



**Sri Aurobindo's
Letters to his wife
Mrinalini Devi**

Sri Aurobindo's letters to his wife Mrinalini Devi

With letters to his Father-in-Law

Sri Aurobindo

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....4
Note on the Text.....5
Sri Aurobindo’s letters to his wife Mrinalini Devi.....6
Sri Aurobindo’s letters to his father-in-law.....24
Reminiscences of Bhupal Chandra Bose.....27

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*Krishna/Vladnesh,
"Auro e-Books" Founder*

NOTE ON THE TEXT

Sri Aurobindo's letters to his wife Mrinalini Devi

The complete set of letters written by Sri Aurobindo to his wife Mrinalini Devi. These letters are significant for they reveal little known but important aspects of Sri Aurobindo's personality.

All these letters are translated from the Bengali except the one dated 20th August 1902, which was originally in English.

Sri Aurobindo's letters to his father-in-law

Two letters written by Sri Aurobindo to his father-in-law Bhupal Chandra Bose (1861– 1937). The first letter, dated 8 June 1906, was written during the early days of Sri Aurobindo's political career and the second letter, dated 19 February 1919, was penned shortly after the death of Sri Aurobindo's wife Mrinalini Devi in December 1918. These letters are indeed very special for they reveal the unknown aspects of Sri Aurobindo's personality.

Reminiscences of Bhupal Chandra Bose

A brief statement made by Bhupal Chandra Bose, Sri Aurobindo's father-in-law on 26 August 1931 where he has recorded his reminiscences of his daughter Mrinalini Devi who was married to Sri Aurobindo in April 1901.

Bhupal Chandra Bose had visited Pondicherry in the early 1930s and had the darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS TO HIS WIFE MRINALINI DEVI

* * *

[1]

c/o K.B. Jadhav, Esq.

Near Municipal Office

Baroda

25th June 1902

Dearest Mrinalini,

I was very sorry to learn of your fever. I hope since then you have begun to look after your health a little more. It is a cold place, so you must be careful not to catch cold. I am sending ten rupees today. Buy some medicine and take it daily. Don't forget. I have heard of a medicine that will cure you of your disease. You don't have to take it daily. One or two doses will cure you; but it won't be possible to take it in Assam. You'll be able to take it in Deoghur. I'll write Sarojini about what is to be done.

Sarojini is in Deoghur. Baudidi [elder brother's wife] has left Darjeeling for Calcutta. Darjeeling did not suit her. Sarojini writes to say that she will remain in Bengal until winter. Grandmother is putting a lot of pressure on her. She hopes Baudidi will be able to arrange a marriage for Sarojini. I don't think there is much hope. If Sarojini gives up her excessive demands in regard to looks and attainments, there will be some chance.

'Kencho' went to the Lonavala Hills. He called me there too. He called

me because he wanted to write a document. It was written but he did not send it. At the last minute he suddenly changed his mind. Another very big and secret work came up. I had to do it. When he saw my work 'Kencho' was very satisfied and he promised to raise my salary. Who knows whether he will do it or not. 'Kencho's' word is not worth very much. But he may give the raise. It seems to me that the day of 'Kencho's' downfall is coming. All of the signs are bad.

I am staying now in Khaserao's house. When you come we will go to the "Navalakha". There probably will not be much rain this year. If there is no rain, there certainly will be a terrible famine. In that case your visit here will have to be cancelled. If you come it will only mean a lot of trouble – trouble as regards food, water and prices. It is not hot in Baroda this summer. A beautiful breeze is blowing, but this beautiful breeze has blown away the hope of rain. Now only ten or twelve days remain. If we have good rain within ten or twelve days we may yet be saved from the stroke of a great misfortune.

I will send your photo soon. Jotin Banerji is staying with us. Today I will go to see him and select the best photo.

Give my respects to your father and your mother. You will understand all that I leave unexpressed.

Your husband

* * *

[2]

C/o Rai Bahadur

K.B. Jadhav,

Baroda.

July 2nd 1902.

