

On Sri Aurobindo's second "dream":

"The resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilisation."

Draft

**Research Paper
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Summary

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Foreword

In his message for India's independence, on 15th August 1947, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

On this day I can watch almost all the world-movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement...

The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India.

The second of his "five dreams" is the topic of this research paper:

Another dream was for the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilisation. Asia has arisen; large parts are now quite free or are at this moment being liberated: its other still subject or partly subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done and that will be done today or tomorrow.

A "free and united India" is the topic of a paper compiled by this author on Sri Aurobindo's "first dream". This paper focuses more on Japan's role in containing Russia's expansion in North Asia and on its role in driving the other western powers out of Asia. It shows also how some peoples from West Asia were freed by the dismembering of the Ottoman Empire and how, decades later, other peoples from Central Asia were freed by the dismembering of USSR's Empire.

The first Chapter shows how much of North, East and South had fallen prey to British, Russian, French, Dutch and American imperialisms¹ and how, after being threatened by the Americans, Japan modernised and industrialised very rapidly and soon carved its own share of Asia, at first out of China (whose Qing dynasty was unable to modernise fast enough), then at Russia's expenses and later by grabbing more of China and replacing the Western colonists in Southeast Asia.

The second Chapter describes the effects – in Asia – of the dismembering of the Ottoman Empire.

The third Chapter gives some glimpses of the Pan Asian movement, it speaks of Indian nationalists looking at Japan as a role model to be emulated because it succeeded in not being colonised and even in beating, on land and at sea, a European power, Russia, in the 'first modern war' of the 20th century. It also says that, because of the enormous influence western powers exerted on all Asian economies and cultures, a Pan Asian movement came into existence and developed, linking nationalists and other freedom lovers from many Asian countries – many of them turning to Japan

¹ Portugal was in another league as it held only small territories in India (Goa, Daman, Diu,...) and in China (Macau).

for inspiration and help – or to seek refuge. Some, like Subhas Chandra Bose, went as far as forming their own National Army with Japan’s help and joining hands with its army to try and overthrow their existing foreign rulers.

Readers are likely to be amazed to learn that Mother, her husband Paul and her friend Dorothy sojourned most of their first year in Japan at the home of Dr. Shūmei Ōkawa, a man who will become one of Japan’s most influential ultranationalists leaders before and during WW II – to the extent that, after the war, he will be prosecuted as a class-A war criminal by the Allies.

Readers may be even more amazed to read one of Paul Richard’s virulent pamphlets, which Mother translated in English and which Ōkawa then translated in Japanese, in which he exhorts Japan:

“Liberate and unify Asia; for Asia is thy domain. Asia is thy field of action and, if needed, thy field of war; thou knowest it well... Thine own share is the whole of Asia... Thou hast but to set her free... See at thy door that immense country [China] where throngs a quarter of humanity, that country vaster than all... Go towards China; it is thee she awaits!”

The fourth Chapter shows that, as long as Japan was not threatening India, Sri Aurobindo did not apply his force against it and did not even seem to be concerned by its conquests.

One guesses that his main preoccupation was to get the Westerners out of Asia – which is what Japan’s conquests will succeed in doing – but only after being beaten by the Americans and their Allies.

The fifth Chapter shows that, in March 1942, India was very seriously threatened by Germany and even more by Japan.

The sixth Chapter looks for Sri Aurobindo’s reasons for not wanting Japanese to set foot in India.

The seventh Chapter tells how Mother’s prophecies regarding the time when India will be freed came true at the very end of March 1942.

The eighth Chapter shows what happened to Germany’s and Japan’s forces after they threatened India.

This story is an interesting example of how, at times, things get worse before they get better – of how a war (or a revolution) can unlock a situation that seems totally blocked.

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1) Rival expansions by the main world powers in North, East and South Asia.

Main reasons for expansionism

Having colonies served four main purposes for the colonists: 1) a captive source of raw materials and agricultural resources², 2) a captive market for manufactured products, 3) a captive source of troops for the colonists' armies³ and 4) a place for colonists to seek fortune, settle or simply find employment⁴.

Competing powers felt the need to colonise if only to prevent their rivals from grabbing more territories and becoming even more powerful. China's incapacity to modernise made it a prey.

It was too tempting for rival powers to try and colonise sparsely and little developed regions of the world such as the Americas, Oceania, north and central Asia. In North East Asia, the Chinese, Russians and Japanese were competing for territories while in Central Asia it was the Russians, Chinese and British.

One of the main causes for WW II was that the two new major industrial powers, Germany and Japan, wanted better access to resources and markets, which the existing colonial powers refused to share with them⁵.

² Without Manchuria's agricultural and mineral resources Japan would not have had the means to fight the war as it did.

³ For example, many Indians served in Britain's Imperial Army – mainly against Japan and in the Middle East.

⁴ This played a major role in densely populated countries whose population was booming.

⁵ Germany had lost all its colonies in Africa and in the Pacific Ocean at the Peace Treaties which ended WW I.

2) On Russia's expansionism in Northeast Asia:

Russia had the same reasons as other Western powers to want to expand – in its case eastwards. It had two additional reasons to do so:

Unlike the Himalayas, the Urals which divides – in theory – the Eurasian continent into two sub-continent, Asia and Europe,⁶ is not a serious natural barrier hindering invasions. Russia had been attacked several times by Mongol and other nomadic tribes which on their side wanted to expand westwards. Rather than being repeatedly raided, the Russians decided to conquer those who had raided her.

