

GOD THE ETERNAL GUIDE MET SRI AUROBINDO IN ALIPORE JAIL

By Aju Mukhopadhyay

Life before Going to Jail

Coming back to India in 1893 after 14 long years' studies young Aurobindo Ghose joined Baroda State service with the Gaekwads. While working as professor he was engaged in secret revolutionary work for Indian freedom. He was also writing in pseudonym. After a decade, from 1904 he began some yoga practices. He also received some calls from the beyond; had number of occult experiences during the Baroda period which were definite signs of his entering the spiritual path of which some faint hints he received even in his childhood and while in England. He was already a poet and that work continued. He started visiting Bengal and was quite active during the partition days of Bengal in 1905. Next year he left service and joined as the Principal of the first National College of the country in Calcutta while being deeply engaged in direct politics, editing an English daily, *Bandemataram*, and writing elsewhere in Bengali and English. His occult, spiritual experiences were recorded in some poems, sonnets on many occasions. Gradually he was pressed for going into his inner life by his invisible guide which he did to some extent but could not give up politics or call of the country. Living different lives at the same time he lived dangerously. The British top bosses reported about him as the most dangerous man in India. He was charged for sedition, arrested but they could not prove his guilt. In the circumstances he resigned from the position of Principal of the National College. Lele, a Maharashtrian Yogi, taught him and guided him spiritually for about three months. He visited Aurobindo Ghose in Calcutta to find him not following his instructions but following the yogic path in his own way. In a huff he left leaving him directly in the hands of the Divine.

Blooming of Spiritual Life in Alipore Jail

Sri Aurobindo was not a bhakta from birth like Sri Ramakrishna or mad after knowing the Self in him like Raman Maharshi. He didn't question his Guru to prove the existence of God like young Vivekananda. He simply ignored the issue, giving more stress for the work in hand. He has stated clearly, in spite of his experiences; "When I approached God at that time, I hardly had a

living faith in Him. The agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me, the sceptic was in me and I was not absolutely sure that there was a God at all.” (Speech 117)

But God pushed himself in his life and compelled him to accept Him. He was arrested for political reasons with charges of sedition in 1908. “My prison life at Alipore began on May 5. The Next year on May 6, I was released”, Sri Aurobindo wrote. (Prison Life 12)

“I remembered then that a month or more before my arrest, a call had come to me to put aside all activity, to go into seclusion and to look into myself, so that I might enter into closer communion with Him. I was weak and I could not accept the call. My work was very dear to me and in the pride of my heart I thought that unless I was there, it would suffer or even fail or cease.” Sri Aurobindo said. (Speech 110)

After his arrest, Sri Aurobindo said, “He spoke to me again and said, ‘The bonds you had not the strength to break I have broken for you, because it is not my will nor was it ever my intention that that should continue . . . I have brought you here, to teach you what you could not learn for yourself and to train you for my work.’ Then He placed the Gita in my hands. His strength entered into me and I was able to do the sadhana of the Gita I realised what the Hindu religion meant.”(Speech 110)

Firstly God compelled him and then entered into him to mould him to be a great *bhakta* with unwavering faith on God.

“Troubled by mental listlessness I spent a few days in agony in this manner. One afternoon . . . I could feel that the mind’s regulating power was about to cease.... I called upon God ... prayed to him.... That very moment there spread over my being such a gentle and cooling breeze, the heated brain became relaxed, easy and supremely blissful such as in all my life I had never known before. Just as a child sleeps, secure and without fear, on the lap of his mother, so I remained in the lap of the World-Mother.... I also realised the extraordinary power and efficacy of prayer.” (Prison Life 43-44)

Strolling, he would chant mantras of the Upanishads. He would try to realise the great Upanishadic lore, *sarvam Khalu idam brahma*, on all things around. Everything seemed to him vibrating with a universal consciousness.

“Men, cows, ants, birds are moving, flying, singing, speaking, yet all is Nature’s play; behind all this is a great pure detached Spirit rapt in a serene delight Always it seemed as if someone was embracing me, holding me on his lap. (Prison life 47)

The manifestation of these emotions overpowered him, his body and mind and a pure and white peace reigned everywhere. It was almost indescribable. A spring of love for all creatures welled up in him. Everywhere he realised Vasudeva, in animate and inanimate objects. He felt the arms of :Lord Krishna around him even in the coarse blankets that were given him for a couch.

While hearing about Sri Aurobindo’s experiences in jail we may hear about the rigorous sadhana he did there as witnessed by fellow prisoners and jail workers.

Sudhir Kumar Sarkar, a juvenile prisoner wrote, “His black hair glistened always, as if oil were dripping from it. His face resembled that of a child, without any lines of thought or anxiety – a tender face perpetually filled with happy smile. His eyes were full of profound peace and tranquility. His smile was unlike ours. It was expressed in the glance of his eyes. His body exuded a fragrance like that of a baby’s tender body. His nails grew to half an inch, his hair and beard grew longer and longer. Our hair never had that oily sheen of his.

“At night the warders would come and tell us, ‘Arvind remain standing the whole night, his bedding folded in the corner.’ They didn’t disturb him by pressing him to lie down. They did not even call him up at night, as was their practice with us.” 1

Upendranath Bandyopadhyay wrote, “In a very big hall large number of prisoners of different temperament and abilities, of different growth and maturity, of different ages, mostly young, were kept together They clashed sometimes, jeering at each other.