Dearest Mrinalini,

... You said you have got a horoscope; send it to me. Jotin Banerjee is here and I wish to show it to him. I have faith in astrology ten years' experience confirmed. But also amongst a thousand, nine hundred know nothing about it. Few know but more make mistakes, e.g. non-performance of the coronation ceremony of the English King this year was declared several months ago causes even. If there be evil consequences then there are means of knowing them beforehand as they can be cured often. If horoscope can't be found, exact time of birth will do, but even the very minute must be correct....

Your husband

* * *

[3]

C/o K.B. Jadhav, Esq.

Near Municipal Office

Baroda

20th August 1902

Dearest Mrinalini,

I have not written to you for a long time because I have not been in very good health and had not the energy to write. I went out of Baroda to see whether change and rest would set me up, and your telegram came when I was not here. I feel much better now, and I suppose there was nothing really the matter with me except overwork. I am sorry I made you so anxious; there was no real cause to be so, for you know I never get seriously ill. Only when I feel out of sorts, I find writing letters

almost impossible.

The Maharajah has given me Rs. 90 promotion this will raise my pay to Rs. 450. In the order he has made me a lot of compliments about my powers, talent, capacity, usefulness etcetera, but also made a remark on my want of regularity and punctual habits. Besides he has shown his intention of taking the value of the Rs. 90 out of me by burdening me with overwork, so I don't feel very grateful to him. He says that if convenient, my services can be utilized in the College. But I don't see how it will be convenient, just now at least; for it is nearly the end of the term. Even if I go to the College, he has asked the Dewan to use me for writing Annual Reports etc. I suppose this means that he does not want me to get my vacations. However, let us see what happens.

If I join the College now and am allowed the three months' vacation, I shall of course go to Bengal and to Assam for a short visit. I am afraid it will be impossible for you to come to Baroda just now. There has been no rain here for a month, except a short shower early this morning. The wells are all nearly dried up; the water of the Ajwa reservoir which supplies Baroda is very low and must be quite used up by next November; the crops in the fields are all parched and withering. This means that we shall not only have famine but there will be no water for bathing and washing up, or even, perhaps for drinking. Besides if there is famine, it is practically sure that all the officers will be put on half-pay. We are hoping, rather than expecting, that there may be good rain before the end of August. But the signs are against it, and if it comes, it will only remove the water difficulty or put it off for a few months. For you to come to Baroda and endure all the troubles and sufferings of such a state of things is out of the question. You must decide for yourself whether you will stay with your father or at Deoghur. You may as well stay in Assam till October, and then if I can go to Bengal, I will take you to Deoghur where you can stop for the winter at least. If I cannot come then, I will, if you like, try and make some arrangement for you to be taken there.

I am glad your father will be able to send me a cook when you come.

I have got a Maratha cook, but he can prepare nothing properly except meat dishes. I don't know how to get over the difficulty about the maid-servant. Sarojini wrote something about a Mahomedan ayah, but that would never do. After being so recently readmitted to Hindu society, I cannot risk it; it is all very well for Khaserao and others whose social position is so strong that they may do almost anything they like. As soon as I see any prospect of being able to get you here, I shall try my best to arrange about a maid-servant. It is no use doing it now.

I hope you are able to read and understand this letter; if you can't, I hope it will make you more anxious to learn English than you have been up to now. I could not manage to write a Bengali letter just now – so I thought I had better write in English rather than put off writing.

Do not be too much disappointed by the delay in coming to Baroda; it cannot be avoided. I should like you to spend some time in Deoghur, if you do not mind, Assam somehow seems terribly far off; and besides I should like you to form a closer intimacy with my relatives, at least those among them whom I especially love.

Your loving husband

* * *

[4]

30th Aug. 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.

I read ten rupees instead of twenty and so I said I would send ten rupees. If you need fifteen rupees I will send fifteen. This month I sent money for the clothes Sarojini bought for you in Darjeeling. How was I to know that you had borrowed money to stay there? I am sending fifteen rupees you need. If you need three or four rupees I will send it next month. I will send twenty rupees at that time.