Russia being essentially a continental power, its constant policy has been to try and obtain good harbours which are free from ice all year round and preferably not in seas whose access can be controlled by rival powers (like the Baltic and Black Seas). This was one of its main reasons for expanding southwards once its empire had reached the Pacific coast. As Vladivostok wasn't free from ice in winter, it felt the need to obtain Port-Arthur and to base its Pacific fleet there...

Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea shows that this age-old policy hasn't changed.



This map shows the extent of Russia's Empire in 1914 and that of its sphere of influence, which bordered that of Britain's and included Outer Mongolia⁷ and Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan).

⁶ In the Assyro-Phoenician language, 'Ereb' means 'sunset' and 'obscure' while 'aszu' means 'rising sun' and 'bright'. In antiquity, sailors used to call the Aegean Sea's west coast (Europe): 'ereb' and its east coast (Asia): 'Aszu'. The words 'Europe' and 'Asia' derive from there.

⁷ In 1920, the largest part of Mongolia (Outer Mongolia) became a satellite of the USSR.

During the 19th century, the expansion rivalry between the Russian and British Empires in Central Asia (near the Afghanistan's border) was known as "the great game". On their side, the Chinese were trying to hold on to the territories under their influence.

The map above shows the two parts of Outer Manchuria which Russia forced the weakening Qing Empire to cede it successively in 1858 (the area north of the Amur river whose mouth is at the latitude of the north of Sakhalin Island) and in 1860 (area south of this river, at whose southern tip lies the strategically important harbour of Vladivostok).

The next area occupied by the Russian Army prior to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 is better shown on this second map. It shows also better Port Arthur (Lüshun), a warm water deep seaport, which is very close to Beijing (Pekin) and which Russia had forced China to lease in 1898. Russia then based its Pacific fleet there.

This area had come also under strong Russian influence with the building of the Chinese Eastern Railway through Harbin to Vladivostok. By 1921, Harbin, northern Manchuria's largest city, had a population of 300,000, including 100,000 Russians.



Russia's expansionism in Northeast Asia was stopped by Japanese forces in 1905.

We will now see how, in 1905, Japan succeeded in defeating Russia and stopping its expansionism in northeast Asia.

* * *

2) On Japan's expansionism in east Asia:

In 1854, Commodore Perry of the United States Navy forced Japan to open to the outside world. In order not to be more imposed upon, the emperor decided to modernise and industrialise fast. This period will be known as the “Meiji Restoration”.

Japan defeated China's Qing Dynasty in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and obtained Taiwan.

Its victory in the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905) raised considerably its status because it was the first modern war in which an Asian country defeated a European power.⁸ It took over Russia's interests in Manchuria, annexed Korea and Sakhalin Island's south part. In 1932 it turned Manchuria into a protectorate.

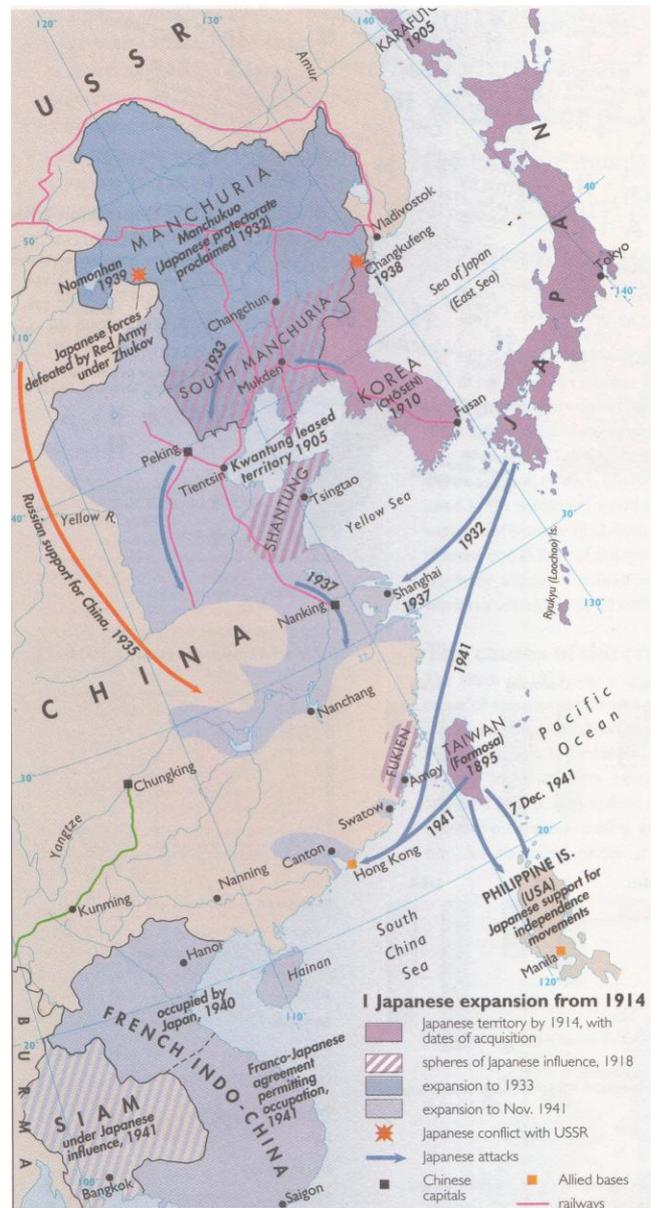
In 1936 it took over Inner Mongolia. From 1937 onwards it started invading other parts of China and implementing its scheme: “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere”. In effect it created a three-way war between Japan, Mao Zedong's communists, and Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists.

