





Sri Aurobindo with his wife Mrinalini Devi

# Sri Aurobindo's Letter to Mrinalini Devi<sup>1</sup>

30. 8. 1905

Dearest Mrinalini,

I have received your letter of the 24th August. I am sorry to learn that the same affliction has fallen once more upon your parents. You have not written which of the boys has passed away from here. But then what can be done if the affliction comes? This is a world in which when you seek happiness, you find grief in its heart, sorrow always clinging to joy. That rule touches not only the desire of children, but all worldly desires. To offer, with a quiet heart, all happiness and grief at the feet of God is the only remedy...

Now I will write the other thing of which I spoke before. I think you have understood by now that the man with whose fate yours has been linked is a man of a very unusual character. Mine is not the same field of action, the same purpose in life, the same mental attitude as that of the people of today in this country. I am in every respect different from them and out of the

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<sup>1</sup> *This letter is one of those which were found and taken away by the police during the search of his house in connection with the Alipore bomb trial and afterwards produced in court. It was in this way that these intimate documents unexpectedly saw the light of day and what was intended by Sri Aurobindo to be secret has become public property. The letter, translated from Bengali is reproduced here. It is a new translation, taken from the 1978 edition of "The Life of Sri Aurobindo" by A. B. Purani.*

ordinary. Perhaps you know what ordinary men say of an extraordinary view, an extraordinary endeavour, an extraordinary ambition. To them it is madness; only, if the madman is successful in his work then he is called no longer a madman, but a great genius. But how many are successful in their life's endeavour? Among a thousand men, there are five or six who are out of the ordinary and out of the five or six one perhaps successful. Not to speak of success, I have not yet even entirely entered my field of work. There is nothing then for you but to consider me mad. And it is an evil thing for a woman to fall into the hands of a mad fellow. For woman's expectations are all bound up in worldly happiness and sorrow. A madman will not make his wife happy, he can only make her miserable.

The founders of the Hindu religion understood this very well. They loved extraordinary characters, extraordinary endeavours, extraordinary ambitions. Madman or genius, they respected the extraordinary man. But all this means a terrible plight for the wife, and how could the difficulty be solved? The sages fixed upon this solution; they told the woman, "Know that the only mantra for womankind is this: 'The husband is the supreme guru.' The wife shares the dharma (law of conduct) of her husband. She must help him, counsel him, encourage him in whatever work he accepts as his dharma. She should regard him as her god, take joy in his joy, and feel sorrow in his unhappiness. It is for a man to choose his work; the woman's part is to give help and encouragement."

Now, the point is this. Are you going to choose the

path of the Hindu religion or follow the ideal of the new culture? Your marriage to a madman is the result of bad *karma* in your previous lives. It is good to come to terms with one's fate, but what sort of terms will they be? Will you also dismiss your husband as a madman on the strength of what other people think? A madman is bound to run after his mad ways. You cannot hold him back; his nature is stronger than yours. Will you then do nothing but sit in a corner and weep? Or, will you run along with him; try to be the mad wife of this madman, like the queen of the blind king who played the part of a blind woman by putting a bandage across her eyes? For all your education in a Brahmo school, you are still a woman from a Hindu home. The blood of Hindu ancestors flows in your veins. I have no doubt you will choose the latter course.

I have three madneses. The first one is this. I firmly believe that the accomplishments, genius, higher education and learning and wealth that God has given me are His. I have a right to spend for my own purposes only what is needed for the maintenance of the family and is otherwise absolutely essential. The rest must be returned to God. If I spend everything for myself, for my pleasure and luxury, I am a thief. The Hindu scriptures say that one who receives wealth from God and does

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not give it back to Him is a thief. So far, I have given two annas to God and used the other fourteen annas for my own pleasure; this is the way I have settled the account, remaining engrossed in worldly pleasures. Half my life has been wasted — even the beast finds fulfilment in stuffing his own belly and his family's and catering to their happiness.

I have realised that I have been acting all this time as an animal and a thief. Now I realise this and am filled with remorse and disgusted with myself. No more of all this. I renounce this sin once and for all. What does giving to God mean? It means to spend on good works. The money I gave to Usha or to Sarojini causes me no regret. To help others is a sacred duty; to give protection to those who seek refuge is a yet greater sacred duty. But the account is not settled by giving only to one's brothers and sisters. In these dark days the whole country is seeking refuge at my door. I have three hundred million brothers and sisters in this country. Many of them are dying of starvation and the majority just manage to live, racked by sorrow and suffering. They too must be helped.

What do you say, will you come along with me and share my ideal in this respect? We will eat and dress like ordinary men, buying only what is truly needed and offering the rest to God: this is what I propose to do. My purpose can be fulfilled, once you give your approval, once you are able to accept the sacrifice. You have been saying, "I have made no progress." Here I have shown you a path towards progress. Will you take this path?