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 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 on 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 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 the 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 that you will choose the latter course.

I have three madnesses. 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 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 realized that I have been acting all this time as an animal and a thief. Now I realize this and I 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. 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 people, 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 realized 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 on to 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 Her as the Mother. What would a son do if a demon sat on his mother's breast and started sucking her blood? 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 it is the strength of 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 on to the bad path. But it was this innocent husband of yours who brought those people and hundreds of others on to that path, be it bad or good, and will yet bring thousands of others on to 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. 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 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 it wants to ridicule. People want to laugh everything away. At your Brahma school, you picked up a little of this fault. Bari[Sri Aurobindo's younger brother, Barindra Kumar Ghose] also had it; all of us are tainted by this defect to some extent. It has grown up 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 way of my husband's life, his aim, his endeavour to realize God. May I always be his helper and his instrument." Will you do this?

* * *

[5]

Dearest,

For the last fifteen days the college examinations have been going on. Besides that a Swadeshi samiti is being established. I have been so busy with these two things that I haven't had a chance to write you. But I haven't had a letter from you for quite some time. I hope all of you are well. The college closes tomorrow. Certainly my work will continue, but I won't have to put in more than an hour a day.

I am sending twenty rupees with this letter. You may give ten rupees to the clerks of Burn Company or else you may spend it on some other good purpose. I can't understand what this Burn Company affair is all about. No clear account is given in the newspapers. Nowadays it is not an easy thing to keep up this sort of strike. Almost always the poor lose, the rich win. It will be a great day for India when the Indian middle class gives up its desire for petty posts and goes into business on its own. I can't send you any more money because I have to send 60 to 70 rupees for Sarojini's Darjeeling expenses and Madhavrao has been sent abroad for some special work. Much money has to be given for the Swadeshi movement and besides that I'm trying to start another movement and I will need no end of money for that. I can't put anything away.

I have sent the Floriline. I hope you got it. Dhanji was not here, then he came but Lakshmanrao was busy with the examinations and so was I, both of us forgot. I shall send the prescription soon.

Why do you want to read the "Seeker"? It is an old poem. I knew nothing about religion then. The poem is very pessimistic. I don't know the Bengali word for "pessimistic". In Marathi they say nirashavadi. Now I have realized that pessimism is just a form of ignorance.

The other day I went over to Khaserao's. Anandrao has grown quite tall. He is going to be a big swindler.

Shri

* * *

[6]

[This letter, apparently written in Bengali, survives only in the form of a court translation, which has been transcribed verbatim.]

22 October 1905

My dearest Mrinalini,

I am in receipt of your letter. I have not written you since a long time. Do not take it amiss. Why are you so much anxious about my health. I never suffer you know, except for cough and cold. Bari is here. He is in an exceedingly bad state of health. His fever is often accompanied by complications but with all his ailments, his energy never flags. He never sits quiet. As soon as he gets a little better, he goes out in the service of his country. He will never take up service. I will of course not write Sarojini about these matters, nor should you do so. She would then get mad with anxiety. I hope I will go to Calcutta in November. Then I have many things to do.

That long letter of yours gave me no reason to despair. I was rather glad. If Sarojini learns to practice self-denial like you, it will help me much in my future (plan of) work. But this is not to be. Her desire for future happiness is very strong. I know not whether she will ever be able to overcome it. God's will be done. Your letter is lost amongst a heap of papers. I will write again as soon as I have found it out. It is time for evening prayer. I stop here for the day. I am well, you should not give

way to anxiety even if you do not hear from me. What ailment will overtake me (that you are afraid of)? I hope you are all quite well.