In December 1937 the Nationalist capital of Nanking surrendered to Japanese troops. In the event known as the *Nanking Massacre*, Japanese troops massacred a large number of the defending garrison.

It is estimated that as many as 300,000 people, including civilians, may have been killed.

In September 1940, Japan signed the “Tripartite Pact” with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy who thus “recognised and respected Japan's leadership in the establishment of a new order in Greater East Asia.”

With the occupation of French Indochina in the years of 1940-41, and with the continuing war in China, the United States worried of Japan's growing power and placed embargoes on it for strategic materials such as scrap metal and oil, which were vitally needed for the war effort. The Japanese were thus faced with the option of either withdrawing from China or trying to secure new sources of raw materials in the resource-rich, European-controlled colonies of South East Asia – specifically British Malaya (modern-day Malaysia) and the Dutch East Indies (modern-day Indonesia). Japan's military government attacked the US fleet at Pearl Harbor.

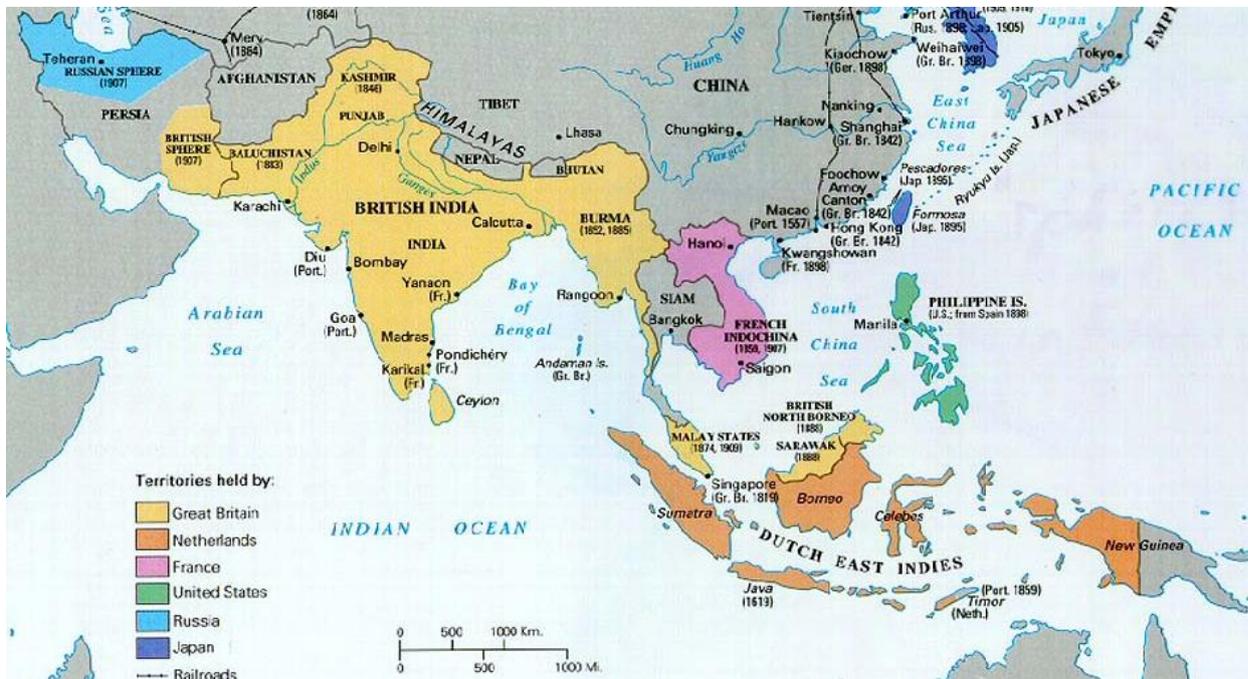


⁸ Japanese forces sank Russia's Pacific Fleet at its home base, Port Arthur, and attacked the Russian fortress there. In January 1905 the Russians surrendered it after a fierce battle in which the Japanese paid a very heavy blood price. When, after sailing all the way from North Europe and around Africa, Russia's Baltic Fleet arrived in Japan Sea to redeem Russia's honour, it was annihilated by the Japanese Navy at the Tsushima battle.

Rival expansions by the main world powers in North, East and South Asia.

One of Russia's main preoccupations has always been to have ports in seas which are both open (unlike the Baltic and Black Seas) and are not frozen in winter (unlike Murmansk and Vladivostok). Its rivals always tried to prevent it from having such harbours especially not in their backyard. This was the main reason for the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War. Japan and several European Powers did not want Russia to retain Port Arthur (Lüshun) in the Yellow Sea.

- European and American colonies in South and South-East Asia prior to 1914



This map shows Britain's colonies (India, Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, North Borneo), Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, the Philippines (which the US took over from Spain in 1898) and also some of the territories Britain, France, Germany and Russia forced China to lease them.

This map doesn't show properly the areas of China which Japan occupied and doesn't show the territories Germany had in northeast New Guinea and other Island in the Pacific Ocean. (At the end of WW I the League of Nations entrusted some to Australia and others to Japan.)

