

a matter of public knowledge. I do not commit myself to more than that. My dear fellow, I was acquitted of sedition twice and of conspiracy to wage war against the British Raj once and each time by an impeccably British magistrate, judges or judge. Does not that prove conclusively my entire harmlessness and that I was a true Ahimsuk?
17 January 1935

Politics and Truth-Speaking

Would it not sometimes be dangerous to speak truth, e.g., in politics, war, revolution? The truth-speaking moralist who would always insist on not concealing anything may bring disaster by revealing the plans and movements of one side to the opposite side.

Politics, war, revolution are things of stratagem and ambush — one cannot expect the truth there. From what I have heard Gandhi himself has played tricks and dodges there. Das told me it was impossible to lead men in politics or get one's objects without telling falsehoods by the yard and he was often feeling utterly disgusted with himself and his work, but supposed he would have to go through with it to the end.

There is no necessity to reveal one's plans and movements to those who have no business to know it, who are incapable of understanding or who would act as enemies or spoil all as a result of their knowledge. Secrecy is perfectly admissible and usual in spiritual matters except in special relations like that of the shishya to the guru. We do not let people outside know what is going on in the Asram but we do not tell any lies about it either. Most Yogis say nothing about their spiritual experiences to others or not until long afterwards and secrecy was a general rule among the ancient Mystics. No moral or spiritual law commands us to make ourselves naked to the world or open up our hearts and minds for public inspection. Gandhi talked about secrecy being a sin but that is one of his many extravagances.

17 May 1936

Some Political Associates

I knew very well Sister Nivedita (she was for many years a friend and a comrade in the political field) and met Sister Christine, — the two closest European disciples of Vivekananda. Both were Westerners to the core and had nothing at all of the Hindu outlook; although Sister Nivedita, an Irishwoman, had the power of penetrating by an intense sympathy into the ways of life of the people around her, her own nature remained non-Oriental to the end. Yet she found no difficulty in arriving at realisation on the lines of Vedanta.

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I knew Satish Mukherji when he was organising the Bengal National College (1905–7), but afterwards I had no contact with him any longer. Even at that time we were not intimate and I knew nothing about his spiritual life or attainments — except that he was a disciple of Bijoy Goswami — as were also other political coworkers and leaders, like Bipin Pal and Manoranjan Guha. I knew Satish Mukherji only as a very able and active organiser in the field of education — a mission prophetically assigned to him, I was told, by his guru, — nothing more.

3 December 1932

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Charu Dutt, I.C.S., wrote a review of Jawaharlal's *Autobiography* in the *Visva-Bharati* review last month. Did you know him well of yore? Political?

Charu Dutt? Yes, saw very little of him, for physically our way lay far apart, but that little was very intimate, one of the kind of men whom I used to appreciate most and felt as if they had been my friends and comrades and fellow-warriors in the battle of the ages and could be so for ages more. But curiously enough my physical contact with men of his type — there were two or three others — was always brief. Because I had something else to do this time, I suppose.

28 September 1936

The Surat Congress (1907)

I happened to read an article in which the author mentions the Surat Congress, but strangely enough he does not even mention your name whereas Tilak, Lal, Pal take the prominent place. It is impossible he could not have known the part you played. In a Gujarati novel, K. M. Munshi has brought you in and indicated you were the central figure, putting certain things in movement and keeping behind the veil. X also says that Tilak used to consult you. How is it these things are forgotten by these Gandhiites?

Probably they know nothing about it, as these things happened behind the veil. History very seldom records the things that were decisive but took place behind the veil; it records the show in front of the curtain. Very few people know that it was I (without consulting Tilak) who gave the order that led to the breaking of the Congress and was responsible for the refusal to join the new-fangled Moderate Convention which were the two decisive happenings at Surat. Even my action in giving the movement in Bengal its militant turn or founding the revolutionary movement is very little known.