Yours
What need have you for my name.
Will not this dash do? —

* * *

[7]

c/o Babu Subodh Chandra Mullick

12, Wellington Square

Calcutta

[1905 December]

Dearest Mrinalini

I have received your letter. I was sorry to read it. I wrote you a letter from Bombay in which I expressed my intention to go to Bengal. In addition I spoke about many other important matters. I did not inform anyone else of my going to Bengal. There was no reason why I did not inform others. Now I realize that you did not receive that letter. Either it was not posted or it was lost in the post office. In any case it is unfortunate that you get impatient so quickly. For I say again, you are not the wife of an ordinary worldly man. You must have a great deal of patience and strength. A time may come when you will be without news of me not for a month or a month and a half but for as much as six months. So you will have to learn a little patience; otherwise there will be endless sorrow for you in the future.

I had written about many important matters. I don't have time to write about all that again. I will write a little later. Very soon I will go to Benares. From Benares I will go to Baroda. Once I arrive I will take leave

and return to Bengal. But if Clarke has not come back there will be some difficulty.

Bari is in Deoghar. He is always getting fever. If I do not get leave he may come back to Baroda.

A.G

* * *

[8]

2 March 1906

Dearest Mrinalini

Today I will leave for Calcutta. I was due to go long ago. The leave was sanctioned but the big men in Baroda couldn't find time to sign it, so I have lost ten days for nothing. At any rate I shall reach Calcutta on Monday. I don't know where I will stay. It may not be possible to stay at Na-mashi's. I have given up fish and meat. I may not eat them again in my life. But why should Na-mashi listen to that? Besides it would not be good if I could not find a secluded place. I have to do a number of things alone for an hour and a half in the morning and an hour and a half in the evening. All that cannot be done in front of others. 12 Wellington Square was quite suitable for me, but Hem Mallick has just died, so I can't go there now. But I will receive letters addressed to me there.

I will try to go to Assam as you ask. But once I set foot in Calcutta everyone catches hold of me. I will have a thousand things to do. I won't get time to visit my relatives. If I do go to Assam I will only be able to stay three or four days. Bari can very well bring you. I can send Ranchhod along with him. If I go, it probably won't be this month. I'll see when I get to Calcutta. Another possibility is that if Sarojini wants to go to Calcutta, Bari can take her there and I can bring her back a month

later when I go. I'll fix things up when I get to Calcutta.

Sri Aurobindo Ghose

* * *

[9]

6th December, 1907

Dear Mrinalini,

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

Here [in Calcutta] I do not have a minute to spare. I am in charge of the writing; I am in charge of the Congress work; I have to settle the Bande Mataram affair. I am finding it difficult to cope with it all. Besides, I have my own work to do; that too cannot be neglected.

Will you listen to one request of mine? This is a time of great anxiety for me. There are pulls from every side that are enough to drive one mad. If at this time you also get restless, it can only increase my worry and anxiety. But if you could write encouraging and comforting letters, that would give me great strength. I should then be able to overcome all fears and dangers with a cheerful heart. I know it is hard for you to live alone at Deoghar. But if you keep your mind firm and have faith, your sorrows will not be able to overcome you to such an extent. As you have married me, this kind of sorrow is inevitable for you. Occasional separations cannot be avoided, for, unlike the ordinary Bengali, I cannot make the happiness of family and relatives my primary aim in life. Under these circumstances there is no way out for you except to consider my ideal as your ideal and find your happiness in the success of my appointed work. One thing more. Many of those with whom you are living at present are our elders. Do not get angry with them even if they

say harsh or unfair things. And do not believe that everything they say is what they mean or is intended to hurt you. Words often come out in anger, without thought. It is no good holding on to them. If you find it absolutely impossible to stay on, I shall tell Girish Babu; your grandfather can come and stay with you while I am at the Congress.

I am going to Midnapur today. On my return I shall make the necessary arrangements here, and then proceed to Surat. That will probably be on the 15th or 16th. I shall be back on the 2nd of January.

Yours

* * *

[10]

23 Scott's Lane,

Calcutta,

17th Feb. [1908]

Dear Mrinalini,

I have not written to you for a long time. This is my eternal failing; if you do not pardon me out of your own goodness, what shall I do? What is ingrained in one does not go out in a day. Perhaps it will take me the whole of this life to correct this fault.