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3) Glimpses of the Pan Asian Movement and of Paul Richard's actions while in Japan

As said, one of Sri Aurobindo's most cherished "dreams" was "the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilisation." Naturally, this aspiration was shared by Mother, Paul Richard and by many others in India and other parts of Asia (especially in Japan).

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Okakura Kakuzō⁹ was a high-profile Japanese urbanite who came to Calcutta in 1901 and announced at a gathering of the town's elite:

"You are such an educated race. Why do you let a handful of Englishmen tread you down? Do everything you can to achieve freedom, openly as well as secretly, Japan will assist you."¹⁰

Rabindranath Tagore and Sister Nivedita were among those Okakura befriended.

Sri Aurobindo met for the first time 'Sister Nivedita' (originally Margaret Noble, an Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda) in October 1902. She was preaching her guru's doctrine of "national man-making" to the youth of Calcutta and had come to try and convince the Gaekwar (the Maharaja of Baroda in whose service Sri Aurobindo was working at that time) to join the freedom movement. He didn't but Sri Aurobindo and Nivedita collaborated from then onwards in this endeavour. Years later, after Sri Aurobindo's departure from British India, Nivedita edited the *Karmayogin*.

As Japan's victory over Russia in 1905, had made many in India think that Japan was a model to be emulated, or even an ally in their struggle against the British, it is to Japan that Sri Aurobindo and his brother Barin at first tried to send Madhavrao Jadhav for training but no military academy agreed to take him. (Eventually they managed to send him for training in Switzerland). Was Sri Aurobindo aware of Okakura's statement? Was he aware of Nivedita's Japanese connection and did he try to use it to find a military academy for Madhavrao Jadhav?

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Dr. Shūmei Ōkawa (6.12.1886 – 24.12.1957) graduated in 1911 from Tokyo Imperial University where he studied Vedic literature and classical Indian philosophy. He had a sound knowledge of German, French, English, Sanskrit and Pali. He became a university professor in Tokyo, teaching Asian History, he was a member of the Black Dragon Society¹¹ and the leading spirit of the Pan-Asiatic movement in Japan... a person of considerable influence, who was deeply interested in Indian affairs and was bitterly opposed to Western influence over Asia. Already in 1916, Ōkawa knew of Sri Aurobindo and was one of his great admirers.

Ōkawa was an ultra nationalistic Japanese political theorist whose writings inspired many of the right-wing extremist groups that dominated Japanese politics during the 1930s. He personally organised and participated in many of the major rightist attempts at direct action, and during World War II he helped shape much of the Japanese government's domestic propaganda.

⁹ Okakura Kakuzō (1862 –1913) was the first dean of the Tokyo Fine Arts School (later merged with the Tokyo Music School to form the current Tokyo University of the Arts) in the Meiji period. He wrote all of his main works in English. Okakura researched Japan's traditional art and travelled to Europe, the United States, China and India. He emphasised the importance to the modern world of Asian culture, attempting to bring its influence to realms of art and literature that, in his day, were largely dominated by Western culture.

His book, *The Ideals of the East* (1904), published on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War, is famous for its opening line, "Asia is one." He argued that Asia is "one" in its humiliation, of falling behind in achieving modernisation, and thus being colonised by the Western powers. This was an early expression of Pan-Asianism.

¹⁰ P. Das, *Amar Jihan Kahini*, p. 103.

¹¹ The Black Dragon Society, or Amur River Society, was a prominent paramilitary, ultranationalist right-wing group in Japan. It was founded in 1901 by Uchida Ryohei. Its name is derived from the translation of the Amur River, which is called Heilongjiang or "Black Dragon River" in Chinese. Its public goal was to support efforts to keep the Russian Empire north of the Amur River (which they crossed in 1860) and out of East Asia. During the 1920s and 1930s, it evolved into more of a mainstream political organisation, and publicly attacked liberal and leftist thought. Although it never had more than several dozen members at any one time during this period, the close ties of its membership to leading members of the government, military and powerful business leaders gave it a power and influence far greater than most other ultranationalist groups.

After World War II, he was prosecuted as a class-A war criminal by the Allies but charges against him were dropped on the grounds of insanity. He was released after two years of confinement and devoted the rest of his life to writing, completing a Japanese translation of the Qur'ān.

At the beginning of the First World War, Dr. Ōkawa had given help and asylum for some time to Indian revolutionaries (Rashbehari Bose¹² and Herambalal Gupta¹³). He and his wife received later in their house Mother, Paul Richard and Dorothy Hodgson, who stayed there during most of the first year of their stay in Japan (May 1916 to March 1920). Such sympathies made the British consider Dr. Ōkawa as a 'persona non grata'.

In October 1957, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar and Prof. V.K. Gokak visited Dr. Ōkawa and his wife at their home in Japan, though he was very sick, bed ridden and almost blind (he died 2 months later), Ōkawa recalled his meeting with Mother and Paul Richard:

"I attended every meeting at which an Indian scholar spoke. I went and listened to him in the hope of finding my soul.

In 'The Japanese Observer', before the First World War, I had read about Sri Aurobindo. I asked for his address, but in vain.

It happened one day that Haraprasad¹⁴ came to Japan. He spoke on Indian philosophy.

I went and listened to him. I was one of the fifty men and women who attended.

Among them was a young lady [Mother] who stirred me to my depths.