My second madness has only recently seized me. It

is this: by whatever means I must have the direct vision of God. Religion these days means repeating the name of God at any odd hour, praying in public, showing off how pious one is. I want nothing of this. If God exists, there must be some way to experience His existence, to meet Him face to face. However arduous this path is, I have made up my mind to follow it. The Hindu religion declares that the way lies in one's own body, in one's own mind. It has laid down the rules for following the way, and I have begun to observe them. Within a month I have realised that what the Hindu religion says is not false. I am experiencing in myself the signs of which it speaks. Now I want to take you along this way. You will not be able to keep step with me, for you do not have the requisite knowledge. But there is nothing to prevent you from following behind me. All can attain perfection on this path, but to enter it depends on one's own will. Nobody can drag you onto it. If you consent to this, I shall write more about it.

My third madness is that while others look upon their country as an inert piece of matter — a few meadows and fields, forests and hills and rivers — I look upon my country as the Mother. I adore Her, I worship Her as the Mother. What would a son do if a demon sat on his mother's breast and started sucking her blood ?

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Would he quietly sit down to his dinner, amuse himself with his wife and children, or would he rush out to deliver his mother? I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race. It is not physical strength, — I am not going to fight with sword or gun, — but the strength of knowledge. The power of the Kshatriya is not the only one; there is also the power of the Brahmin, the power that is founded on knowledge. This feeling is not new in me, it is not of today. I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. God sent me to earth to accomplish this great mission. The seed began to sprout when I was fourteen; by the time I was eighteen the roots of the resolution had grown firm and unshakable. After listening to what my aunt said, you formed the idea that some wicked people had dragged your simple and innocent husband onto the bad path. But it was this innocent husband of yours who brought those people and hundreds of others onto that path — be it bad or good — and will yet bring thousands and thousands of others onto that same path. I do not say that the work will be accomplished during my lifetime, but it certainly will be done.

Now I ask you, what are you going to do in this connection? The wife is the *shakti*, the strength of her husband. Will you be Usha's disciple and go on repeating the mantras of Sahib-worship? Will you diminish the strength of your husband by indifference or redouble it by your sympathy and encouragement? You will say, "What can an ordinary woman like me do in these great matters? I have no strength of mind, no intelligence, I am afraid to think about these things." But there is an easy way out. Take refuge in God. Enter



once the path of God-realisation; He will soon make good your deficiencies. Fear gradually leaves one who takes refuge in God. And if you can put your trust in me, if you can listen to me alone and not to all and sundry, I can give you my own strength; that will not diminish my strength but increase it. We say that the wife is the husband's *shakti*, his strength. This means that the husband's strength is redoubled when he sees his own image in his wife and hears an echo of his own high aspirations in her.

Will you remain like this for ever: "I shall put on fine clothes, have nice things to eat, laugh and dance and enjoy all the pleasures?" Such an attitude cannot be called progress. At the present time the life of women in this country has taken this narrow and contemptible form. Give up all this and follow after me. We have come to this world to do God's work; let us begin it.

You have one defect in your nature. You are much too simple. You listen to anything anyone might say. Thus your mind is for ever restless, your intelligence cannot develop, you cannot concentrate on any work. This has to be corrected. You must acquire knowledge by listening to one person only. You must have a single aim and accomplish your work with a resolute mind. You must ignore the calumny and the ridicule of others

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and hold fast to your devotion.

There is another defect, not so much of your personal nature, as of the times. The times are such in Bengal that people are incapable of listening to serious things in a serious manner. Religion, philanthropy, noble aspirations, high endeavour, the deliverance of the country, all that is serious, all that is high and noble is turned to ridicule. People want to laugh everything away. At your Brahmo school, you picked up a little of this fault. Bari also had it; all of us are tainted by this defect to some extent. It has grown in surprising measure among the people of Deoghar. This attitude must be rejected with a firm mind. You will be able to do it easily. And once you get into the habit of thinking, your true nature will blossom forth. You have a natural turn towards doing good for others and towards self-sacrifice. The one thing you lack is strength of mind. You will get that through worship of God.

This is the secret of mine I wanted to tell you. Do not divulge it to anybody. Ponder calmly over these matters. There is nothing to be frightened of, but there is much to think about. To start with, you need do nothing but meditate on the Divine each day for half an hour, expressing to Him an ardent desire in the form of a prayer. The mind will get prepared gradually. This is the prayer you are to make to Him: "May I not be an obstacle in the path of my husband's life, his aim, his endeavour to realise God. May I always be his helper and his instrument." Will you do this?

Yours

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