I was to come on the 8th January, but I could not. This did not happen of my own accord. I had to go where God took me. This time I did not go for my own work; it was for His work that I went. The state of my mind has undergone a change. But of this I shall not speak in this letter. Come here, and I shall tell you what is to be told. But there is only one thing which must be said now and that is that from now on I no longer am the master of my own will. Like a puppet I must go wherever

God takes me; like a puppet I must do whatever He makes me do. It will be difficult for you to grasp the meaning of these words just now, but it is necessary to inform you, otherwise my movements may cause you regret and sorrow. You may think that in my work I am neglecting you, but do not do so. Already I have done you many wrongs and it is natural that this should have displeased you. But I am no longer free. From now on you will have to understand that all I do depends not on my will but is done at the command [adesh] of God. When you come here, you will understand the meaning of my words. I hope that God will show you the Light He has shown me in His infinite Grace. But that depends on His Will. If you wish to share my life and ideal you must strive to your utmost so that, on the strength of your ardent desire. He may in His Grace reveal the path to you also. Do not let anyone see this letter, for what I have said is extremely secret. I have not spoken about this to anyone but you; I am forbidden to do so. This much for today.

Your husband

P.S. I have written to Sarojini about household matters. When you see the letter you will understand that it is unnecessary to write to you separately about them.

* * *

[11]

23 Scott's Lane,

Calcutta,

21-2-08

Dearest Mrinalini,

As there will be a delay in my obtaining my salary from the College I have borrowed Rs 50 from Radha Kumud Mukherjee and am sending it. I asked Abinash to have it sent. He ought to have sent it by wire, but he forgot to send it in your name. Take the rent money from this and after keeping aside something for mother, pay off some of the debt. Next month I will get my salary for February and January, three hundred rupees. Then we can pay off the rest of the debt.

I will not say anything of what I wrote in my last letter. I will tell you everything when you come. I have got permission and cannot avoid speaking. Enough for today.

Your husband

* * *

[12]

I have not written you a letter for a long time. I believe there may soon be a great change in our life. If so, if that happens we will be free from all want. We wait on the will of the Mother. Within me as well the final transformation is taking place. The Mother's inspiration has become very compact. Once this transformation is complete, the descent stable, our separation cannot continue any more. For the day of the yogasiddhi is coming near. After that will be the How of the entire body. Tomorrow or the day after a sign will manifest itself. After that I will be able to see you.

SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS TO HIS FATHER-IN-LAW

Two letters written by Sri Aurobindo to his father-in-law Bhupal Chandra Bose (1861– 1937). The first letter, dated 8 June 1906, was written during the early days of Sri Aurobindo's political career and the second letter, dated 19 February 1919, was penned shortly after the death of Sri Aurobindo's wife Mrinalini Devi in December 1918. These letters are indeed very special for they reveal the unknown aspects of Sri Aurobindo's personality.

* * *

[1]

Calcutta

June 8th 1906.

My dear father-in-law,

I could not come over to Shillong in May, because my stay in Eastern Bengal was unexpectedly long. It was nearly the end of May before I could return to Calcutta, so that my programme was necessarily changed. I return to Baroda today. I have asked for leave from the 12th, but I do not know whether it will be sanctioned so soon. In any case I shall be back by the end of the month. If you are anxious to send Mrinalini down, I have no objection whatever. I have no doubt my aunt will gladly put her up until I can return from Baroda and make my arrangements.

I am afraid I shall never be good for much in the way of domestic virtues. I have tried, very ineffectively, to do some part of my duty as a son, a brother and a husband, but there is something too strong in me which forces me to subordinate everything else to it. Of course that is no

excuse for my culpability in not writing letters,— a fault I am afraid I shall always be quicker to admit than to reform. I can easily understand that to others it may seem to spring from a lack of the most ordinary affection. It was not so in the case of my father from whom I seem to inherit the defect. In all my fourteen years in England I hardly got a dozen letters from him, and yet I cannot doubt his affection for me, since it was the false report of my death which killed him. I fear you must take me as I am with all my imperfections on my head.