Something in her drew me to her, – call it grace, call it the immutable light of the polar star that makes the magnet point to its own centre.

A fragrance was wafted from her to me as from Paradise, sweet with the scent of immemorial days.

¹² Rashbehari Bose (1886 – 1945) was a revolutionary leader against the British Raj. Following the attempt to assassinate Lord Hardinge, on 12.12.11, Rash Behari was forced to go into hiding. During World War I he became extensively involved as one of the leading figures of the Ghadar Revolution that attempted to trigger a mutiny in India in February 1915. The revolution failed and most of the revolutionaries were arrested but Rash Behari managed to escape British intelligence and reached Japan in 1915.

In Japan, Bose found shelter with various radical Pan-Asian groups – i.e. at the house of Dr. Shūmei Ōkawa and his wife (where Mother would later stay). From 1915–1918, he changed residences and identities numerous times, as the British kept pressing the Japanese government for his extradition. Bose along with A M Nair was instrumental in persuading the Japanese authorities to stand by the Indian nationalists and ultimately to support actively the Indian freedom struggle abroad. Bose convened a conference in Tokyo in March 1942, which decided to establish the "Indian Independence League". At the conference he moved a motion to raise an army for Indian liberation. He convened the second conference of the League at Bangkok on 22 June 1942. It was at this conference that a resolution was adopted to invite Subhas Chandra Bose to join the League and take its command as its president.

¹³ Heramba Lal Gupta was an Indian Nationalist linked to the Berlin Committee and the Ghadar Party extensively involved in the Hindu-German Conspiracy, who later turned a British agent and passed in intelligence on Mahendra Pratap's Kabul Government.

At the outbreak of World War I, Gupta was in Germany as member of the Berlin Committee, which within a short time established contacts with the Ghadar Party in the United States in what came to be called the Hindu-German Conspiracy. (This conspiracy came to an end when the US joined the war on the side of Britain.) Efforts had begun as early as 1911 to procure arms and smuggle them into India. When a clear idea of the conspiracy emerged, more earnest and elaborate plans were made to obtain arms and to enlist international support. After the failure of the SS *Korea* mission, Herambalal Gupta took over the leadership of American wing of the conspiracy and began efforts to obtain men and arms. While the former resource was in plentiful supply with more and more Indians coming forward to join the Ghadarite cause, obtaining arms for the uprising proved to be more difficult.

The revolutionaries started negotiations with the Chinese government through James Dietrich, who held Sun Yat Sen's power of attorney, to buy a million rifles. However, the deal fell through when it was realised that the weapons offered were obsolete flintlocks and muzzle loaders. From China, Gupta went to Japan to try to procure arms and to enlist Japanese support for the Indian independence movement. [For this purchase, Gupta had received from the Germans between 40,000 and 50,000\$.] However, he was forced into hiding within 48 hours when he came to know that the Japanese had planned to hand him over to the British.

¹⁴ Haraprasad Shastri (1853 –1931), also known as Haraprasad Bhattacharya, was an Indian academic, Sanskrit scholar, archivist and historian of Bengali literature. He is most known for discovering the Charyapada, the earliest known examples of Bengali literature. Shastri held different positions within the Asiatic Society, and was its President for two years. He was also President of Vangiya Sahitya Parishad for twelve years and was an honorary member of the Royal Asiatic Society in London.

There was a light in her eyes as of the great morning of the world that was about to dawn. The lecturer spoke clearly, even eloquently. I heard him mechanically. But my soul was listening eagerly to the silence in her depths and straining to catch a glimpse of the vastness in her soul. I saw Haraprasad the next morning. And what was my surprise when he said that this very lady had desired to see me!

I was thrilled.

I was moved to the very roots of my heart.

I met her as a brother and friend and was privileged to be her fellow-worker, not realising what great cause I worked for and with what success beyond my dreams.

She and her friends [Paul Richard] dreamed of a new Asia, a new world. They were in living touch with another who dreamed dreams and saw visions in the ancient land of the Buddha. That was Sri Aurobindo himself. I was destined to work with the collaborators of the very seer whose whereabouts I could not know.

I was drawn into the magic circle of their light and, all unconscious, I lived on the very edge of heaven.

We lived together for a year. We sat together in meditation every night for an hour. I practised Zen and they practised yoga. But these twin paths led us to the same mountain heights....”

One month later, during a brief visit to Japan, J. Nehru, India’s Prime Minister, requested an audience with Dr. Ōkawa but he was too ill to receive him. (He passed away one month later.)

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We have just seen that Mirra and/or Paul Richard had wanted to meet Dr. Ōkawa – most probably because they knew he was one of the most influential Pan Asian activists. Hence one should not be astonished by the kind of article Paul Richard wrote while in Japan:

In his book, “The Mother”, George van Vrekhem wrote:

In January 1917 [that is, while staying at the Ōkawas, Paul Richard] wrote and published in Tokyo a tract of seventeen pages entitled “Au Japon” (To Japan) and translated into English by Mirra¹⁵. It begins as follows:

“I am seeking throughout the world for a just nation, a nation of the future. For the future belongs to the just nations. They shall inherit the Earth.”