22 March 1936

Leaving Politics

I may also say that I did not leave politics because I felt I could do nothing more there; such an idea was very far from me. I came away because I did not want anything to interfere with my Yoga and because I got a very distinct adesh in the matter. I have cut connection entirely with politics, but before I did so I knew from within that the work I had begun there was destined to be carried forward, on lines I had foreseen, by others, and that the ultimate triumph of the movement I had initiated was sure without my personal action or presence. There was not the least motive of despair or sense of futility behind my withdrawal. For the rest, I have never known any will of mine for any major event in the conduct of the world affairs to fail in the end, although it may take a long time for the world-forces to fulfil it. As for

the possibility of failure in my spiritual work, I shall deal with that another time. Difficulties there are, but I see no cause for pessimism or for the certification of failure. October 1932

Inability to Participate in Politics

There was a report in the *Hindu* that a deputation was coming from London to Pondicherry to ask you to take the helm of politics as a successor to Gandhi. The report says that you know 35 languages and have written 500 books.

I have read the wonderful screed from London. Truly I am more marvellous than I thought, 35 languages and 500 books! As to the seven pilgrims, they must be men of the Gita's type, *niṣkāma-karmīs*, to be prepared to come all these thousands of miles for nothing. 2 September 1934

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Sri Aurobindo says that it is impossible for him to take up political action and enter the political field which would involve a sacrifice of his spiritual work.⁵

His spiritual help is given to the country and individually to all those who aspire for it. He is ready to continue this help and even to increase it if it is necessary. But he is convinced that written messages alone are not sufficient to have a permanent effect or even a sufficiently wide effect.

Among the members of the Ashram he sees nobody whom he can send to represent him effectively.

⁵ This reply was written by the Mother at Sri Aurobindo's dictation or under his instructions. — Ed.

Outer Life in Pondicherry 1910–1950

Meeting Paul Richard

I would like to know the mystery behind M. Paul Richard's meeting with Sri Aurobindo. I have heard that when he started for Pondicherry you [*i.e. the Mother*] gave him some signs or some questions to be solved by an Indian Yogi. And they were solved by Sri Aurobindo.

I don't think there was any mystery. He came for political purposes and enquired of Naidu or perhaps from Shankar Chettiar in whose house I was living whether there was any Indian Guru here and my name was mentioned and they brought him to see me. He showed me some signs employed in Indian, Egyptian and other occultisms, some of which I had seen — they happened to be, he said, the Indian ones. That was all. 26 June 1936

Fasting

I have myself fasted first 10 days and then 23 days just to see what it was like and how far one could live without food, and certain things like that. I found that it was no good. To take with equanimity whatever comes (or does not come) seemed to me more the thing than any violent exercises like that.

4 May 1935

Start of the *Arya*

It is said that the *Arya* began on the day the world war broke out or just before it. Has this not some significance? Was it not a kind of parallel movement?

The *Arya* was decided on on the 1st June and it was agreed that it would start on the 15th August. The war intervened on the 4th. "Parallelism" of dates if you like, but it was not very close

and certainly nothing came down at that time.

9 September 1935

Walking and Standing

X is experiencing pain in her heel. There is no bone or joint tenderness, just tenderness in the pad of fat in the heel.

It may be “policeman’s disease” as the French call it, “maladie de sergent de ville”; I have forgotten the technical name for it, but it is supposed to come from too much standing. I had it myself for something like a year because of walking or standing all day — that was when I used to meditate while walking. The Fr. medical dictionary says there is no remedy but rest. I myself got rid of it by application of force without any rest or any other remedy. But X is not a policeman and she does not walk while she meditates — so how did she get it?

29 May 1935

The Mother’s Taking Charge of the Ashram

On what date in 1926 did Mother take up the work of the sadhana?

Mother does not at all remember the exact date. It may have been a few days after 15th August. She took up the work completely when I retired.

17 May 1936

Bushy and the Meditation House

Today I felt like writing a story. I cast it in the form of an autobiography of Bushy the great cat. In the opening statement she claims to be one of the greatest personalities in the world.

Bushy was the cat who introduced us to this house (Meditation) running before us and showing us all the rooms. That ought to find a place in her autobiography.

12 October 1934

**Relations with the Government
of French India, 1934–1935**

But how is it that people can have such an idea?¹ There is no fund and there has never been a fund. All money has been given to myself or to the Mother. If there were a fund I suppose there would be trustees and a secretary and a treasurer and all the rest of it! The houses are ours, the money ours and it is to us in our houses that people come for learning the methods of Yoga. There is no association or public institution and nothing belonging to an association or institution. 16 February 1934

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I have not wantonly stopped the books or free letter-writing nor have I become impatient with you or anyone. I am faced with a wanton and brutal attack on my life-work from outside and I need all my time and energy to meet it and do what is necessary to repel it during these days. I hope that I can count not only on the indulgence but on the support of those who have followed me and loved me, while I am thus occupied, much against my will.

I do hope you will not misunderstand me. I have not altered to you in the least and if I wrote laconically it was because I had no time to do otherwise.

My prohibition of long letters was of a general character and I had to issue it so that the stoppage of the books might not result in a flood of long letters which would leave me no time for making the concentration and taking the steps I have to take. I have said that you can send your poems and write too when you feel any urgent need — I had no feeling to the contrary at all. 17 February 1934

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¹ Shortly before writing this letter, Sri Aurobindo learned that the Government of French India planned to launch an inquiry into the status of the Asbram. It appears that this move was provoked by reports that the Asbram was a formal “institution” that had a “common fund”. Had this been the case, it ought to have been registered with the government as a legal entity. — Ed.

I do not know that your going later to Bombay is at all necessary — since it is decided, it may be better to get it over quickly. It is too early to say whether the menace to the Asram is conquered or still hangs over it.

19 February 1934

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Of course, one must use these external means and there one must be careful so as to have as many factors as possible on one's side and give as little handle as possible to adverse forces. But no outward action can be for us sure of success unless behind it is the growing Yogic vision and Yogic power. We have had ourselves serious difficulties from the outside, petitions made against us to the Minister of Colonies in Paris and a report demanded from the Governor here which if acted on would have put the Asram in serious jeopardy. We used outward means of a very slight and simple character, i.e. getting the Mother's brother (Governor in French Equatorial Africa) to intervene with the Ministry (and also an eminent writer in France, a disciple), but for the most part I used a strong inner Force to determine the action of the Colonial Office, to get a favourable report from the Governor here, to turn the minds of some who were against us here and to nullify the enmity of others. In all these respects I succeeded and our position here is much stronger than before; especially a new and favourable Governor has come. Nevertheless we have to remain vigilant that the situation may not be again threatened. Also one disadvantage has resulted, that we have been asked not to buy or rent more houses, but to build instead. This is difficult without land near here and much money; so we are for the moment unable to expand. In certain respects however this is not a disadvantage, as I have been long wishing to put off farther expansion and consolidate the inward life of the Asram in a more completely spiritual sense. I give this as an example of how things have to be dealt with from the Yogic point of view.

20 March 1935

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X has passed along these two pieces of news about the Asram: (1) During his tour Mahatma Gandhi went to Pondicherry and with a view to meet Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter to him. In reply Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter to the Mahatma, which the local authorities withheld. It was after this that Sri Aurobindo published his statements about the Asram and his teaching.² (2) The French authorities at Pondicherry have enacted a law, the effect of which was to prevent the Mother from purchasing any more houses in the town for the purposes of the Asram.

You can write about the stories of the Asram that they are not true. The publication had no connection with Gandhi's visit to Pondicherry. No "law" has been passed by the French Government, nor could be. The relations of the Asram with the French Government are very friendly. But there was a housing crisis in Pondicherry and some complaints from the officials that they could not get houses to live in because the Asram had occupied so much of the better part of the town, so it was suggested to us that we might build houses in future rather than buy them.

1 July 1935

² The "statements" referred to here were first published in a newspaper on 20 February 1934 and later brought out in pamphlets and as a booklet. See Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 530–31 and 547–50. For Gandhi's visit to Pondicherry see pp. 442–44 of the same volume. — Ed.

Section Two

General Remarks on His Life