Barin¹ has again fallen ill, and I have asked him to go out to some healthier place for a short visit. I was thinking he might go to Waltair, but he has set his heart on going to Shillong— I don't quite know why, unless it is to see a quite new place and at the same time make acquaintance with his sister-in-law's family. If he goes, I am sure you will take good care of him for the short time he may be there. You will find him, I am afraid, rather wilful and erratic,— the family failing. He is especially fond of knocking about by himself in a spasmodic and irregular fashion when he ought to be sitting at home and nursing his delicate health, but I have learnt not to interfere with him in this respect; if checked, he is likely to go off at a tangent & makes things worse. He has, however, an immense amount of vitality which allows him to play these tricks with impunity in a good climate, and I think a short stay at Shillong ought to give him another lease of health.

*Your affectionate
son-in-law
Aurobindo Ghose*

* * *

[2]

Pondicherry

¹ Barindra Kumar Ghose, Sri Aurobindo's youngest brother and a noted revolutionary.

19 February 1919

My dear father-in-law,

I have not written to you with regard to this fatal event in both our lives; words are useless in face of the feelings it has caused, if even they can ever express our deepest emotions. God has seen good to lay upon me the one sorrow that could still touch me to the centre. He knows better than ourselves what is best for each of us, and now that the first sense of the irreparable has passed, I can bow with submission to His divine purpose. The physical tie between us is, as you say, severed; but the tie of affection subsists for me. Where I have once loved, I do not cease from loving. Besides she who was the cause of it, still is near though not visible to our physical vision.

It is needless to say much about the matters of which you write in your letter. I approve of everything that you propose. Whatever Mrinalini would have desired, should be done, and I have no doubt this is what she would have approved of. I consent to the chudis [gold bangles] being kept by her mother; but I should be glad if you would send me two or three of her books, especially if there are any in which her name is written. I have only of her her letters and a photograph.

Aurobindo

REMINISCENCES OF BHUPAL CHANDRA BOSE

I. Her father and mother both belong to the Jessore district. The ancestral home of the Basu family is situated in a village named Meherpore on the left bank of the Kapadaka river, 24 miles to the south of the district town of Jessore. Mrinalini's father, Bhupal Chandra Basu (born 1861) – the writer of this short note – graduated from the Calcutta University (1881) and received an agricultural training as a State scholar at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, in England, and after his return to India, served for two years as a teacher in the Bangabasi School and College of which he was a joint founder with his lifelong friend Srijut Girish Chandra Bose, entered Government service in 1888 and after serving as an Agricultural Officer for 28 years in Bengal and Assam, retired in 1916 and settled down at Ranchi soon after his retirement.

During service his headquarters were for a year (1888-89) at Ranchi, then in Calcutta (1889-97) and finally for nineteen years at Shillong (1897-1916), and Mrinalini spent portions of her life at all these places. This note would be incomplete without a special mention of the very intimate and affectionate relations which have existed ever since the year 1883 between her father and his family on the one hand and S. J. Girish Chandra Bose and his family on the other. So much so that to most of their acquaintances Mrinalini's father is known as a younger brother of the latter. Mrinalini spent considerable periods of her life under her uncle Girish Babu's roof and was regarded as a daughter of his house. It was Girish Chandra who looked after her education while she was a boarder at the Brahma Girls' School in Calcutta. It was he who negotiated her marriage and did everything in connection with that ceremony and it was under his roof that Mrinalini passed away in December 1918.

II. Mrinalini, the eldest child of her father, saw the light of day on the... 1887² in Calcutta in a house in Eden Hospital Street (or lane), which with the entire lane was demolished after a year or two and merged in the extension grounds of the Calcutta Medical College.

III. Mrinalini spent her early childhood in Calcutta. She was at first educated under a private teacher, and soon after her father's transfer to Shillong, she was sent down to Calcutta and lived as a boarder for nearly three years at the Brahmo Girls' School until the time of her marriage in April 1901. She evinced no exceptional abilities or tendencies at this age, indeed at no stage of her life.

There was nothing remarkable about her short school career. She however contracted two notable friendships during this time. One of the two was Miss Swarnalata Das, M.A., eldest daughter of a very intimate friend of her father Sj. Raj Mohan Das, a distinguished Officer of the Assam Police, who after his retirement, devoted his heart and soul to the work of uplifting the depressed classes in East Bengal, and is now living a retired life at Dacca. Swarnalata was several years her senior in age and acted towards her as an elder sister during her school life. After graduating in Calcutta Swarnalata was sent to England for higher training in the art of teaching and after her return worked as a senior teacher of the Brahmo Girls' School of which she acted for a time as the Lady Superintendent. She was cut off in the prime of life leaving behind a memory which for purity and sweetness cannot be excelled. Mrinalini's second friend was Miss Sudhira Bose, a classmate of hers with whom she lived in closest intimacy till the day of her death. Sudhira was a younger sister of late Devabrata Bose, an associate of Sri Aurobindo in the Alipore Bomb Case, who after his acquittal at the trial, turned a Sannyasin and joined the Ramakrishna Mission. Miss Sudhira too joined the same Mission and worked as a teacher of the Sister Nivedita School,

²The portion was kept blank by the author but the date of Mrinalini Devi's birth is 6 March 1887.

of which, after Sister Christine left for America shortly before the war, she became the head. Sudhira too was not destined to live long. She fell a victim to a sad railway accident at Benares in December 1920, thus surviving her friend by exactly two years.

Mrinalini, though she was surrounded by Brahmo friends and was a boarder in a Brahmo School never evinced any special interest in the Brahmo movement nor in any of the social reforms associated with that movement. The whole religious bent of the later years of her life was in the direction of the Hindu revival movement inspired by Paramhansa Ramakrishna and his great disciple Swami Vivekananda.

IV. There was no relationship, nor even acquaintance between the Boses and the Ghose family, except that Mrinalini's father once came in contact with Sri Aurobindo's father, Dr. Krishnadhan Ghose, while he was stationed as Civil Surgeon at Khulna. It must have been about the year 1890 when Sri Aurobindo was preparing himself in England for the I.C.S. examination.

Sri Aurobindo first met Mrinalini at the house of her uncle S. J. Girish Chandra Bose in Calcutta in the course of his search for a mate to share his life, and chose her at first sight as his destined wife. Their marriage took place shortly afterwards in April 1901. It is not possible for the writer or for anybody else to say what psychological affinity existed between the two, but certain it is that as soon as he saw the girl, he made up his mind to marry her. The customary negotiations were carried on by Girish Babu on the bride's side. Sri Aurobindo was at the time employed either as a Professor or as Vice-Principal of the Gaekwar's College at Baroda. He was then 28 years 9 months old, and his wife was only 14 years and 3 months, the difference in age being over 14 years.

V. The writer knows next to nothing about the married life of the couple at Baroda. After Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal and during the stormy years that followed, Mrinalini had little or no opportunity of living a

householder's life in the quiet company of her husband. Her life during this period was one of continuous strain and suffering which she bore with the utmost patience and quietude. She spent the greater period of the time either with Sri Aurobindo's maternal relatives at Deoghar or with her parents at Shillong. She was present with her husband at the time of his arrest at 48, Grey Street in May 1908 and received a frightful mental shock of which the writer and others saw a most painful evidence in the delirium of her last illness ten years later.

The writer is unable to say from his own knowledge how far Mrinalini agreed with and helped her husband in his public activities, but he can say this much for certain that she never stood in the way of his work. She never evinced any aspiration for public work.

VI. The famous letter of Sri Aurobindo to his wife bears the date 30th August without mention of the year. There is a reference in the letter to the death of a brother of hers (a second bereavement to her parents) from which the writer makes out the year to be 1905. It was the month of the declaration of the Bengal Boycott. Sri Aurobindo was apparently then at Baroda, and Mrinalini with her parents at Shillong.

The writer has never seen any of Mrinalini's letters to her husband and is therefore unable to say whether they contained anything noteworthy.

VII. The writer cannot throw any light on the mutual relations between Mrinalini and her husband, except that they were characterised by a sincere though quiet affection on the side of the husband and a never questioning obedience from the wife. One can gather much in this respect from Sri Aurobindo's published letters. After Sri Aurobindo left Bengal, the two never met again, but all who knew her could see how deeply she was attached to her husband and how she longed to join him at Pondicherry. The fates however decreed it otherwise.

During the first 3 or 4 years of his exile, Sri Aurobindo lulled her with the hope that some day (which we thought could not be very distant) he would return to Bengal. His letters to his wife as well as to the writer were few and far between, but they gave ample grounds for such a hope. At last Sri Aurobindo ceased to write at all, possibly because of his exclusive preoccupation with Yoga, but to the last day of her life Mrinalini never ceased to hope.

VIII. There was no issue of the marriage. During Sri Aurobindo's trial at Alipore which lasted a full twelve months Mrinalini lived with her parents at Shillong or with her uncle Girish Babu in Calcutta. She paid several visits to her husband at Alipore Central Jail in the company of her father. She never evinced any visible agitation during those exciting times, but kept quiet and firm throughout.

IX. Sri Aurobindo disappeared from Calcutta at the end of February or beginning of March 1910. Mrinalini was living at the time in Calcutta. We did not know his whereabouts, until several weeks later it was announced in the papers that he had escaped to Pondicherry to get out of the reach of the British Courts.

Sri Aurobindo never called his wife to Pondicherry for Sadhana. They never met again. Her father made a serious attempt after his retirement from Government service in 1916 to take her to Pondicherry but the attitude of Government at the time prevented him from realising this wish.

These long years of separation (1910-18) she spent with her parents at Shillong and Ranchi, paying occasional visits to Calcutta. She devoted these years almost exclusively to meditation and the reading of religious literatures which consisted for the most part of the writings of Swami Vivekananda and the teachings of his Great Master.

The writer believes she perused all the published writings of the

Swami and all the publications of the Udbodhan Office. Of these she has left behind an almost complete collection.

Mrinalini often visited Sri Ma (widow of Paramhansa Dev) at the Udbodhan Office in Bagbazar, who treated her with great affection, calling her Bau-Ma (the normal Bengali appellation for daughter-in-law) in consideration of the fact that the Holy Mother regarded Sri Aurobindo as her son.

Mrinalini desired at one time to receive dīksha from one of the Sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Mission. Her father wrote to Sri Aurobindo for the necessary permission but the latter in reply advised her not to receive initiation from any one else and he assured her that he would send her all the spiritual help she needed. She was content therefore to remain without any outward initiation.

X. Mrinalini passed away in Calcutta in the 32nd year of her life on the 17th of December 1918, a victim of the fell scourge of influenza which swept over India in that dreaded year.

There was nothing notable about her death. In fact but for the fate which united her for a part of her short life to one of the most remarkable and forceful personalities of the age, her life had nothing extraordinary about it.

Nothing happens in the world without serving some purpose of the Divine Mother, and no doubt she came and lived to fulfil a Divine purpose which we may guess but can never know.

For sometime before she passed away, she had been selling her ornaments and giving away the proceeds in charity and what remained unsold, she left with her friend Miss Sudhira Bose, at the time Lady Superintendent of the Sister Nivedita School. Soon after her death Sudhira sold off the ornaments and the whole of the proceeds, some two thousand rupees was, with Sri Aurobindo's permission, made over to the Ramakrishna Mission and constituted into an endowment named

after Mrinalini, out of the interest of which a girl student is maintained at the Sister Nivedita School.

XI. Mrinalini in the Mother – the writer would rather say nothing about this. If the facts relating to the descent of Mrinalini's spirit in the Mother which the writer heard from the Mother herself are to be published, it is proper that the Mother's permission be taken by the publisher and she be approached for an authentic and firsthand account of the incident. The writer is greatly afraid that he might be guilty of grave mistakes if he were to narrate it from his own memory.