And he continues in his exalted, prophetic and not infrequently bombastic style:

“First of all the nations in whom the divorced tendencies of the spirit join again, and, as yet, the only one who knows how to unite the thought of Europe and that of Asia, thou [Japan] art born to become the unifier of those two complementary halves of the future world; thou art the first nation of that future... Nation whose shores are open toward all shores, making them less distant; nation whose thought is turned toward all thoughts, reconciling them; nation in whom the world seems to seek the scattered rays of its soul, thou art born out of a hope of Humanity; thou art born as a hope for the birth of Humanity!”

Then the tone turns exhortative and bellicose:

“Each day all thy warriors, from lowest to highest, already fight in their hearts and joyously die for thee in their dreams... Thou hast the quivering of the steed who hears his master’s step. Already dost thou feel his hand on thee. People ready for the fight, this master is a divine warrior. Let thy war be worthy of the god who is in thee! For thou shalt fight! Against whom? It matters not, so long as thou knowest why... Liberate and unify Asia; for Asia is thy domain. Asia is thy field of action and, if needed, thy field of war; thou knowest it well... Thine own share is the whole of Asia... Thou hast but to set her free... See at thy door that immense country [China] where throngs a quarter of humanity, that country vaster than all... Go towards China; it is thee she awaits!”¹⁶

And Richard finishes this grandiloquent exhortation to Japan speaking of ‘the Lord of the Nations.’

¹⁵ Underline is mine (Gilles).

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‘... It is the voice of the Lord of thy work. He will accomplish this work with thee, but he can also accomplish it without thee. To the Lord of the Nations who today tills the Earth to found there the Kingdom of his Justice, what nation could long offer resistance?... I saw, I saw thy soul. It was prostrated in silence before him, to receive from him the command, and the promise, the sword of Victories, and the crown of the Future.’

We know who the ‘Lord of the Nations’ is: he is one of the four great Asuras whose actual name is Lord of Falsehood, and of whom Paul Richard was an emanation. The Mother would say that the ‘Lord of the Nations’ bluntly refused to collaborate in the transformation of the world, and that, on the contrary, he promised to fight the changes ahead to the very last and to cause as much havoc and destruction as possible. He was the direct cause, the Mother would say, of all the wars and massacres to which the twentieth century has been witness.

It is not surprising that the Government of India again received a report on “To Japan”.

“It is reported that Mr. Paul Richard is about to publish a book entitled “To Japan”, in which he urges Japan to liberate Asia from European domination. The book will be published in English, Japanese and Chinese, and copies will be distributed by the Pan-Asiatic League...”

In Japan, Paul Richard wrote two more books which he considered to be one opus, ‘To the Nations’ and ‘The Lord of the Nations’. ‘To the Nations’ was translated by Sri Aurobindo¹⁷ and carries an introduction by Rabindranath Tagore that concludes:

“When gigantic forces of destruction were holding their orgies of fury I saw this solitary young Frenchman, unknown to fame, his face beaming with the lights of the new dawn and his voice vibrating with the message of new life, and I felt sure that the great To-morrow had already come though not registered in the calendar of the statesmen.”

‘In all nations there are men, lost in the crowd,’ writes Richard, ‘who bear in themselves this consciousness of a new world. They belong no more to the departing century. They seem to come from the future.’ Again, no Aurobindonian would disagree with this, but the perspective in which it has to be read is very different from that of Sri Aurobindo’s; it becomes fully clear in ‘The Lord of the Nations’.

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Subhas Chandra Bose,¹⁸ ‘Netaji’ as his supporters called him, was a Bengali, an ICS officer who became a staunch nationalist politician, an admirer of Sri Aurobindo and a close friend of Dilip Kumar Roy. After escaping from house arrest in India and travelling to Germany, he met with Hitler who promised him to help him reach Japan, which he did. The Japanese helped him convince Indians who had served in Britain’s Imperial Army and were held in Japanese prisoners’ camps to join his Indian National Army (INA) and fight alongside the Japanese Army against Britain’s Imperial Army (in which even more Indians served).

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The “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” was a concept created and promulgated for occupied Asian populations by the government and military of the Empire of Japan. It promoted the cultural and economic unity of the East Asian race. It also declared the intention to create a self-sufficient

¹⁷ Underline is again mine (Gilles).

¹⁸ Subhas Chandra Bose (1897 – August 18, 1945) was an Indian nationalist whose defiant patriotism made him a hero in India, but whose attempt during World War II to rid India of British rule with the help of Nazi Germany and Japan left a troubled legacy. Earlier, Bose had been a leader of the younger, radical, wing of the Indian National Congress in the late 1920s and 1930s, rising to become Congress President in 1938 and 1939. However, he was ousted from Congress leadership positions in 1939 following differences with M. K. Gandhi and the Congress high command. He was subsequently placed under house arrest by the British before escaping from India in 1940.

With Japanese support, Bose revamped the Indian National Army (INA), then composed of Indian soldiers of the British Indian army who had been captured in the Battle of Singapore. To these, after Bose’s arrival, were added enlisting Indian civilians in Malaya and Singapore. Before long the Provisional Government of Free India, presided by Bose, was formed in the Japanese-occupied Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the only part of India the Japanese succeeded in conquering.

“bloc of Asian nations led by the Japanese and free of Western powers”. It was announced in a radio address entitled “The International Situation and Japan’s Position” by Japan’s Foreign Minister on June 29, 1940.