“Aurobindo Babu used to keep still and silent among these warring parties. He never gave his opinion even with yes or no in any affair. We used to hear strange stories of his behaviours and habits from the warders of the jail. Some said that he did not sleep at night, some said that he had become mad; that he used to partake his meal with cockroaches, ants and wall lizards, that he didn’t wash his mouth, didn’t take bath, didn’t change his clothes, etc. . . . Once I took courage and asked him, ‘Do you use oil on your head while taking bath?’

“His reply was that ‘I don’t take bath’ stunned me. I asked, ‘How then the hairs on your head are so shining?’

“Aurobindo Babu said, ‘Some changes are occurring in my body in the course of sadhana that I am undergoing. My hairs absorb fat from my body.’

“Once I noticed that the eyes of Aurobindo Babu were stilled like glass, without a blink, without any movement. Somewhere I read that such things happen when all activities of the mind and heart cease . . . none had the courage of asking him about it. Lastly Sachin slowly approached him and asked, ‘What have you got through your sadhana?’

“Resting his hand on the shoulder of this tender aged boy he said, ‘I got what I was seeking.’

“We heard some of what types of tantric sadhana he was going through.” 2

Nolini Kanta Gupta once requested him to help find a poem in English . . . and the next day Sri Aurobindo wrote a poem in English on the margin of an old letter in pencil, in want of proper paper or writing material. Once on request he recited ten or twelve lines from Homer in original Greek while in Alipore jail. In the court once a meeting was arranged while court proceedings were on, and Sri Aurobindo consented to give a talk. He spoke on the subject, “Nationalism and three qualities”.

He wrote four essays in support of ‘Bomb’ which was a condemned subject . . . he wrote some more literary pieces while the court proceedings were on. Remaining most silent and unmoved he did not hesitate to write serious things . . .” 3

From the above stories an idea may be formed that in Alipore jail he did sadhana with the help of Gita (Niskama Karma; Karma Yoga), Upanishad (Advaita Vedanta), Tantrik sadhana (Shakti Sadhana) as was given to him by God. And, “The Veda which I first began to read long afterwards in Pondicherry rather confirmed what experiences I already had than was any guide to my Sadhana” (On Himself 68).

He got from Swami Vivekananda something towards his future realisation in the realm of Supramental Consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo confirmed, “It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence... The

voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on that subject.” (On Himself 68)

A Glimpse of Spiritual Consciousness

Here is an incident in the life of Sri Aurobindo, long after his sadhana in Alipore jail, when Yogi Sri Aurobindo had his permanent seat in Pondicherry.

“*Tranquility, says the Mother, is a very positive state; there is a positive peace which is not the contrary of strife- a peace active, contagious, powerful, which dominates and calms, puts everything in order, organises.*’ An example of this “contagious peace” anticipates a little an event in Sri Aurobindo’s life: it was in Pondicherry, many years ago, in that season when the tropical rains, sometimes cyclones, sweep down suddenly and work havoc. Doors and Windows have to be barricaded with stout bamboo laths. That night a cyclone had burst with torrents of rain and the Mother had hastily come to Sri Aurobindo’s room to help him shut the windows. He was seated at his desk as usual (Sri Aurobindo spent twelve hours writing, from six in the evening to six next morning, for years together; then for eight hours he used to walk up and down “for yoga”) the windows were wide open, not a drop of rain had entered. The peace which reigned in that room, relates the Mother, was so solid, so compact that the cyclone *could not enter.*” 4

This was a state of his spiritual consciousness which could not be disturbed even by Nature; an exceptional situation which automatically rejected any intervention.

Notes and References

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Bio

Based on Pondicherry and Kolkata, Aju Mukhopadhyay is a bilingual award winning poet, critic and author. He has authored 35 books and has received several awards from India and abroad besides other honours. He has so far published ten books of poems in English besides two in Bangla. He regularly contributes to journals and books in India and abroad. Besides usual poetry he has been regularly writing Japanese short verses of different genres. His works are widely anthologised and translated in several Indian and international languages. He has published works on wildlife, Nature, Environment, Spirituality and Philosophy besides his main area; LITERATURE.

He is listed in the Who's Who of Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, India.

He was awarded **Certificate of Competence as a Published Writer** by the Writers Bureau, Manchester, UK in 2000. He was awarded **Best Poet of the Year-2003** by the Poets International, Bangalore, India. He was given second prize in a short story competition in 2007 by Bizz-Buzz, Bangalore. He was conferred with **2007 Editor's Choice Published Poet** award by the International Library of Poetry, USA and **Excellence in World Poetry Award, 2009** by the International Poets Academy, Chennai. Many of his poetic works have been acclaimed and honoured like one of his poems remaining at the top of the list of poems in www.asianamericanpoetry.com from December 2007 for about three months and inclusion of his poems in the list of top ten recent poems by www.Poetsindia.com. Lucidity Poetry Journal from Sugar Land, USA has awarded him **Certificate of Merit** for his poem, "Structural

Violence” in June 2011. The American Biographical Institute, 5126 Bur Oak Circle, Raleigh, NC 27612 selected him for **American Order of Merit** in 2009. The Editor of The Sons of Camus Writers International Journal (Edited from Canada and published from Cyprus) conferred on him in Autumn 2013: **The Albert Camus Centenary Writing Award**

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His awards and credits in writing Japanese Short Verses has been recorded in Haiku Foundation of the US which may be referred to Haiku Foundation. docu an international site.

His latest book, Consciousness, Spirituality and Philosophy has been published by a European Publisher, Lap Lambert Academic Publisher on Invitation.