who know something about Yoga would count 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 years as nothing for the preliminary work of preparation and self-purification. That was X's bane—He expected to conquer Heaven in a gallop, but there was only one way of doing it, complete abdication of self, and that he refused and probably could not do. Then when the gallop could not succeed, he has been wrestling arid groaning ever since—meditation, jap, prayer with only one idea "When is it coming? when is it coming? Why is it not coming? why is it not coming? Of course, it won't come. It will never come, never, never." And of course it doesn't—that is not the way.

(...)

All hold grimly to their own ideas—follow their own conceptions about Yoga. Reasonings! logic! As for the ways pointed out by the Guru, all supramental nonsense. The surprising thing is that anyone succeeds here.

*You seem to have again changed your front. Once you wrote that the Supramental descent may not depend on the condition of the sadhaks, and now you speak of the Supramental coming as fast as we will allow.*

You have mistaken the sense altogether. It simply means if with the bother of your revolts, depressions, illnesses,

shouts, quarrels and all the rest of it, I can get time to go on rapidly. Nothing more, sir.

*If we fellows have to allow, you had better close down the shop and enjoy your impersonal supramental beatitude!*

I am quite ready. I propose that you call a meeting and put it to the vote. "That thereby we resolve to release Sri Aurobindo into beatitude and all go off quietly to Abyssinia."

Ibid. May 19, 1936, 591-5

### **Absurd Poetry: Playful Doctor, Playful Guru**

*Really, Sir, you have caught a magnificent fellow for Supramentalisation, what?*

Well, sir, in the supramental world all kinds will be needed, I suppose. Then why not a supramental ass?

Nirodbaran, "Sri Aurobindo's Humor", p. 27

*By the way, people get poems, pictures in meditation and I seem to get only letters and points for letters! Since letters and discussions are interdicted I have been obliged to draw inspiration from sleep. And I find that sleeping has a decided advantage in this Yoga!*

You get letters in meditation! that would be fine—it would save me the trouble of writing them, simply project into your meditation instead of sending through Nolini!

Ibid. p. 33

*But concentration on real work? Good Lord, you do that from 9 or 10 a.m.—p.m. God alone knows what you do then.*

What is this transcendental rubbish?

*Perhaps you send Force to Germany etc...?*

That is not my real work. Who except the devil is going to give force to Germans? Do you think I am in liaison with Hitler and his howling tribe of Nazis?

Ibid. p. 38

*Please don't fall flat again. So much depends on your curvilinear position, especially when you are bringing down the supramental tail.*

Now look here, do you think I fell flat on purpose? No, sir. Sudden rush of correspondence, interruption of campaign—consequent breakdown of road to Addis Abbaba, retreat necessary, consolidation of back position, road repair—feat, but I suppose, necessary.

Ibid. p. 39

So soft, so soft, I almost coughed, then went aloft  
To supramental regions where rainbow-breasted  
pigeons

Coo in their sacred legions—

*N.B.* This inspired doggerel is perfectly private. It is an effort at abstract or surrealist poetry, but as I had no models to imitate, I may have blundered.

*I had to show that doggerel to Amal as I couldn't decipher. Amal suggests if your "perfectly private" is a joke, after all.*

No, sir. Quite serious. Can't afford to play jokes like that in public.

*Is that "Coo in their sacred legions"?*

Yes, the cooing is the supramental zenith of the softness and the surrealist transformation of the cough.

Ibid. pp. 49-50

*How is it, Sir, that my letter with the poem came away as they went? Because I was late or some Supramental forgetfulness?*

Never had a glimpse of either of them. Must have been  
hiding scared in your bag.

*For this have I kept awake at night and done sadhana.  
I've endured mosquito-bites all over my body, and it  
has come back without receiving your gracious look.  
Now I'm bursting into tears of despair. I'll send it  
again at your door, you'll kill me, O Guru, if you forget  
it this time!*

0 must I groan and moan and scarify my poor inspired  
bones

To get my poem back as it were a bill from Smith or  
Jones?

N.B. Abstract poetry very abstract.

Ibid. pp. 50-1

*Let me know  
How 'tis so  
A dullard like me  
Bursting like the sea  
With the heart of the Muse  
Makes his rhythm fuse?  
You are opening, opening opening  
Into a wider, wider scopening  
That fills me with a sudden hopening  
That I may carry you in spite of gropening  
Your soul into the supramental ropening.*

N.B. Surrealist poetry.

Ibid. p. 51

*I asked you what were the exceptional  
circumstances. In reply you have delighted my soul  
with surrealist poetry, but not my intellect,  
"widening, widening" is not the cause, but the effect.*

Well, but that's just it. Widen, widen, scopen, scopen and  
the poetry may come in a torrent roaring and cascading

through an enlarged fissure in yours and the world's subtle cranium.

Ibid. pp. 51-2

All I can say is that if it was X's Force (of effort) that turned in a moment a hobbling ass into a winged eagle for that was what happened to his poetry, it has done something no one ever did before. But no doubt you are both of you right. I am rather coming to the conclusion that this world should be left to his own "efforts" to arrive where it can and the Mother and myself should take tickets for some other.

Ibid. p. 53

*"Over the lone heights in the still air roamed," but roamed what, Sir?*

How the deuce am I to know? I wrote what came as a metrical example and the roamer did not come in view.

Ibid. pp. 53-4

*Will try again, if no result, will absolutely fall flat. Can't blame me, I think you have no time to send any Force.*

Had no force to send, at least some that I considered worth something. Fell flat myself for the last two or three days—as flat as I could manage to at this stage. Am recovering curvilinear proportions and shall try to send something along.

Ibid. p. 54

*What poem, you ask? Good Lord! Didn't I request you to compose a poem illustrating some points of prosody? Already forgotten? If the Guru is so forgetful, the sisya can be worse.*

And didn't I tell you that it was an extravagant and unwarrantable idea to demand a poem for such a

grammatical purpose and I kept the carte blanche that I might use it for other purposes? What's this *sisya* who does not read his Guru's objurgations, however illegible?

Ibid. pp. 54-5

*Last night I tried to compose a poem. It was a failure,  
I fell asleep over its first two lines.*

You call it a failure when you have discovered a new soporific?

Ibid. p. 55

*I let go the typescript, but the poem? How can I allow  
you to break your promise?*

Break a promise? who's going to do that? No time was fixed—so the promises can be fulfilled, say in 1997. If you say you are not likely to be alive then, nor I either—well, our heirs can complete the transaction.

Ibid. p. 56

*My cold has given me the quick realisation that  
everything in this world—including the Divine, is  
Maya. What Shankara and Buddha realised by  
sadhana, I realise by a simple cold!*

No need of sadhana for that—anybody with a fit of the blues can manage that. It is to get out of the Maya that sadhana is needed.

Ibid. p. 61

I got irritated last night by your persistent boiling and put a gigantic Force which, I am glad to see, burst the little boil.

Thank God for that!

Free from boil,

At poems toil

Laugh and grow fat.

*You actually propose "Laugh and grow fat" though  
laughing never makes fat!*

You oppose one of the most ancient traditions of humanity by this severe statement. But your statement is mistaken even according to Science. We are now told that it is the activity of certain glands that makes you thin or fat. If glands, then why not gladness?

Ibid. p. 62

*Again a blessed boil inside the left nostril—painful, feverish. A dose of Force please!*

As the modernist poet says—

O blessed blessed boil within the nostril,  
How with pure pleasure dost thou make thy boss  
thrill!

He sings of thee with sobbing trill and cross trill,  
O blessed boil within the nostril.

I hope this *stotra* will propitiate the boil and make it disappear, satisfied.

*I couldn't make out one word. Is it bows thrill?*

I thought you'd boggle over it. "Boss", man, "boss"=yourself as owner, proprietor, patron, capitalist of the boil.

Ibid. pp. 62-3

*Guru,  
My head, my head  
And the damned fever  
I am half dead!*

Cheer up! Things might have been so much worse. Just think if you had been a Spaniard in Madrid or a German Communist in a concentration camp! Imagine that and then you will be quite cheerful with only a cold and headache. So

Throw off the cold,  
Damn the fever,  
Be sprightly and bold  
And live for ever.

*I am better today. But what about the lack of interest in everything? Imagination of Madrid or concentration camp will have a reverse effect.*

Don't understand. You want to get rid of the interest in everything or to get rid of the lack of interest?

Ibid. pp. 63-4

*By the Guru! Please don't forget to give a supramental kick to my main impediments at Darshan; only no after-effect please!*

By the Guru"! What kind of oath is this? But the object of the imagination was not to liberate your nose or forehead but to liberate your soul.

Kicking is easy. As to the effects or after-effects, that has to be seen.

Ibid. p. 64

*Boil again inside the right nostril! But perhaps you will ask me to imagine being a Spaniard, German, Jew, Japanese—German pact, Russian inflammation at it etc., etc. All right. Sir, I will imagine all these if you will imagine giving me a dose of Force, what?*

It is for you to do that. I can only send Force.

*Boil paining, what to do? Suffer with a smile?*

Smile a while.

Ibid. pp. 64-5

*Again a boil on the left cheek. Good Heavens! No improvement.*

As René's doctor says, "Tut tut tut tut tut tut!"

*Punishment for too much talking or eating or subconscious welling out?*

Probably.

Ibid. p. 65



*Boil a little ripe, but still—  
Hard and big as hazel-nut,  
In spite of your tut, tut, tut!  
Give one more dose at the least  
Or I howl on like a beast!*

Tut nut tut, not nut tut tut!

Hope this will have the effect of a Tantric *mantra* which it resembles. So if you like Om ling *bling* bring kring!

Just try repeating either of these 15,000 times concentrating on your boil (bling) at the time.

*Did you really want me to chant that mantra? I took it as a big piece of joke.*

You couldn't realise that Tut Tut Tut was a serious *mantra* with immense possibilities? Why, it is the modern form of [Sanskrit: That, the Absolute, pronounced "tut"] and everybody knows that [Sanskrit: om tat sat, OM That which Is] is a *mantra* of great power. Only you should as a penance for not having accepted at once, do it not 15,000 but 150,000 times a day—at a gallop, *e.g.* Om Tut or Tut Tut a Tut, Tut a Tut and so on at an increasing pace and pitch till you reach either Berhampur<sup>1</sup> or Nirvana.

*I am not only ignorant about all things spiritual, Atma, Yog-biyog etc., they are as nauseating to me as quinine which I had to gulp. And see the trick of Fate, it is such things now that I am called upon to do.*

You are justly punished—but what is Yog-biyog? I thought that had to do with mathematics, not spiritual philosophy.

*Is it for nothing that I see the Red Light as the outcome of my misadventure?*

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<sup>1</sup> A place famous for its mental hospital.

Take courage. Say Tut tut tut to the misadventure and go ahead.

*By the way I am trying your mantra though by fits and starts.*

Good Lord! What *mantra*? Om Tut a tut tuwhit tuwhoo? Man! But it is to be recited only when you are taking tea in the company of four Brahmins pure of all sex ideas and 5 ft. 7 inches tall with a stomach in proportion. Otherwise it can't be effective.

Ibid. pp. 65-6

*Hard, throbbing, painful boil. Slight fever, headache in the morning. Hot fomentation etc. Went to the miracle doctor, 4 powders! added to these the Force! Does it budge? The game must be over tomorrow, Sir. Otherwise I have to lie flat!*

All this for a poor little boil? What would it be if you were put to roast?

Ibid. p. 66

*A swelling—size of a cherry has appeared inside the nose. The tip is damn painful. Knifing is not advisable. I hope it won't leave me with a nose like that of Cyrano de—quoi?*

Let us hope not. That kind of nose wouldn't suit either your face or your poetry.

Ibid. pp. 68-9

*Nose boil boiling down; terrible headache, fever too. Feeling fed up, Sir!*

Cellular bolshevism probably.

*What's cellular bolshevism?*

Bolshevism of the cells surging up against the Tsar (yourself). Also the Bolsheviks carry on their propaganda by creating Communistic "cells" everywhere, in the army,

industries etc. You don't seem to be very up in contemporary history.

Ibid. p. 69

*X has profuse 'whites'.*

What on earth is this word? 'Winter? Wintes? It may be profuse, but it is not legible. For God's sake don't imitate me.

*The word you tumbled upon is 'whites' meaning leucorrhoea. But I thought it should be our ideal to imitate you!*

Good Lord, what an h! I could not do worse myself.

Ibid. p. 70

*The pain of the patient gone and she had a beautiful long sleep. What do you think of it?*

Refuse to think—lost the habit.

Good Heavens! After a life of sadhana you expect me still to think and what is worse think what is right or wrong. I don't think even; I see or I don't see. The difference between intuition and thought is very much like between seeing a thing and badgering one's brains to find out what the thing can possibly be like. Intuition is truth-sight. The thing seen may not be the truth? Well, in that case it will at least be one of its hundred tails or at least a hair from one of the tails.

Ibid. pp. 73-4

*A is passing excessive phosphate, shall we make a microscopic exam?*

Do you want to microscope him out of existence? The loss of phosphate, I suppose, explains his weakness.

*Shall we then turn a deaf ear to his complaints?*

What complaints? Micturition and phosphates? Tell him to learn to economise his phosphates instead of squandering them and he will become strong and healthy as a tiger.

*X has phimosis.*

What kind of medical animal is this?

*That is a trouble causing difficulty in passing urine due to the narrowing of the orifice.*

My dear sir, if you clap a word like that on an illness, do you think it is easy for the patient to recover?

Ibid. pp. 74-5

But what about E? Extravagant? Eccentric? Epatant?

Well, both the doctors did that and one is a mighty man there, the Doctor of Doctors. But perhaps it's the fashion in Hyderabad to breathe like that when one has pneumonia. Anyhow pn. seems to have dropped out of the picture, and the 'D of Ds' tells only of typhoid and impossible re-activity of inactive germs of tuberculosis.

*I chuckled, Sir, to learn that you held the paper horizontally, because of its length! And E is neither of those high-sounding "extravagant" words. If you had just looked about you for a moment lifting your eyes from the correspondence, you would have discovered that E stands for nothing but a simple evening, clear?*

No. What has evening to do with it? Evening star? "Twinkle, twinkle, evening star! How I wonder what your temperatures are?" But I suppose Sir James Jeans knows and doesn't wonder. But anyhow E for Evening sounds both irrelevant and poetic.

*No, Sir, it is not at all irrelevant, though poetic. I swear it is Evening. You know they take these pulse and respiration rates Morning and Evening of which M & E are short hands and one of which I suppose you will make mad and the other, one of the three you have divined! But what it this Jones—knows and doesn't wonder?*

Jeans, Jeans, Jeans—not Jones!

Sir James Jeans, sir, who knows all about the temperatures, weights and other family details of the stars, including E.

By the way, what do you mean by deceiving me about E in the Hyderabad fever chart? R wrote that E is the entry in the "Motions" column; it evidently means enema. Poetry indeed! Sunset colours indeed! Enema, sir! Motions, sir! Compared with that, ling bling is epically poetic.

*I beg your pardon, Sir! Enema didn't strike me at all. But I hope it didn't make any difference in the working of your Force unless you enematised the patient too much. It is a pleasure to learn that one can deceive the Divine, however!*

If the Divine chooses to be deceived, anyone can deceive him just as he can run away from the battle.

Ibid. pp. 77-9

*A carpenter beaten by a rat.*

Say, say! I never heard of a rat beating a man before! He ought to go to the criminal court, instead of the hospital.

Ibid. p. 82

You have medicated her throat but under the tongue there is fire. Surrealist Poetry is not your monopoly—even your patients write it. S informed me the other day that her spine had already begun breaking itself into two.

*You may congratulate yourself, Sir, on this invasion of Surrealism. However she is better. But what have you done with the spine? I saw her still going strong; result of your operation?*

The spine was surrealist—her going it strong is realistic.

*I wrote in my medical report: D better; pain.*

Is it that he has a better pain? or that the fact that he has a pain shows that he is better or that he is better, but still has pain? An aphoristic style lends itself to many joyfully various interpretations.

Ibid. pp. 92-3

*We examine chemically first a sample of urine, i. e. by chemical re-agents, which is called qualitative test. You ought to know that from your English Public School chemistry, Sir!*

Never learned a word of Chemistry or any damned science in my school. My school, sir, was too aristocratic for such plebian things.

Ibid. p. 93

*Why the devil does A write all these things to you? Are you prescribing or are we? and what the devil is the use of his knowing the medicines and doses, pray? He could have asked me.*

Well, what about the free Englishman's right to grumble? This is not London and there is no "Times" to write to. So he writes a letter to me, instead of to the "Times".

*Surely, there is a twist somewhere.*

There always is a twist, sir, always.

*Anyway, I won't fume nor tear my hair.*

Don't. Losing one's hair is always a useless operation.

Keep your hair on.

*Only just tell him, please, that he ought to let us know instead of sending a boy with an empty bottle, if he doesn't want to present his honourship himself, or I will tell him myself?*

Dear sir, tell him yourself, tell him yourself. I will pat you on the back in silence from a safe distance.

Ibid. pp. 93-4

*People say I am getting absolutely bald, Sir. Two things I feared—one a big tummy and another a damned baldness. Couldn't be saved from one. If you can't grow new hair, please help to preserve the few I have, Sir.*

What one fears most, is usually what happens. Even if there were no disposition, the fear calls it in. Who knows if you had not feared; you might have had the waist of a race-runner and the hair of Samson.

*I read in Conversation that skin, hair and teeth are very near to Matter and so, spiritual Force takes a long time in acting on them. Is it true?*

Painfully true.

*Then I have no chance till Supermind descends?*

I suppose not. And who knows what fancies the supramental may have?

Ibid. p. 94

*Shall I adopt the surrealist method ? i.e. keep quiet for a moment and whatever strikes first, go ahead with it; only be careful in case of poisons! You remember once I told you of this and you cried—  
Good Lord!*

I did and I repeat it. I don't want this Ashram transferred to the next world by your powerful agency.

*I wonder why you flared up at my 'go at it'. By 'go at it' I didn't obviously mean sending your Ashram to the next world. No, not at all. I meant only this: say a case comes with pain in the stomach etc. I simply keep silent, and suddenly comes to me the suggestion: gastritis.*

I didn't flare up. I was cold with horror.

Doctors don't mean it, when they do that kind of thing. It is not deliberate murder with them but involuntary or shall we say, experimental homicide.

*Can you not or rather isn't it high time that you should open up the medical channel in me, Sir? I feel ashamed that I am a doctor and can't cure cases! You gave me a godship in Timber Godown work and compliments for my ability etc. In my own field I shall be a failure?*

Medical channel? Rather rocky perhaps and sanded—but if poetry could open, why not medicine?

*Medical channel rather vicky? vichy? and—what? It means anyhow the thing is not easy, but why not?*

Rocky, sir, rocky—sanded—silted up with sand from both sides. No place for the current. Have to blast rocks, dig out channel, embank.

Shobhan Allah!<sup>1</sup> With your diagnosis one would have expected him to be already in Paradise. Of course, I put a Force.

*No, sir, not in Paradise but in hell of agony, suffering, fever, brown hepatisation, grey hepatisation etc., etc.*

*(nothing to do with liver though). But is this a miracle of Force or miracle of diagnosis?*

What on earth is this hepatisation? where? lungs? pneumonia? what else? Kindly be less cryptic.

*Well, red and grey hepatisation are parts of morbid anatomy. When there is pneumonia, lungs undergo pathological changes from red to grey and get the solid appearance of liver. So the stages are called red or grey hepatisation. Nothing alarming, you see.*

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<sup>1</sup> “Glory to God”, an Urdu term. [Comp.]



But hang it all! Has he pneumonia or not? Is there fever now? Alarming or not, what is his present condition?

*But I told you long ago that he is hale and hearty and that was the miracle; no fever; nothing at all. You said according to our diagnosis you expected him to be in Paradise. I said, no, not so early but in hell of suffering etc., etc...that's all—that grey hepatisation troubled you, eh?*

Naturally, if you say that a fellow who is supposed to be hale and hearty, is brown and grey with a mysterious hepatisation and suffering a hell of agony and not yet in Paradise.

*No, Sir, no! You didn't read between the lines. You wanted to send him to Paradise; I objected and said—no, he would have suffered i.e. in hell of suffering.*

Ibid. pp. 99-100

*I hear that X is now shedding tears of joy at the sight of apples, oranges, prunes etc., etc. She has forgotten all her troubles. Tears of sorrow, tears of joy, oh dear!*

'Fruity' tears of joy. They move me to poetry.

"O apples, apples; oranges and prunes,  
You are God's bliss incarnate in a fruit!  
Meeting yon after many desolate moons  
I sob and sniff and make a joyous bruit."

Admit that you yourself could not have done better as a poetic and mantric (romantic?) comment on this touching situation.

Ibid. pp. 105-6



"...And joy laugh nude on the peaks of the Absolute..."



## DILIP: BETWEEN LAUGHTER AND TEAR

I do not care a button about having my name in any blessed place. ... A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damned nonsense. It means that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence.

Dilip Kumar Roy, "Sri Aurobindo came to me", pp. 50-1

But what strange ideas again!—that I was born with a Supramental temperament and that I know nothing of hard realities! Good God! ... *My life has been a battle; the fact that I wage it now from a room upstairs and by spiritual means as well as others that are external makes no difference to its character.* But of course as we have not been shouting these things, it is natural, I suppose, for others to think that I am living in an august, glamorous, lotus-eating dreamland where no hard facts of life or nature present themselves. But what an illusion all the same!

(...)

Your descriptions of Avatars and prophets are magnificent in color. I wish it were a sober fact that the Divine refuses us nothing—if He would start doing that, it would be glorious and I should not at all insist on constant beatitude. But from his representatives, Vibhutis, and Avatars, he exacts a good deal and expects them to overcome rather difficult conditions. No doubt they do not call for compassion, but, well, surely you can permit them an occasional divine right to a grumble?

(...)

The Divine may be difficult, but His difficulties can be overcome if one keeps at Him. Even my smilelessness was

overcome, which Nevinson<sup>1</sup> had remarked with horror more than twenty years before—'the most dangerous man in India', Aurobindo Ghosh 'who never smiles'. He ought to have added: 'but who always jokes'—but he did not know that as I was very solemn with him, or perhaps I had not evolved sufficiently on that side then. Anyhow since you have overcome that—my smilelessness—you are bound to overcome all the other difficulties also."

Ibid. pp. 67-9 *passim*

I do not understand why you should assume that I am displeased with the Karma question. I castigated or fustigated Nirod not from displeasure nor even 'more in sorrow than in anger', but for fun and also from a high sense of duty: for that erring mortal was bold enough to generalise from his very limited experience and impose it as a definite law in Yoga, discrediting in the process my own immortal philosophy! What then could I do but to jump on him in a spirit of genial massacre?

Ibid. p. 255

You struck your head against the upper sill of the door our engineer Chandulal fixed in your room? ... A pity, no doubt. But remember that Chandulal's dealings with the door *qua* door were scientifically impeccable: the only thing he forgot was that people—of various sizes—should pass through it. If you regard the door from the Russellian *objective* point of view as an external thing in which you must take pleasure for its own sake, then this will be brought home to you and you will see that it was quite all right. It is only when you bring in irrelevant *subjective* considerations like people's demands on a door and the pain of a stunned head, that objections can be made.

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<sup>1</sup> Henri W. Nevinson, a well-known author who came to India in 1907 and was deeply impressed by Sri Aurobindo.

However, in spite of philosophy, the Mother will speak to Chandulal in the morning and get him to do what has (practically, not philosophically) to be done. May I suggest, however, if it is any consolation to you, that our Lilliputian engineer perhaps measured things by his own head, forgetting that there were in the Ashram higher heads and broader shoulders? ... As for the Divine rapture, a knock on the head or foot or elsewhere can be received with the physical *ananda* of pain or pain and *ananda* or pure physical *ananda*—for I have often, quite involuntarily, made the experiment myself and passed with honours. It began, by the way, as far back as in Alipore Jail when I got bitten in my cell by some very red and ferocious-looking warrior ants and found to my surprise that pain and pleasure are conventions of our senses. But I do not expect that unusual reaction from others. And I suppose there are limits, e.g. the case of the picketers in Madras or Dr. Noel Paton. [These were beaten by the police as a result of which there were many fractured skulls.] In any case their way of having rapture is better off the list and that dwarfish doorway was not a happy contrivance.

Ibid. pp. 270-1

*Once upon a time, Guru, there was a foolish ass who lived in the neighbourhood of a wise Yogi. One day a sudden flood burst the banks of a river nearby and flooded the countryside. The wise Yogi, being wise, ran up till he reached the safe top of a hill at the foot of which he used to meditate day and night in a cave. But the ass—being foolish, not to say unmeditative—was swept away by the rushing tides. 'Alas!' he brayed, 'the world is being drowned!' 'Don't be an ass,' reprimanded the Yogi in high scorn from up the hill-top. 'It's only you who are*

*being drowned—not this great big world.' 'But sir,' argued the idiot, 'if I myself am drowned how can I be sure that the world will survive?' And the Yogi was struck dumb and wondered, for the first time, which was the deeper wisdom—the human or the asinine! And I too have started wondering on my own, Guru!" I added. "So I appeal to you to adjudicate: tell me whose is the more pitiable plight: the Yogi's or the ass's? And incidentally, tell me also if my mind is going off the handle because I find the foolish ass's argument nearly as rational as the wise Yogi's?*

Your wise but not overwise ass has put a question that cannot be answered in two lines. Let me say, however, in defence of the much-maligned ass that he is a very clever and practical animal and the malignant imputation of stupidity to him shows only human stupidity at its worst. It is because the ass does not do what man wants him to do even under blows, that he is taxed with stupidity.

But really, the ass behaves like that first because he has a sense of humour and likes to provoke the two-legged beast into irrational antics; and secondly, because he finds that what man wants of him is quite a ridiculous and bothersome nuisance which ought not to be demanded of any self-respecting donkey. Also note that the ass is a philosopher. When he hee-haws, it is out of a supreme contempt for the world in general and for the human imbecile in particular. I have no doubt that in the asinine language man has the same significance as ass in ours. These deep and original considerations are, however, by the way—merely meant to hint to you that your balancing between a wise man and the wise ass is not so alarming a symptom after all.

Ibid. pp. 271-3

*Once a rather funny thing happened in 1933. We used in those days to have a musical programme in the Ashram, about once in two months. As I was singing a song on Krishna on one such occasion with Mother sitting before me in samadhi, I was conscious of a sudden commotion behind me where the others were sitting. A senior sadhaka of considerable girth, Purushottam—so I was told subsequently—got up on a sudden to dance when Ambu, a rather thin though strong youth, leapt up to restrain the other's indomitable ecstasy, as a result of which there was, necessarily, a tussle. So the musical soiree was partially spoiled. This saddened me and I asked Sri Aurobindo if I had been responsible in any way, or if I had simulated a bhakti unfelt by my heart. To that he replied:*

There was no misdirection of your appeal to Krishna; if there was anybody responsible it was Anilkumar with his *tabla* (Indian drum). But there was nothing wrong and no possession in the evil sense of the word—nothing hostile. The beat of the *tabla*,—more than anything else—created a vibration which was caught hold of by some rhythmic material energy and that in turn was caught hold of by Purushottam's body which considered itself under a compulsion to execute the rhythm by a dance. There is the whole (occult) science and genesis of the affair. Purushottam thought he was inspired and in a trance; Ambu thought Purushottam was going to break his own head and other people's legs; a number of others thought Purushottam was going cracked or already cracked; some thought Purushottam was killing Ambu which Ambu contemptuously rejects, saying he was able to hold Purushottam all alone, and out of these conflicting mental judgments—if they can be called so—arose the whole row. A greater quietude in people's minds would have

allowed the incident to be 'liquidated' in a less uproarious fashion—but the Mother was absorbed in the music and could only intervene later on when Champaklal consulted her. That is all.

*Ibid.* pp. 273-4

Good heavens! But what! But when! But which! You expect me to give you 'clear and concise' notes on all that, fixing the 'nature and salient features' of each blessed thing? It will take me several Sundays wholly devoted to grappling with this tremendous task! And how the deuce am I to tell you in a 'clear and concise way' what consciousness is or mind or life is? Do you think these confounded entities are themselves clear and concise or have any 'salient features'? They are salient only in the Latin sense of jumping about all the time and becoming something different each moment. As for 'consciousness' you might well ask me to define the word. Of course I do it by replying—'a damned mess', and that would be very satisfactory to me as well as 'clear and concise' but it would hardly serve the purpose.

*Ibid.* pp. 274-5

Fastings? I don't believe in them, though I have done them myself. You would really eat like an ogre afterwards. Shaved head? Have you realised the consequences? I pass over the aesthetic shock to myself at Darshan on the 24th November from which I might never recover—but the row that would rise from the Cape Comorin to the Himalayas! You would be famous in a new way which would cast all your previous glories into the shade. And just when you are turning away from fame and all the things of the ego! No: too dangerous by half. Sleep without the mosquito-net? That would mean no sleep, which is as bad as no food. Not only your eyes would become weak, but yourself also—and, to boot, gloomy, grey and gruesome—



more gruesome than the Supramental of your worst apprehensions! No and No again.

(...)

But how in the earthly did you get this strange idea that we were pressing asceticism on you? When? How? Where? I only admitted it as a possibility after repeated assertions from you that you wanted to do this formidable thing, and it was with great heart-searchings and terrible apprehensive visions of an ascetic Dilip with wild weird eyes and in loin-cloth, eating ground-nuts and nails and sleeping on iron-spikes in the presence of a dumbfounded Lord Shiva! I never prescribed the thing to you at all: it was you who were clamouring for it, so I gave in and tried to make the best of it, hoping that you would think better of it. As for the Mother, the first time she heard of it she knocked it off with the most emphatic 'Nonsense!' possible.

*Ibid. pp. 286-9 passim*

Your epic of the four Aurobindos is luminous, informing and hair-raising! But there can be no doubt about who this Aurobindo is—it is, I presume, Aurobindo the fourth, 'a doer of dreadful deeds'. I am referring to the phrase *bhimakarma Brikodara*<sup>1</sup>—However a truce to unseemly jests; let us come to grave practical matters.

His address? How in the name of the wonderful am I to know? His address in the telegram is 'Aurobindo, Bombay' just as mine might be 'Aurobindo, Pondicherry'. In his previous letter he wrote that he was going to Bombay and would waltz from there straight to Pondicherry. He may have given his Bombay address but I don't think so. Nolini who has his letter can perhaps enlighten you. I do not know whether he expects us to put him up—I suppose not, since although he is Aurobindo,

<sup>1</sup> From Sanskrit, meaning literally: "wolf-belly of dreadful deeds."

Aurobindo does not know him from Adam. However, what I am doing is to send you his reply-paid telegram form and shove my responsibility on your shoulders. You will decide these according to the ripe wisdom of your many-Aurobindonian experience. Whether you wire 'come and be blessed' or 'stay where you are in your Eden'—is your shout—I back out. To sum the matter up in two far-flowing Alexandrine couplets:

Tell him, by wire: 'Come on' with a benignant nod,  
Or leave him journeying to the devil or to God,  
Decide for the other Aurobindo what you please,  
This namesake-flooded Aurobindo leave at ease.

In fact my Supermind is almost staggering helpless to make any decision under the weight of all these Aurobindos and others. I am told there will be 400 of them in families and singles apart from the 200 who are here, and so unless the divine mercy descends with a greater force than the 'gentle dew' from Heaven, we may be still there receiving people till past three o'clock in the afternoon. So one Aurobindo more or less can make no difference to me. It is you who will rejoice or suffer—according as he falls on you like a ton of bricks or envelopes you like a soothing zephyr in the spring.

(...)

As for the explanation, your epic of the four Aurobindos has suddenly revealed to me why the name Aurobindo has spread and why its bearers are heading for Pondichery. I have it—eureka! And I am released from all *kshobha*<sup>1</sup> at the violated uniqueness of my name. Your description shows that each Aurobindo represents a world-type and it is of the conglomeration and sublimation of great world-types that the supramental-terrestrial will be made. You may not have appreciated their greatness, but that is not

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<sup>1</sup> Chagrin.

their fault. Also the formula for the Supramental may sound to you too chemical like the formula for a patent medicine, but there it is. Incidentally, I am more convinced than ever that you lived and wrote and sighed ('I am between tears and sighs', said Maecenas as he sat between the weak and watery-eyed Virgil and the aesthetic Horace) under Augustus Caesar. You have kept the spirit and turn and most even of the manner.

Your 'epistolary frivolity' was all right. There is laughter in the Kingdom of Heaven, though there may be no marriage there.

*Ibid. pp. 318-20*

It is not a fact that either the Mother or I are turning away from Yoga and intend to interest ourselves only in sports; we have no intention whatever of altering the fundamental character of the Ashram and replacing it by a sportive association. If we did that, it would be a most idiotic act and if anybody should have told you anything like that, he must be off his head or in a temporary crisis or delirious enthusiasm or obsessed by a very upside-down idea. ... As for myself, it is surely absurd to think that I am neglecting my Yoga being interested only in running, jumping and marching! ... In all this there is nothing to justify the idea that sports could be a means of jumping on the Supermind or that the Supermind was going to descend into the playground and nowhere else and only those who are there will receive it; that would be a bad look-out for me as I would have no chance!

*Ibid. pp. 500-1*

# Nonsense Poetry



*by Sri Aurobindo the surrealist*

## **Despair on the Staircase**

Mute stands she, lonely on the topmost stair,  
An image of magnificent despair;  
The grandeur of a sorrowful surmise  
Wakes in the largeness of her glorious eyes.  
In her beauty's dumb significant pose I find  
The tragedy of her mysterious mind.  
Yet is she stately, grandiose, full of grace.  
A musing mask is her immobile face.  
Her tail is up like an unconquered flag,  
Its dignity knows not the right to wag.  
An animal creature wonderfully human,  
A charm and miracle of fur-footed Brahman,  
Whether she is spirit, woman or a cat,  
Is now the problem I am wondering at.

*October 1939, SABCL vol. 5, 113*

## **A Dream of Surreal Science**

One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink  
At the Mermaid, capture immortality;  
A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink  
Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.

A thyroid, meditating almost nude  
Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal Light  
And, rising from its mighty solitude,  
Spoke of the Wheel and eightfold Path all right.

A brain by a disordered stomach driven  
Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled and fell;  
From St. Helena went, perhaps, to Heaven.  
Thus wagged on the surreal world, until

A scientist played with atoms and blew out  
The universe before God had time to shout.

*SABCL vol. 5, 145*

## Surrealist

I heard a foghorn shouting at a sheep,  
And oh the sweet sound made me laugh and weep  
But ah, the sheep was on the hither shore  
Of the little less and the ever-never more.  
I sprang on its back; it jumped into the sea.  
I was near to the edges of eternity.  
Then suddenly the foghorn blared again.  
There was no sheep—it had perished of ear pain.  
I took a boat and steered to the Afar  
Hoping to colonise the polar star.  
But in the boat there was a dangerous goose  
Whom some eternal idiot had let loose.  
To this wild animal I said not “Bo!”  
But it was not because I did not know.  
Full soon I was on shore with dreadful squeals  
And the fierce biped cackling at my heels.  
Alarmed I ran into a lion's den  
And after me ran three thousand armoured men.  
The lion bolted through his own back door  
And set up a morose dissatisfied roar.

At this my courage rose; I grew quite brave And  
shoved myself into a tiger's cave.

The tiger snarled; I thought it best instead To don  
my pyjamas and go to bed.

But the tiger had a strained objecting face, So I  
turned my eyes away from his grimace. At night  
the beast began my back to claw And growled out  
that I was his brother-in-law.

I rose and thought it best to go away

To a doctor's house: besides 'twas nearly day.

The doctor shook his head and cried "For a back  
Pepper and salt are the remedy, alack." But I  
objected to his condiments

And thought the doctor had but little sense.

Then I returned to my own little cot

For really things were now extremely hot.

Then fierily the world cracked Nazily down And I  
looked about to find my dressing gown.

I was awake (I had tumbled on the floor). A shark  
was hammering at my front-door.

*CWSA vol.2, 658-9*



## Surrealist Poems

### 1

I heard the cockcuck jabbering on the lea  
And saw the spokesman sprinting on the spud;  
The airmale soared to heaven majestically  
And dropped down with a strange miraculous thud.  
I could not break the bosom of the blue;  
I went for a walk and waltzed with woe awhile.  
The cat surprised me with a single mew;  
The porridge was magnificently vile.  
These things are symbols if you understand,  
But who can understand when poets resolve  
To nothing mean. The beautiful beast is banned;  
The problem grows too difficult to solve.

*[The heart of the surrealist poet should be unfathomable. The problem is how to mean nothing, yet seem to mean anything or everything. His poetry should be at once about nothing at all and about all things in particular; nonsensically profound and irrationally beautiful. Unknown and extraordinary words are not indispensable in its texture but can have a place, if sparingly and mystically used. One who can do these things and others of a congenial character is a surrealist poet: Willy Whistler.]*

## 2

### **The Crossing of the Moro**

My way is over the Moro river, Amid  
projectiles and sad smiles. Wind bottles  
in a ghastly jam Explode before you can  
say damn.

But the jam is over and we have  
passed: Alas, felicity can never last!

I see an aeroplane on high,

I hear it sob and sigh.

Fate happier has been yours, my lad,

For you are dead and I am mad.

Kiss not the corpse but shove it in.

Ah let the booby trap be.

There is a moan upon the moving sea.

*CWSA vol.2, 660*

## **A Ballad of Doom**

There was an awful awful man  
Who all things knew and none  
And never met a Saracen  
And always drank a bun.  
He said he was a bullywag  
And that he did it for fun.  
I don't know what a bullywag is  
And I don't think he was one.  
Of nonsense and Omniscience  
He spoke as one who knew  
That this was like a temperament  
And that was like a hue.  
He said there was a phantom sun  
That saw a branching sky  
And he who could but never should  
Was always God's best boy.  
And he who should but never could  
Was not in the savoury jam  
That thronged the gates of Paradise

Jostling the great I am.  
He said he saw a smudgy moon  
A down a patterned ridge  
And that Beethoven to his ear  
Rang like a bluzzing midge  
That bluzzed and bluzzed and bluzzed and bluzzed  
Until the eye grew green  
With shouting for dear visible things  
Where nothing could be seen.  
For nothing can be seen, my child,  
And when it's seen it's read,  
And when red nothing once is seen  
The world can go to bed.

*CWSA vol.2, 657*