The original concept was an idealistic wish to free Asia from colonising powers, but soon, nationalists saw it as a way to gain resources to keep Japan a modern power, and militarists saw the same resources as raw materials for war. Many Japanese nationalists were drawn to it as an ideal. Many of them remained convinced, throughout the war, that the Sphere was idealistic, offering slogans in a newspaper competition, praising the sphere for constructive efforts and peace. The reality was very different.

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4) Sri Aurobindo’s attitude towards Japan’s expansion as long as it didn’t affect India

For those who took part in the ‘evening talks’ with Sri Aurobindo, it was obvious that Sri Aurobindo was far more preoccupied with Germany’s conquests than with those of Japan.

In an article on his “*Political Life*”, dated 1946,¹⁹ he wrote (at the third person):

He had not, for various reasons, intervened with his spiritual force against the Japanese aggression until it became evident that Japan intended to attack and even invade and conquer India.

In the chapter on “War and Politics” of his “Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo”, Nirodbaran wrote:

“Japan, like a minor Hitler, had established its supremacy in the East. But Sri Aurobindo had never taken Japan’s aggression very seriously. On the contrary, he once remarked that should Hitler become supreme in the West and turn his forces towards the East, Japan’s power might be useful in confronting Hitler and checking his advance. This remark supporting as it were Japan’s blaze of imperial conquest baffled me at the time. Did he want Japan’s rise to serve as a counterblast to Hitler’s problematic thrust towards the East? Or could it be read as a move to force America into the War? At any rate it was quite evident from our talks that Japan’s dramatic conquests did not disturb him, as did Hitler’s.”

Had not Stalin’s forces stopped Hitler’s at Stalingrad, it might indeed have been useful to have Japan “confronting Hitler and checking his advance”. The (surprise) bombing by the Japanese Navy of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, did compel the American Congress to declare war to Japan. As Hitler then declared war to the United States, this bombing forced the US to wage war against these two countries though, prior to it, the American public did not want to go to war. Eventually America’s might played a crucial role in defeating them both.

Hence, Nirodbaran seems to have guessed rightly two of Sri Aurobindo’s reasons for not intervening “*with his spiritual force against the Japanese aggression*” as long as it didn’t threaten India. Another reason must have been his “dream” of a free Asia and of letting the Japanese forces drive all western powers out of it. In the Evening Talk of 12.1.39 the master said:

The idea is first to drive out the Europeans from Asia, but the Japanese will go about it silently without bragging.

To understand Sri Aurobindo’s viewpoint, one has to keep in mind the first two maps presented in our first Chapter. As China was unable to reform fast enough, its territory was highly vulnerable. The question was whether Western powers or Japan should have the upper hand.

On 14th December 1938, during an ‘Evening Talk’, Sri Aurobindo was asked what he thought of the China-Japan war:

I don’t think much of either party. They are like six and half-a-dozen. Both too materialistic. But if I had to choose, I would side with Japan. Japan at one time had an ideal. Their powers of self-sacrifice, patriotism, self abnegation and silence are remarkable. They would never lose temper in front of anybody. If their honour is injured

¹⁹ It was revised and published in 1948.

they may stab, but they must not lose self-control. They worked so silently and secretly that no one knew anything about how they had prepared themselves before the Russo-Japanese war actually broke out [in 1904]. All on a sudden it broke out. They are Khatriyas and their aesthetic sense is of course well known. But the European influence has spoiled all that. They are now very materialistic. How brutal they have become now; it is thoroughly un-Japanese...

In old times, the Japanese, even while fighting, had perfect sympathy with those with whom they fought.

On 30th December 1938, during another ‘Evening Talks’, Sri Aurobindo was asked whether he had read a letter to Tagore defending Japan’s aggression. His answer was:

No. But there are always two sides to a question. I don’t believe in such shouts against Imperialism. Conquests of that sort were, at one time, regarded as a normal activity of political life; now you do it under some pretensions and excuses. Almost every nation does it. What about China herself? She took Kashgar²⁰ in the same way. The very name Kashgar shows that the Chinese have no business to be there. Apart from the new fashions of killing there is nothing wrong in war. It is the Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy that cries out against it; the French don’t.

In a letter, probably dating from the same period, Sri Aurobindo wrote on the same line:²¹

War and conquest are part of the economy of vital Nature, it is no use blaming this or that people for doing it – everybody does it who has the power and the chance. China who now complains was herself an imperialist and colonising country through all the centuries in which Japan kept religiously within her own borders. If it were not profitable, I suppose nobody would do it. England has grown rich on the plundered wealth of India. France depends for many things on her African colonies. Japan needs an outlet for her over-abundant population and safe economic markets nearby. Each is pushed by forces that use the minds of rulers and peoples to fulfil themselves – unless human nature changes no amount of moralising will prevent it.

There has been almost continuous war in the world – it is as in the history of the Roman Republic when the gates of the temple of Janus were closed only once or twice in its many centuries – a sign that the Republic was at peace with all the world. There have been in modern times long intervals between long wars, but small ones have been generally going on somewhere or another. Man is a quarrelling and fighting animal and so long as he is so how can there be peace?

* * *

5) March 1942: India was under very serious threat from Japan and from Germany.

After the capitulation of France, in June 1940, Britain stood alone against Nazi Germany. Hitler’s surprise attack against USSR in June 1941 brought it into the war. Japan’s surprise attack against Pearl Harbor, on 7th December 1941 brought the US into the war.

In March 1942, India was in very serious situation because it was threatened in 4 different ways:

- Japan’s army had taken Singapore on 15th February (though it was said to be impregnable), on 8th of March it took Burma’s capital Rangoon and pursued the remnants of Britain’s Imperial Army which were fleeing towards India’s border.

²⁰ Kashgar (or Kashi) in Xinjian (Chinese Turkestan) is the westernmost Chinese city; it is an oasis with approximately 350,000 residents, located near the border with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. It is the administrative centre of Kashgar Prefecture of China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Turkestan). It lies some 600km north of Srinagar and 700km north of Rawalpindi (in a straight line). The 1,200km road (Karakoram Road) which links Rawalpindi to Kashgar is one of the most scenic in the world. It was inaugurated in 1982. China is now investing massively in this city to make it a major commercial centre in Central Asia – and obviously also to boost its political influence there.

²¹ “Letters on Yoga – I”, p. 436-37

- At the very end of March a very powerful Japanese fleet, commanded by Admiral Nagumo (who had conducted the raid against Pearl Harbor) was seen passing through the Straits and entering the Indian Ocean. Its target was obviously Britain's possessions in South Asia but admiral Somerville who commanded the British Navy there was left to guess where exactly it would attack. The Japanese fleet consisted of: 6 aircraft carriers, 4 battleships, 7 cruisers, 19 destroyers, 5 submarines, several tankers and 350 planes.²²
- On 25th January 1942, General Rommel and his Afrika Korps launched his second offensive towards Egypt and the Suez Canal (which provided Britain with a crucial gateway to India and its other possessions in the Indian Ocean. It is only at the end of August that Rommel will be stopped at El Alamein and in November that Montgomery will claim total victory.
- Germany's offensive towards the Caucasus and its rich oil fields seemed to be going well; Rostov will be taken on 14th July, the Volga will be crossed there and the Caucasus reached early August. On 20th August Germany's armies will reach Stalingrad... and be stopped there.

* * *

6) Reasons why Sri Aurobindo did not want the Japanese to conquer

In the article "*Political Life*", which he wrote at the third person, Sri Aurobindo wrote (in 1946):

[in April 1942,] He supported the Cripps' offer²³ because by its acceptance India and Britain could stand united against the Asuric forces [behind Hitler] and the solution of Cripps could be used as a step towards independence. When negotiations failed, Sri Aurobindo returned to his reliance on the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressor and had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory, which had till then swept everything before it, changed immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat.

At the time of the 'Cripps' Proposal' (April 1942), one of the points Duraiswamy Iyer made to the Indian leaders on behalf of Sri Aurobindo was:

Japan's imperialism being young and based on industrial and military power and moving westward, was a greater menace to India than the British imperialism which was old, which the country had learnt to deal with and which was on the way to elimination.²⁴

On 5th April 1947, Sri Aurobindo wrote these words to a disciple who intended to eulogise Subhas Chandra Bose:

You will remember that both the Mother and I were very angry against Subhas for having brought the Japanese into India and reproached him with it as a treason and crime against the Motherland. For if they had got in, it would have been almost impossible to get them out. The Mother knows the Japanese nation well and was positive about that. Okawa, the leader of the Black Dragon (the one who shammed mad and got off at the Tokyo trial²⁵) told her that if India revolted against the British, Japan would send her Navy to help²⁶, but he said that he would not like the Japanese to land because if they once got hold of Indian soil they would never leave it, and it was true enough. If the Japanese had overrun India, and they would have done it if a powerful Divine intervention had not prevented²⁷ it and turned

²² Wikipedia: "Indian Ocean Raid". "*The Second World War complete and unabridged version, Volume 4, The Hinge of Fate*" by Winston S. Churchill, p. 154 & 156.

²³ At the end of March 1942, the British Government sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India to offer "Dominion" status after the war if the Indian leaders would support the war effort. They refused.

²⁴ "Twelve years with Sri Aurobindo", by Nirodbaran, p. 149 and 158.

²⁵ This allusion to Dr. Okawa's insanity at the time of the trial shows that Sri Aurobindo was well aware that the Allies considered him as a war criminal.

²⁶ Note that, in 1927, Mother had prophesised that India would be free "*When a Japanese warship will come to the Indian Ocean.*"

²⁷ In "*Political Life*", which he revised in 1946, Sri Aurobindo wrote that when negotiations for the Cripps Proposal failed, he "*returned to his reliance on the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressor [Japan] and had the*

the tables on them, they would have joined the Germans in Mesopotamia and the Caucasus and nothing could have saved Europe and Asia from being overrun. This would have meant the destruction of our work and a horrible fate for this country and for the world. You can understand therefore the bitterness of our feelings at that time against Subhas and his association with the Axis and the disaster to his country for which he would have been responsible. Incidentally, instead of being liberated in 1948, India would have had to spend a century or several centuries in a renewed servitude. When therefore the Mother heard that you were writing a book eulogising Subhas, she disapproved strongly of any such thing issuing out of the Ashram and she wanted that you should be asked not to publish it...

* * *

7) 30th March 1942: Mother's prophecy regarding India's freedom comes true.

Page 157 of his "Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo", Nirodbaran wrote:

In 1927, when [a sadhak] asked how India was likely to get freedom. The Mother's prophetic reply was,
"When a Japanese warship will come to the Indian Ocean."

*

8) Effects of the Force Sri Aurobindo put against Japan when it threatened India.

*

satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory, which had till then swept everything before it, changed immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat."