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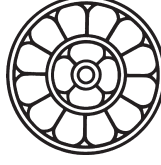
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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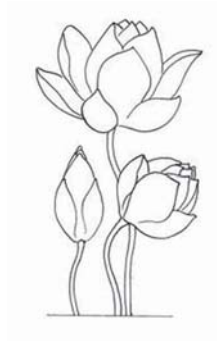
TORN ARE THE WALLS*

Torn are the walls and the borders carved by a miserly Nature,
I now have burst into limitless kingdoms of sweetness and wonder.
Breaking the fences of Matter's gods and their form and their feature,
Fall'n are the barriers schemed and the vetoes are shattered asunder.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 675)

* No title in the manuscript. Circa 1936.



SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of September 2014)

MEETING THE MOTHER

Smiles and Seriousness

Sometimes the Mother looks at us smilingly, as if she were pleased; at other times she looks in quite a different way, as if seriously.

Why not? The Mother cannot be serious, absorbed, drawn into herself? Or do you think it is only displeasure against the sadhaks that can make her so?

18 June 1934

*

During some dark periods such as now, I am awfully afraid to go to Pranam, lest I should have the misfortune to see the Mother's grave face, with no smile at all.

All this about the Mother's smile and her gravity is simply a trick of the vital. Very often I notice people talk of the Mother's being grave, stern, displeased, angry at Pranam when there has been nothing of the kind — they have attributed to her something created by their own vital imagination. Apart from that, the Mother's smiling or not smiling has nothing to do with the sadhak's merits or demerits, fitness or unfitness — it is not deliberately done as a reward or a punishment. The Mother smiles on all without regard to these things. When she does not smile, it is because she is either in trance, or absorbed, or concentrated on something within the sadhak that needs her attention — something that has to be done for him or brought down or looked at. It does not mean that there is anything bad or wrong in him. I have told this a hundred times to any number of sadhaks — but in many the vital does not want to accept that because it would lose its main source of grievance, revolt, abhiman, desire to go away or give up the Yoga, things which are very precious to it. The very fact that it has these results and leads to nothing but these darknesses ought to be enough to show you that this imagination about Mother's not smiling as a sign of absence of her grace or love is a device and suggestion of the Adversary. You have to drive away these things and give some chance for the psychic with its

deeper and truer love and surrender to come forward and take up the Adhar as its kingdom.

28 July 1934

*

So many sadhaks are not able to understand the Mother's seriousness at Pranam. They find it difficult not to feel that they have displeased her in some way or other. Could you not clarify the cause of the seriousness?

The whole foundation of the difficulty is erroneous. It is the wrong idea that if Mother is serious it must be because of some personal displeasure against "me" — each sadhak who complains of being the "me". I have repeated a hundred times to complaints that it is not so, but nobody will give up this idea — it is too precious to the ego. The Mother's seriousness is due to some absorption in some work she is doing or, very often, to some strong attack of hostile forces in the atmosphere.

19 April 1935

*

About Mother's seriousness at Pranam, you wrote: "The Mother's seriousness is due to some absorption in some work she is doing or, very often, to some strong attack of hostile forces in the atmosphere." But I never felt any hostile attack before going to Pranam; rather the attack comes afterwards when my vital fails to endure her seriousness.

It does not matter whether you feel any attack or not — the attack is there. In fact for the last several months the atmosphere is full of the most violent attacks threatening the very existence of the Yoga and the Asram and the sadhaks personally or the body of the Mother. If you are not touched that is a matter for which you ought to be grateful to the Mother instead of your vital getting upset because she is doing her work.

20 April 1935

Wrong Ideas about the Mother's Showing Displeasure

Why did the Mother have such a look of seriousness when I went to her? I have given up everything to take shelter in her, but sometimes I feel that she is displeased with me; then I wonder for whom I am living.

So long as you do not get rid of this silly illusion about the Mother's "seriousness", this kind of thing can always recur. I have told everyone the truth about it, that it is their own minds which wrongly think the Mother is serious and displeased with them. It is under the pressure of a Force of Falsehood that wants them to get upset and to destroy their peace and set them against the Mother that these things come. Yet you all go on still listening to the Force of Falsehood. It is only when you reject the falsehood that you will be free from these troubles.

*

I have the idea that the Mother is completely displeased with me. Have I done something wrong or written something that has displeased her?

The idea is absolutely without foundation. It is the constant illusion that the sadhaks are getting that the Mother is displeased with them, that they have done something wrong or said or written something wrong and therefore she is severe or distant, that her expression or her action shows it etc. Very often they think this even when she smiles on them most kindly. It is a purely subjective feeling generated by some difficulty in themselves. The Mother is not displeased with people because they have difficulties; it is only a reason for giving more of her help and support. All these ideas you speak of are suggestions generated by the adverse pressure on you. You can rely always on the Mother's Grace and you may be perfectly sure that we shall not throw you off — our support will be always with you.

4 July 1933

*

Today at Pranam the Mother was not as usual with me. I got the idea of her displeasure and it disturbed me for a time.

There was certainly no such idea in Mother's mind. People have that idea because it is an old and rooted one in their minds and it is true that at one time it had some meaning when Mother was dealing with the vital difficulties of the sadhaks. But now it is different. At the present stage of descent into the physical the Mother is meeting all with a large equanimity, tolerating all the mistakes of the sadhaks and only bringing an inner pressure, supporting all with her force as much as they will allow her. This has been so for a considerable time past — but the physical mind of the sadhaks does not find it easy to accept the change and they seek for expressions and interpretations that are not there. This is farther complicated by the fact that now the Mother has little time to rest or sleep — and when it is like that she goes easily into trance at Pranam and when in trance she may in her body forget to smile

or give the blessing etc. It is why I have had to warn people that they must not misinterpret these things.

19 November 1933

*

Yesterday and this morning after Pranam the idea came that the Mother was displeased with me, she was treating me coldly and that she was throwing me off. I tried to reject it, but it came back again and again. Of course, there cannot be any truth in it, but it kept repeating itself in feelings, not so much in the thoughts.

Certainly, there is not and cannot be any truth in such suggestions. Neither displeasure nor coldness are possible and throwing off is too absurd even to be considered. It is the attempt of the forces to set in vibration certain feelings habitual to the human vital — and it is a phenomenon that is constantly seen in the sadhana that when all substantial or even plausible reason is taken away from these vibrations, they are thrown upon the vital without any apparent cause or justifying reason by mere force of habitual response to some covert or subconscious stimulus. The one thing to do is to detach oneself at once or as soon as possible and see it for what it is and throw it off with decision.

26 December 1933

*

This morning, as I watched the Mother come down the stairs before meditation, I thought that her face looked very displeased. Why? What have I done wrong? Can this be my imagination? Can one's eyes tell such lies?

Certainly they can and the mind can distort still farther. There are any number of people who have written to the Mother that she did not smile and was fierce and severe when she had been most kind and smiling to them, knowing that they were in trouble. There have been hundreds of cases in which people have heard the opposite of what she said and refused to believe otherwise until or unless others who had been present told them they were mistaken. Note that they did not believe the Mother's denial, but at once believed other sadhaks when they confirmed the Mother. We have singular disciples! As for the mind twisting and misinterpreting the Mother's looks, speech, action, that is so ordinary and everyday that it hardly needs mention, so if you are going to trust your mind and senses so absolutely, you will go on mistaking the Mother to the end of the chapter. It is only the psychic being that can know and understand her.

11 September 1935

*

It is a great pity you allowed the thought that the Mother was severe with you to come in and throw you down. These thoughts are never true and whenever a sadhak indulges them, he is always invaded by the old movements. The Mother's love and kindness have always been the same and will always remain the same to you, so you should never accept this idea that she is displeased or severe. But whatever the mistakes or the difficulties, our help will be with you and the Mother's force will work to bring you out and get you back the psychic openness and peace which you had for many days this time and which is bound to return and become permanent after a while.

19 November 1935

*

I do not at all understand why you should think that the Mother was displeased with you for any reason whatever. She was just as she is always with you. Even if you had made any mistake, the Mother now is disposed to overlook mistakes and leave it to the pressure of the Light and the psychic being of the sadhak to set things right. But why on earth should she be displeased because you wanted to stop the French lessons with X or for any such trivial reason! Whether you continue or suspend your lessons is a detail which has to be settled in accordance with the condition of your mind and the needs of your sadhana and it can be settled either way. It is surprising that you should think Mother could show displeasure over so slight a matter. You must get over a nervousness of this kind and not disturb your good condition by imaginations — for it is an imagination, since it had no reality behind it. Have a more perfect confidence and do not let your mind create difficulties where there are none.

*

Understand once for all that Mother is not using the Pranam to show her pleasure and displeasure; it is not meant for that purpose. The only circumstance under which Mother's attitude at Pranam is likely to be influenced by the actions of the sadhak is when there is some great betrayal or a violent breach of the main rules of spiritual life such as an act of sexual intercourse or when the sadhak has become pointedly hostile to the Mother and the Yoga. But then it is not a special show of displeasure at Pranam, but a withdrawal of the gift of grace which is quite a different matter.

Wrong Ideas about the Mother's Smile and Touch

Sometimes when Mother smiles, people take it as an approval of their wrong activities. A sort of vanity comes in and says, "Oh, Mother is smiling. Don't worry; go on as you like." Or else there is a competition: "Oh, see how long Mother has put her hand on me." But if these constructions are wrong, why have they gained such currency? For on them people judge and criticise others.

It is a great mistake. We are persistently correcting it, but a legend has been formed and people cling to it.

5 July 1933

*

I do not think your reasoning that you were in the physical consciousness and therefore the observation of the physical fact [*of the Mother's touch*] is likely to be correct is very sound. The physical consciousness is full of impressions and that they are not entirely reliable has begun to be more and more recognised — it is the reason why the statements of different people about the same physical fact differ widely. Especially when there is a depression or a pressure of adverse forces the impression given to the senses is often distorted or modified in the sense of the depression or of the suggestion made — of that we have had innumerable instances.

But apart from that it is a mistake to measure the power of the blessing by these details. I have known instances in which the Mother omitted to put her hand at all on the head of a sadhak and yet the force was felt double of what he or she usually received. That was because the Mother was very concentrated and putting a full force out. Even so a finger on the head with a strong power put out may mean much more than the full hand on the head with less in the touch.

21 August 1933

*

If the Mother's putting her hand or giving her smile at Pranam is all a mental construction, why do I get so terribly upset? I have to find some way to get out of it when it comes.

The obsession about the smile and touch has to be overcome and rejected because it has become an instrument of the contrary Forces to upset the sadhaks and hamper their progress. I have seen any number of cases in which the sadhak is going on well or even having high experiences and change of consciousness and suddenly this imagination comes across and all is confusion, revolt, sorrow, despair and the

inner work is interrupted and endangered. In most cases this attack brings with it a sensory delusion so that even if the Mother smiles more than usual or gives the blessing with all her force, she is told, “You did not smile, you did not touch” or “you hardly touched”. There have been any number of instances of that also — the Mother telling me, “I saw X disturbed or else a suggestion coming towards him and I gave him my kindest smile and blessing”, and yet afterwards we get a letter affirming just the contrary, “You did not smile etc.” And you are all ready to give the Mother the lie, because you felt, you saw and your senses cannot be deceived! As if a mind disturbed does not twist the sense observation also! as if it were not a common fact of psychology that one constantly gets an impression according to his mood or thought! Even if the smile or touch were less, it should not be the cause of such upheavals, if there is not an intention in it and there is no intention at all as we have constantly warned all of you. Of course the cause is that the sadhaks apply the movements of a vital human love to the Mother and the ordinary vital human love is full of contrary movements of distrust, misunderstanding, jealousy, anger, despair. But in Yoga this is most undesirable — for here trust in the Mother, faith in her divine Love is of great importance; anything that denies or disturbs it opens the door to obstacles and wrong reactions. It is not that there should be no love in the vital, but it must purify itself of these reactions and fix itself on the psychic being’s trust and confident self-giving. Then there can be the full progress.

30 June 1935

*

Our ideas about the Mother’s hand or smile at Pranam are not constant. If Mother puts the hand all right, then one finds her smile less. If both the hand and smile are all right, one finds he has been given a smaller lotus than others. If nothing else is found, then one remembers that in 1932 Mother did not treat me well. It must be the wolf in the lower vital at work.

Yes, it is the insatiable demand of the vital and when the vital is up reason gets no chance. It was the experience of this insatiable demand that made the Mother draw back and retire from the free outward self-giving she had begun. The more she gave, the more was demanded and the more dissatisfied people became and each was jealous of the others — life was becoming impossible and sadhana was certainly not profiting!

30 June 1935

*

Today after the Pranam, even though the Mother did not smile or put her hand as usual, my consciousness remained high. The ego determines its revolt according to her smile and touch, but today it remained quiescent. I don't know how it happened.

The ego acts according to these things when it dominates; when it does not dominate or is not present, then these motives can have no effect. The whole question is whether ego leads or something else leads. If the higher consciousness leads, then even if the Mother does not smile or put her hand at all, there will be no egoistic reaction. Once the Mother did that with a sadhika, being herself in trance — the result was that the sadhika got a greater force and Ananda than she had ever got when the Mother put her hand fully.

11 November 1935

*

All this idea about the Mother's looks and her hand in the blessing which is current in the Asram is perfectly irrational, false, even imbecile. I have a hundred times written to people that the whole thing is wrong and rests on a false suggestion of the adverse forces made in order to create a disturbance. The Mother does not refrain from smiling or vary her smile or her manner of blessing in order to show displeasure or because of anything the sadhak has done. She does not, as certain people annoyingly believe, dose out her smiles or blessings in such a way as to assign a number of marks for each sadhak according to his good behaviour or bad behaviour. These variations are *not* intended to assign a competitive place to each sadhak, as to schoolboys in a class. All these ideas are absolutely absurd, trivial and unspiritual. The Asram is not a schoolboys' class nor is the Yoga a competitive examination. All this is the creation of the narrow physical mind and vital ego and desire. If the sadhaks want to get a true basis and make true progress, they must get these ideas out of their minds altogether. Yet they cling obstinately to it in spite of all I can write, so dear is this falsehood to their mind. You must get rid of it altogether. At the Pranam the Mother puts her force to help the sadhak — what he ought to do is to receive quietly and simply, not to spoil the occasion by these foolish ideas and by watching who gets more of her hand or smile and who gets less. All that must go.

8 December 1936

The Mother's Hand at Pranam

If the Mother does not put her hand on my head or keep it there for long, does it mean that I was not in a fit condition to receive well?

No, it means only that these days there are nearly 140 people and Mother has to do it quickly — otherwise Pranam would not end.

22 November 1932

*

I was not going to send this letter, thinking it will make Mother angry and that she will irritate me still more at Pranam by putting her hand only just a little, as yesterday. Anyway, it is now becoming impossible to live.

Why should you think that Mother will be angry? We have ourselves told you to write everything frankly and conceal nothing — so there is not the least likelihood that she will resent what you write. Moreover she knows perfectly well the difficulties of the sadhana and of human nature and, if there is goodwill and a sincere aspiration such as you have, any stumblings or falterings of the moment will not make any difference in her attitude to the sadhak. The Mother thinks you must have had a wrong impression about her putting her hand just a little only — for she was just the same with you inwardly as always and there had been no reason why there should be any change.

17 April 1933

*

If the Mother does not put her hand on the head in Pranam, it does not mean that she is displeased — it may have quite other causes. People have this idea but they are quite mistaken. Some time ago the Mother failed to put her hand on the head of a sadhika at Pranam for two days. People mocked at her and looked down at her. As a matter of fact she was having remarkable realisations and getting more power from the Mother at Pranam than on ordinary days. The whole idea is an error.

2 August 1933

*

I could not understand the Mother's intention in not blessing me with her hand when I made pranam.

There was no intention. It has happened with others but always when Mother was in trance or absorbed within. It does not in the least depend on the condition of the sadhak and has no meaning against him.

26 September 1933

*

It seems someone has said that I take too long in doing pranam and Mother is a little annoyed. Is this true? In my ignorance I am unable to grasp her hints.

It is true that you take too long in the Pranam — Mother gave you several hints but you did not seem to understand. If it were not for the overlong time taken by the Pranam with so many people, Mother would not mind — but it is becoming impossible because people take so long in coming to make their pranam. It is better if you take only a short time. The power of the blessing does not depend on the length of the pranam made.

22 October 1933

*

It is entirely untrue that Mother was pushing you away today. There may be days when she is absorbed and therefore physically inattentive to what her hand is doing. But today she was specially attentive to you and at the Pranam she was putting force on you for peace, tranquillity and the removal of the difficulty. If she at all acted by the palm or anything else, it was for that she was acting. About this there can be no mistake, for she was specially conscious of her action and purpose today. What must have happened was that something must have felt the pressure and intervened and persuaded your physical mind by suggestion that it was *you* she was pushing away, not the difficulty. This is a very clear instance of how easy it is for the sadhaks to make a wrong inference and think that the Mother is doing the very opposite of what she is doing. Very often when she has concentrated most to help them by pressing out their difficulties, they have written to her, "You were very severe and displeased with me this morning." The only way to avoid these wrong reactions is to have full psychic confidence in the Mother, believing that all she does is for their good and out of the Divine Mother's care for them and not against them. Then nothing of this kind will happen. Those who do that, can get the full help of her concentration even if in her absorption she does not touch the head or smile. That is why I have constantly told the sadhaks not to put their own interpretations on the Mother's appearance or actions at the Pranam — because these interpretations may always be wrong and make an opening for an unfounded depression and an attack.

23 January 1934

*

X complained to me that the Mother did not put her hand on her head at Pranam today.

Too much demand in people's minds so that the Mother seldom feels free to do what is best. Pranam and the rest have their importance, but they ought not to feel upset or frustrated by the smallest change. Each ought to learn to have a sufficient inner life and inner connection to fall back on that whenever the outer is changed or interrupted.

14 June 1934

*

What to write of my miserable condition? Today, when I expected the Mother to hold me up a little more, I got the reverse. But perhaps it is necessary to make a man suffer sometimes.

Mother put her hand just as usual. Not only so, but as she saw your condition needed special help, she tried to give it. But when you are in this condition, it is unfortunate that you are so much occupied with the feeling of misery as to feel nothing else, nothing that does not minister to or increase the misery. Support you always have; there is absolutely no reason why we should withhold it. If anyone is in serious trouble in this Asram, that falls on us and most on the Mother — so it is absurd to suppose that we should take pleasure in anyone suffering. Suffering, illness, vital storms (lusts, revolts, angers) are so many contradictions of what we are striving for and therefore obstacles to our work. To end them as soon as possible is the only will we can have, not to keep them in existence.

If you could only acquire the power to detach yourself somewhere in you when these storms come, not to be swept away by the push or the thoughts that rise! Then there would be something that could feel the support and be able to react against these forces.

28 June 1935

*

It was not because of any fault of yours that the Mother gave only a short blessing; she has to do that for all who come at the beginning because they need to go quickly to their work. If you want a longer blessing, you must come afterwards. But, when you have to come early, you can get as much out of the Mother's short blessing, if you are quiet and open.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 541-53)

‘MAY ONLY THE INSTRUMENT REMAIN’

May 3, 1914

O DIVINE LOVE, supreme Knowledge, perfect Oneness, at every moment of the day I call to Thee so as to be nothing but Thou alone!

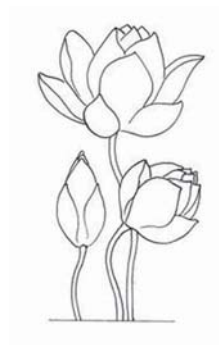
May this instrument serve Thee, conscious of being an instrument, and may all my consciousness, merged in Thine, contemplate all things with Thy divine vision.

O Lord, Lord, grant that Thy sovereign Power may manifest; grant that Thy work may be accomplished and Thy servitor be consecrated solely to Thy service.

May the “I” disappear for evermore, may only the instrument remain.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 134)



**K. D. SETHNA AND P. BRUNTON —
CORRESPONDENCE & ADDITIONAL MATERIAL**

(A Compilation)

(Continued from the issue of September 2014)

“Jasmine Villa”, Hyderali Road, Mysore
23rd August, 1944

My dear Sethna,

Thank you for sending me the copy of *All India Weekly* containing your article on “The Birthday of Sri Aurobindo”. I found it particularly interesting because it includes a topic we discussed a couple of years ago and I must say the views you express therein seem more acceptable now to me than they did then, although still not completely so.

I wrote you a long letter on July the 14th. So will now conclude with my best wishes for your literary career, and with my peace.

Paul Brunton

[The essay mentioned above reproduced from *The Thinking Corner: Causeries on Life and Literature*, 1996, pp. 22-26.]

SRI AUROBINDO’S 72ND BIRTHDAY

On the fifteenth of this month, August, Sri Aurobindo reaches the age of seventy-two. But immediately we state that fact our minds are filled with a sense of contradiction. We used to speak of Tagore advancing in years and we speak now of Gandhi growing old: nothing strange is felt by us in our utterances. Sri Aurobindo, however, makes any calculation in terms of age a falsity.

Fundamentally such a calculation errs because of Sri Aurobindo’s mysticism. Both Tagore and Gandhi can be called great, but their greatness is of the human and not the divine type. The essence of Tagore is the poet, of Gandhi the moralist, of Sri Aurobindo the mystic. Though Tagore and Gandhi cannot be considered devoid of

mysticism, the mystical Reality is in them an indirect power. The indirectness is shown by their predominant aims. The mystic in quest of the divine Spirit does not hold it as his predominant aim to write a *Gitanjali* or to practise *satyagraha*. Sri Aurobindo is a poet of the highest order and the moralist's effort at detachment from gross animal desires and egoistic motives finds fulfilment in him, but poetry and morality are not his ends: they are only the means of his master-passion. His master-passion is not brilliant poetic achievement for its own sake or the triumph of a human virtue: it is the sheer surpassing of the human level, the continuous union with the Supreme Being and the direct expression of that Being in all the ways of our nature.

Now, the Supreme Being is, first and foremost, a mighty transcendence of time and life, and infinite Consciousness and Bliss immutably seated above the waxing and waning of the world's years. A grand stanza of the ancient Upanishads, translated with revelatory force by Sri Aurobindo, catches in words that sovereign status: "There the sun shines not and the moon has no splendour and the stars are blind; there these lightnings flash not nor any earthly fire. For all that is bright is but the shadow of His brightness and by His shining all this shineth." What the *rishis* in the past attained is present in Sri Aurobindo, and he stands, among things that vary and fade, a smiling Eternity unbarred by appearances, unmarred by phenomena. To such a realisation how shall we apply our measure of moments and confine it within an age of seventy-two? Is it not incongruous to think of the Spirit's timeless plenitude that is Sri Aurobindo's deepest self as growing old as men grow old who live in the clutch of the temporal and the mortal?

But the Eternity that is above time and life is not the sole cause of the contradiction we feel. The divine Spirit is not utterly the opposite of time and life. When the Upanishads chant, "by His shining all this shineth", they do more than trace the source of our cosmos in the beyond. While opening our world-beglamoured eyes to the Truth whose infinity no light of earth equals, they do not cut off earth's light from that Truth. It is God who has emanated the world, the world is at bottom His own stuff of divinity: omnipresent, He pervades occultly all phenomena. The many-sided vision of the Upanishads no sooner found tongue in the grand stanza about the supra-cosmic "There" than it followed up with another as grand about the cosmic "Here" of the Divine. In Sri Aurobindo's vivid, vibrant and wide-sweeping English this Sanskrit mantra runs: "The Eternal is before us and the Eternal is behind us and to the south and to the north of us and above and below and extended everywhere. All this magnificent universe is nothing but the Eternal." A mystic *par excellence*, Sri Aurobindo is inwardly one with a Cosmic Consciousness supporting with a limitless peace a limitless activity, with an indivisible singleness a myriad variety of forms. Not this one body alone which we know as Sri Aurobindo is his reality. It cannot circumscribe the far-stretched continuity of his being and his becoming. In all quarters he feels his own self at work. He overflows the span of an

individual life. The march of the centuries is not alien to him, the rising and falling and rising again of the endless energy around us is part of him in the union he has realised with the Beauty of ancient days that is ever new. Can seventy-two years in one particular physical form sum up such an existence?

When we have seen mysticism in its cosmic aspect as well as in its transcendental, we have still not said the last word about Sri Aurobindo. There is yet another aspect — the individual — rendering the concept of old age inapplicable to his seventy-two years. And here he brings a mystical achievement that goes further than any spirituality known in the past. Our universe is not merely the occult omnipresence of the Divine: it is also meant to be His manifestation. The immense unity and the immense multiplicity are pressing forward to express in the cosmic formula a divine life taking its start in the individual soul-spark which is enshrined in creatures and which one of the Upanishads englished by Sri Aurobindo sums up with intuitive intensity: “The Purusha that is within is no larger than the finger of a man; he is like a blazing fire that is without smoke; he is lord of his past and his future; he alone is today and he alone shall be tomorrow.” An intricate evolution focussing itself in individuals and proceeding through rebirths of the individual soul is worked out from a beginning and a base that appear to be the opposite of everything divine. All mystics talk of evolving and manifesting the perfect Light: the perfect Light, according to them, can throw an aureole round life’s hours and express sublimities and sweetnesses of a superhuman kind in the human mould. Yet a bound has been felt by all mystics, an irreducible imperfection in our members that compels us ultimately to drop them and look for the end of our soul’s journey in a plane that is not terrestrial — a Vedantic Brahmaloaka, a Buddhist Nirvana, a Vaishnavite Gokula or Heaven. Sri Aurobindo says that if the universe is meant to be the Divine’s manifestation, there must lie in the bosom of the Spirit the secret of the universe’s fulfilment. In some hidden Consciousness must be waiting the archetype, the perfect ideality of our whole embodied nature. He calls that Consciousness Supermind or Gnosis. The gnostic plane has created the evolutionary process. Our evolving nature is upheld by a truth of its terms, a truth of its varied individuality in the gnostic plane and it has been created for expressing fully on earth itself this prime perfection. To incarnate again and again in order finally to escape beyond for good does not justify the Soul’s incarnating travail. And our terrestrial nature can have no divine *rationale* unless it be capable of being completely divinised. Have not our mind, our vital force and our physical form derived from God’s self and substance? Surely then they are here for a Godlike existence and not simply to be used awhile and thrown aside: past yogis used them thus and threw them aside because the dynamics of the supramental Gnosis were not adequately possessed. A Godlike existence can signify nothing save living no longer on any level a victim to ignorance, incapacity, failure. From top to toe God must make us His habitation. From the highest peak of the mind down to the lowest chasm of the body we must

live in the Immortal's consciousness.

The implications of such a living are almost incredible: they posit as a last rapturous result a physical transformation, a change of our very stuff of matter, so that the mortal in us puts on immortality in the most palpable sense! Ever since man awoke to his own incompleteness and to a perfect Presence concealed behind phenomena the dream of a divine earth has haunted him. He has sought the *elixir vitae* along a multitude of paths. Disappointment has met him wherever he has searched, for the right mode of searching has never been found by him. Even his spiritual masters have told him that though the terrestrial scene can display the paradisaical lustre he cannot hope for an integral manifestation. Now comes Sri Aurobindo and proclaims that the earth-scene would never have been set by the Divine except for an integral display and manifestation of Himself, and that, however strange it may seem to the disease-suffering, decay-enduring, death-accepting experience that has been ours so far, a divinised body immune to "crass casualty" and harmonious with the undying Spirit that descends into it is a miracle inevitable in the long and arduous but all-consummating Yoga he is doing today and offering to all who follow in his footsteps.

It must be made clear that the Aurobindonian Yoga is not for selfish seekers of health and longevity. The physical transformation is the fifth act to a drama in which egoistic desire dies at every turn of the plot and only a vast aspiration for God goes from strength to strength. It is God and not the ego who, in answer to the aspiration, flowers in the mind, the *élan vital* and the body. No attachment to things gross is at the back of the body's change: the thirst for divine integrality alone is the alchemist. The body's change is insisted on as a grand finale because Sri Aurobindo deems it a slur on God's creative vision and a blindness to our *raison d'être* in a God-emanated cosmos to leave any part of our complex being as radically impotent to be perfect. And not just the philosopher of the Integral Yoga does Sri Aurobindo act: mystical realisation is his work and his philosophy is born from his experience. By mystical realisation he moves ahead of mysticism's glorious past to the most golden lustre our time-process can enjoy — a future in which his so-called old age will prove a prelude to a radiant renovation of the physical cells in a manner we can scarcely imagine.

Sri Aurobindo, therefore, is not only unlike a non-mystic advanced in years; he is also unlike any other mystic bearing grey hair. To look at August 15 as bringing him to the dangerous ripeness of seventy-two is to forget this unique difference. His birthday is the symbol of a step forward in the complete birth of the Divine in the human.

(To be continued)

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of September 2014)

Chapter: XXXVI

Thus Spake Silence

The condition of my mind is different now . . . henceforth I am not under my will; like a puppet I have to go wherever God takes me, do whatever He makes me do.

Literal rendering from Bengali of an extract from Sri Aurobindo's letter to Mrinalini Devi, dated the 17th of February 1908.¹

THIS candid confession by Sri Aurobindo that was meant to be confidential reveals the great change that had come over him and it may not be an exaggeration to say, a kind of change that was not expected by the person who was instrumental in bringing this about as well as for Sri Aurobindo himself.

In chapter XXIV we have seen the tumultuous reception that awaited Sri Aurobindo at Baroda, his old familiar city where he had passed thirteen years, outwardly keeping himself confined to the Maharaja's secretariat, the college, his not-too-large circle of friends, his studies, writing and practice of Pranayama, though secretly doing much more towards the later period of his residence.

We do not know how, but the city, unlike any other capital town of the princely States, had become notorious in the eyes of the colonial administration for its anti-British stance, if not for activities clearly related to that. It is surprising and intriguing that even five years after Sri Aurobindo left Baroda, a congeries of high-ranking British officials wrote in a "secret Internal" communication addressed to the person highest in the hierarchy, "The Most Hon'ble the Marquis of Krewé, K. G., His Majesty's Secretary of State for India":

In 1902 (sic), Arabinda Ghose entered the Gaekwar's service, for a time acted as His Highness's Private Secretary (sic) and, subsequently, held an appointment as the Vice-Principal of the Baroda College, where his lectures on political subjects led eventually to his leaving Baroda (sic). There can be no question

but that his employment in the State gave a great impetus to the anti-British movement. Several Baroda State officials were his close friends, notably one K. G. Deshpande, Assistant to the Sar-Subha of Baroda, who was the prime instigator of a movement to establish national schools. There is ample evidence that the teaching of one of these schools which was originally established at Ganganath on the borders of Baroda and British India and later removed to Baroda, is nationalist and anti-British in character, and that it is closely associated with the extremist party.²

If, unknown to us, Sri Aurobindo's presence had given birth to an unexpressed love for nationalism in many, it became eminently evident during his return to the city, albeit for a short time, now as a political leader. Crowds not only followed him right from the railway station up to Khaserao Jadav's mansion that had been his residence for the greater part of his stay at Baroda, but also pressed around it for a glimpse of him. Local leaders were busy organising receptions and talks. Sri Aurobindo gave three talks at different venues in the city and once met the Maharaja Sir Sayajirao at the latter's invitation. The Maharaja continued to nurture a respect for Sri Aurobindo. However, he did not respond to yet another invitation from the Maharaja.³

But unknown to all barring a few of his confidants, he was pursuing a discipline that would reveal to him the infinite promise and possibility his consciousness treasured.

As we know, he had already had numerous mystic experiences and visions for some years past. (See Chapter XXII in May 2013 of the *Mother India*, 'The Two Mutually Complementary Movements'.) But his routine, particularly pertaining to his long hours of Pranayama, had been disrupted under the pressure of political exigencies, resulting in some difficulties. He wished to discuss this personal issue with some experienced Yogi and it was a golden coincidence that the one to suit his demand had been identified by Barindra Kumar. He was Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, a Maharashtrian Yogi whom Barindra Kumar had known during his visit to Swami Brahmananda's Ashram at Ganganath. Called by a telegram, the Yogi met Sri Aurobindo at Khaserao Jadav's house the very day Sri Aurobindo arrived there. Despite the presence of numerous people around them Barindra Kumar managed to arrange for an exclusive meeting between Sri Aurobindo and the Yogi for half an hour.

Records Barindra Kumar:

When he had left I asked my brother how he found him so far as the Yogi was concerned. Aurobindo said in his characteristic cryptic way, "Lele is a wonderful Yogi."⁴

That day and for the next three or four days, Sri Aurobindo had no respite from his admirers and public programmes. But Lele insisted that Sri Aurobindo break away from his hectic routine and devote a full week to what the guide had to impart to him.

At that time nothing was more difficult than this to arrange. Aurobindo had become the idol of the nation and a wonderful halo surrounded him producing a mysterious magnetic attraction for him in the hearts of our young men. Anybody, who was in national work anywhere, and needed help sought his advice and guidance. Day in and day out, crowds surrounded our house and programmes of public meetings were being arranged for him.

Lele suddenly spirited Aurobindo away from the midst of all this commotion to a lonely old place tucked away in the heart of the city. There, day in and day out, the two of them sat wrapped in deep meditation facing each other. Their simple needs were looked after by Vishnu Bhaskar's wife, a matriculate girl of small stature and of very subdued nature.

Seven days passed almost in continuous and silent meditation while batches of young men traversed the town in search of their newly-found leader who had so suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from among them upsetting all their crowded programmes and arrangements. When Aurobindo was at last permitted to come out and attend a meeting in the famous gymnasium there among his ardent admirers, a great and abiding peace had descended on him which from thence forward formed the basis of all his future Sadhana.⁵

Sri Aurobindo's yogic sessions with Lele took place at the top floor of a large house belonging to Sardar Majumdar. On several occasions Sri Aurobindo has spoken about the event in conversation and correspondence. A statement written in May 1932 to correct some incorrect impressions of a seeker covers several aspects of this rendezvous; it reads:

I think you have made too much play with my phrase "an accident", ignoring the important qualification, "it *seemed* to come by an accident". After four years of *prāṇāyāma* and other practices on my own, with no other result than an increased health and outflow of energy, some psycho-physical phenomena, a great outflow of poetic creation, a limited power of subtle sight (luminous patterns and figures, etc.) mostly with the waking eye, I had a complete arrest and was at a loss. At this juncture I was induced to meet a man without fame whom I did not know, a Bhakta with a limited mind but with some experience and evocative power. We sat together and I followed with an absolute fidelity what he instructed me to do, not myself in the least understanding where he was leading me or where I was myself going. The first result was a series of

tremendously powerful experiences and radical changes of consciousness which he had never intended — for they were Advaitic and Vedantic and he was against Advaita Vedanta — and which were quite contrary to my own ideas, for they made me see with a stupendous intensity the world as a cinematographic play of vacant forms in the impersonal universality of the Absolute Brahman. The final upshot was that he was made by a Voice within him to hand me over to the Divine within me enjoining an absolute surrender to its will — a principle or rather a seed force to which I kept unswervingly and increasingly till it led me through all the mazes of an incalculable Yogic development bound by no single rule or style or dogma or Shastra to where and what I am now and towards what shall be hereafter. Yet he understood so little what he was doing that when he met me a month or two later, he was alarmed, tried to undo what he had done and told me that it was not the Divine but the devil that had got hold of me. Does not all that justify my phrase “it seemed to come by an accident”? But my meaning is that the ways of the Divine are not like those of the human mind or according to our patterns and it is impossible to judge them or to lay down for Him what He shall or shall not do, for the Divine knows better than we can know. If we admit the Divine at all, both true reason and Bhakti seem to me to be at one in demanding implicit faith and surrender. I do not see how without them there can be *avyabhicāriṇī bhakti* (one-pointed adoration).⁶

With the new orientation of his mind marked by a perfect silence Sri Aurobindo wondered how he could relate himself to the public through speeches expected of him. He received a clue from his guide. According to Barindra Kumar this happened at Baroda, but we find in A. B. Purani:

When Sri Aurobindo got an invitation from the Bombay National Union to address a meeting at the Mahajan Wadi on the nineteenth, he was in a fix. His mind had become calm, blank — how was he to deliver a speech? He could not very well decline the invitation as he was an active political worker and a prominent all-India leader. He asked Lele, who said that it would be all right to accept and that all would be well. Here is a description of what happened in Sri Aurobindo’s own words: “In that silent condition — without any thought in the mind — I went to Bombay. There I had to lecture at the National Union and so I asked Lele: ‘What should I do?’ He asked me to pray. But I was so absorbed in the silent Brahman Consciousness that I could not pray. So I said to him that I was not in a mood to pray. Then he replied that it did not matter. He and some others would pray and I had simply to go to the meeting and make Namaskar to the audience as Narayana and then some voice would speak. I did exactly as he told me. On my way to the meeting somebody gave me a

paper to read. When I rose to speak the impression of the headline flashed across my mind and then all of a sudden something spoke out. That was my second experience from Lele. . . .”

It was thus that Sri Aurobindo got the clue not only to the practicality of the yoga but to its dynamism. To the sadhana leading to passivity or inactivity was added the important element of divine dynamism. Not only did he understand it, but he put it to the test throughout his tour from Bombay to Calcutta. As already mentioned above, all activities initiated afterwards were taken up in the same way. The basis of his ideal of divine life as a result of complete transformation of human nature was derived from solid experience gained in the midst of a stormy political activity.⁷

The sound and the echo of speeches he delivered thereafter have receded to Time's horizon. But snatches of reminiscences available speak of their incredible effect. In 1981 a ninety-year-old hotelier of Nagpur, when gifted with an item by a customer that bore the name of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, broke into his nostalgic recollection of listening as a boy to Sri Aurobindo's speech in his city. (Sri Aurobindo was in Nagpur on the 30th of January and the 1st of February 1908). He took a vow then and there never to serve the British government and never to write "Your most obedient servant" to an English superior as was the custom. He still remembered the speaker's "beautiful choice of words" and his "displeasure" at the action of the Moderates at the Surat Congress explained "decently" without naming anybody.⁸

Reminisced A. B. Purani who attended his public meetings at Baroda, that the speeches "not only took the audience by storm but also changed the course of many lives."⁹

The renowned Vedic scholar T. V. Kapali Sastry records:

I had first heard of Sri Aurobindo under peculiar circumstances. In 1907, Bepin Pal had come down to Madras on his lecture tour and the city was all agog over his thunders on the Marina. Being caught up in the general whirlpool of the raging new spirit, I could not help attending those lectures. And it was after one of these that a friend, who was a college student then and later retired as the Principal of a local college, took me aside and said: "This Pal is a loud speaker; inspired, he orates, true, but he is not the chief leader. There is another man behind the scenes, working at the desk, giving directions. His name is Aurobindo Ghose — a saintly man, a Shakti-Upasaka." I got interested and when in the course of a year another friend returned from Nagpur where he attended a lecture by Sri Aurobindo (after the Surat Congress on his way from Bombay to Calcutta), I lost no time in getting as much information as possible from him. He was all admiration and respect while describing the leader. "He does not have a loud voice. But when he started speaking in distinctive tones,

we all felt a kind of rhythm creeping over the vast concourse and when the lecture was over, we woke up as if from an enchantment,” he said.¹⁰

It is amazing that such was the impact of his speeches even though he spoke in English — and without a microphone.

On or around the 10th of January Sri Aurobindo left Baroda for Bombay. It was severe winter but Sri Aurobindo was moving about wearing a simple shirt. He carried no bedding. “While travelling he slept on the sitting board and used his hand for pillow.” “Sardar Majundar presented Sri Aurobindo with a Pashmina shawl.”¹¹ Barindra Kumar took a train to Kolkata at Mumbai. Sri Aurobindo arrived at Pune on the 11th and stayed with Tilak. On the 13th he addressed an audience of over four thousand people.

Next day he returned to Bombay and spoke to an impressive audience at Girgaum on the 15th. The subject was “National Education”. The long police report, based on the news of the event published in the *Kesari* and other papers, also speaks about Sri Aurobindo’s next lecture at Mahajanwadi on the 19th of January and observes:

Though the hand-bills announcing the lecture were published only four hours before the time fixed for the lecture, over three thousand people gathered to hear Babu Arvind Ghose. He alluded to the heavy sentence passed on the printer of the *Yugantar* and remarked that the secret of the new awakening in Bengal lay in a firm belief in the justice of the national cause and an abiding faith in God. Our helplessness, he continued, when contrasted with the might of the ruling class, gave rise to a feeling of despondency in ordinary people and made them look upon the efforts of the National party as those of lunatics. But the national movement in Bengal was based on the fact that what seemed impossible to ordinary minds was easy to those who had unshakable faith in God.¹²

The extempore speech that became famous began like this:

My Fellow-Countrymen, Mr. Ranade has said that there is no President here, but that God himself is our President. I accept that remark in the most reverent spirit, and before addressing you, I ask Him first to inspire me. I have been asked to speak on the “Needs of the Present Situation”. What is the present situation? What is the situation of this country today? Just as I was coming in, this paper (*showing the copy of the ‘Bande Mataram’ newspaper*) was put into my hands, and looking at the first page of it, I saw two items of news, “The *Yugantar* Trial, Judgment delivered, the Printer convicted and sentenced to two years’ rigorous imprisonment.” The other is “Another Newspaper Prosecution, The *Nabasakti* Office sacked and searched, Printer let out on a bail of Rs. 10,000.” This is the situation of the country today. Do you realise

what I mean? There is a creed in India today which calls itself Nationalism, a creed which has come to you from Bengal. This is a creed which many of you have accepted when you called yourselves Nationalists. Have you realised, have you yet realised what that means? Have you realised what it is that you have taken in hand? Or is it that you have merely accepted it in the pride of a superior intellectual conviction? You call yourselves Nationalists. What is Nationalism? Nationalism is not a mere political programme; Nationalism is a religion that has come from God; Nationalism is a creed which you shall have to live. Let no man dare to call himself a Nationalist if he does so merely with a sort of intellectual pride, thinking that he is more patriotic, thinking that he is something higher than those who do not call themselves by that name. . . .¹³

The speech of 19th January clearly showed the profundity that marked his call to the nation; it was far more than political, yet not at all aloof from the reality of the day. Descending from silence, this speech and the others to come were examples of a spontaneous harmony between ideas mystic and pragmatic.

Concentrating on this phenomenon we can come almost close to visualising how Lord Krishna could be what he was behind his appearance — and outwardly and simultaneously act as Arjuna's charioteer.

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

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3. A. B. Purani: *Life of Sri Aurobindo*; and Barindra Kumar Ghose: *Sri Aurobindo as I understand Him*. According to Purani, Sri Aurobindo did not meet the Maharaja again because Lele forbade him to do so.
4. Barindra Kumar Ghose: *Sri Aurobindo as I understand Him*; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives.
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ABRAHAM LINCOLN — NOBLE AND RESOLUTE

(Continued from the issue of September 2014)

3. Lincoln — sensitive and compassionate

IN April 1832 the Black Hawk War — a brief conflict over disputed land between the settled immigrant Americans and the native American Indians led by Black Hawk — flared up and when the Governor issued a call for volunteers, Lincoln was one of the first to enlist. He was liked and was told to stand for the election of officers to become their captain. Though reluctant he consented. He easily defeated the other candidate, a Mr. Kirkpatrick, who once had been his employer and had treated Lincoln so harshly that they parted ways as he became too overbearing for Lincoln to endure. Mr. Kirkpatrick served under Lincoln but Lincoln was above all ill-feelings and never humiliated Mr. Kirkpatrick.¹ It was his first experience of leading and handling men and his compassion and courage in another incident is narrated by a co-volunteer, William G. Greene, who served under Lincoln's command:

An old Indian came to camp & delivered himself up, showing us an old paper written by Lewis Cass, stating that the Indian was a good & true man. Many of the men of the Army said, "We have come out to fight the Indians and by God we intend to do so." Mr. Lincoln in the goodness & kindness and humanity & justice of his nature stood, got between the Indian and the outraged men, saying, "Men, this must not be done, he must not be shot and killed by us." Some of the men remarked, "The Indian is a damned Spy." Still Lincoln stood between the Indian and the vengeance of the outraged soldiers . . . Some of the men said to Mr. Lincoln, "This is cowardly on your part, Lincoln." Lincoln remarked, "If any man thinks I am a coward let him test it," rising to an unusual height. One of the Regiment made this reply to Mr. Lincoln's last remarks, "Lincoln, you are larger and heavier than we are." "This you can guard against. Choose your weapons," replied Mr. Lincoln somewhat sourly. This soon put to silence quickly all charges of the cowardice of Lincoln.²

Greene added, "This is the first time or amongst the first times I ever saw Mr. Lincoln aroused. He was unusually kind, pleasant — good humoured, taking any & all things. But this was too much for Lincoln. This hushed up at once all disputes

1. See *Lincoln's Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, p. 20.

2. *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln*, Edited by D. L. Wilson, R. O. Davis, T. Wilson, pp. 18-19.

about Lincoln's courage."³ "Always on the side of justice, with the weak ever," said William Greene and "always on the side of the weak," said New Salem friend Henry McHenry.⁴ Another long-time friend, Joseph Gillespie, said Lincoln "was remarkably tender of the feelings of others and never wantonly offended even the most despicable although he was a man of great nerve when aroused".⁵ Henry McHenry recalled "all the men in the Company — as well as the Regiment to which he and they belonged loved him well — almost worshipped him." New Salem teacher, Mentor Graham, remembered that Lincoln emerged from the Black Hawk War with the reputation of a "kind-hearted and noble man who did his duty well without fear."⁶

Years later, journalist Noah Brook said this of Lincoln, "No man living has a kinder heart."⁷ Mr. Lincoln "had very great kindness of heart," recalled another lawyer-friend, Leonard Swett. "His mind was full of tender sensibilities; he was extremely humane, yet while these attributes were fully developed in his character and unless intercepted by his judgment controlled him, they never did control him contrary to his judgment. He would strain a point to be kind, but he never strained to breaking. . . . He would be just as kind and generous as his judgment let him be — no more."⁸ Even in his younger days Lincoln was compassionate. A few incidents come to mind.

One day he helped some neighbours put up the frame of a new house and then while walking home found a stray horse without the rider. Lincoln recognised the horse and looked for the owner and found him lying on the ground, drunk. His companions urged him to leave the drunk alone but Lincoln picked him up on his shoulders and carried him to the nearest house and sent word to his father that he would not return until morning, and spent the night helping the drunk to recuperate.⁹

Once while riding horseback he passed a pig caught in a mire. His first instinct was to stop and extricate the animal but he decided against it because he did not want to soil his newly purchased suit. As he rode on he could not rid himself of the vision that the pig was undergoing a slow death in the thick sludge. After riding two miles further, his conscience pricked him and he returned to extricate the pig with considerable difficulty and at the cost of ruining his clothes. Lincoln pondered if this act was benevolence on his part but then concluded that going to the pig's relief was pure selfishness, for, as he candidly explained to a friend, "It was to take a pain out of my own mind."¹⁰ In another incident, when riding in the country with five companions he stopped to put some fallen bird chicks back into their nest, much to

3. Website: www.mrlincolnandfriends.org (W. H. Herndon interview with W. G. Greene, May 30, 1865)

4. Website: *Ibid.* (Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress)

5. Website: *Ibid.* (D. L. Wilson and R. O. Davis, *Herndon's Informants*, p. 181)

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8. Website: www.mrlincolnandfriends.org (Leonard Swett's letter to W. H. Herndon, January 17, 1866)

9. See *Lincoln's Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, pp. 13-14.

10. See *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

the amusement of his companions. He responded, “Gentlemen, you may laugh but I could not have slept tonight, if I had not saved those birds. Their cries would have rung in my ears.”¹¹

Lincoln underlined his philosophy to his long-time friend, Joshua Speed, “Speed, die when I may, I want it said of me by those who know me best that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow.”¹²

An interesting incident reflects Lincoln’s deep gratitude to his step-mother, who, besides his sister, was his only source of love and affection during his childhood. Early in his legal career he had a windfall of \$500 and wished it was \$750 to enable him to buy some land for his step-mother. A friend agreed to loan him the difference but advised that as she was getting on in years he could arrange for the property in her name during her lifetime and after her death it could revert back to Lincoln. Annoyed, Lincoln said: “I shall do no such thing. It is a poor return for all the good woman’s devotion and fidelity to me, and there is not going to be any half-business about it.” And there wasn’t.¹³

In May 1858, Lincoln took time off from his hectic schedule to help his old friend, Jack Armstrong, whose son got involved in a fight that resulted in the death of the opponent for which he was charged with murder. Lincoln wrote to Armstrong’s wife volunteering to defend her son though it looked a hopeless task. Lincoln’s gratitude can be assessed from the letter written to his friend’s wife, which ran:

Dear Mrs. Armstrong,

I have just heard of your deep affliction, and the arrest of your son for murder.

I can hardly believe that he can be guilty of the crime alleged against him.

It does not seem possible. I am anxious that he should have a fair trial at any rate; and gratitude for your long-continued kindness to me in adverse circumstances prompts me to offer my humble services gratuitously in his behalf.

It will afford me an opportunity to requite, in a small degree, the favours I received at your hand, and that of your lamented husband, when your roof afforded me grateful shelter, without money and without price.

Yours truly,

A. LINCOLN¹⁴

A fair trial seemed unlikely on account of the uproar in the locality. Lincoln obtained a postponement of the trial and also a change of venue. When the case came to trial the chief witness testified that he saw the accused, in the moonlight,

11. Don Edward Fehrenbacher, Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 412.

12. Website: www.mrlincolnandfriends.org

13. See *Lincoln’s Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, pp. 24-25.

14. *Lincoln’s Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, p. 41.

inflict the death blow. Lincoln was equal to the occasion when he proved conclusively by the Almanac that there could not possibly have been a moon shining at that time of the month. Lincoln's subsequent cross-examination unnerved the chief witness. After that Lincoln summoned his own witnesses. The jury brought in a verdict of "Not guilty."¹⁵

Gratitude was a component of Lincoln's compassionate nature. The Mother highly valued the virtue of gratitude, once stating: "The nobility of a being is measured by its capacity of gratitude."¹⁶

William Herndon spent about 16 years as a junior law partner, getting to see him at very close quarters. He said: "Mr. Lincoln was the most generous, forbearing, and charitable man I ever knew."¹⁷ Elsewhere he wrote: "He gave me everything I wished and asked for. I never had, for one short moment, a grievance against Mr. Lincoln."¹⁸

Lincoln's compassion for fellow human beings was legendary. In the first period of his Presidency, he allowed office seekers and visitors to continually accost him for all sorts of favours which consumed his energy and disrupted his concentration. Being sensitive, he was careful not to hurt anyone's sentiments and showed remarkable tact, always having a kind word or a heartening smile for almost every visitor. His staff, in the interest of his health, tried to close his door to outsiders for longer periods so that he could concentrate on his official duties but at the time he had insisted that "they don't want much; they get but little, and I must see them." To the dismay of his aides, if a visitor came at an odd or irregular hour, Lincoln would open the door and invite the person anyway. He did admit that each visitor took away a bit of his vitality and energy and the endless public demands took their toll and wore him out. During his second tenure of Presidency, Lincoln was careful to avoid the thousands of office seekers, though he kept meeting people in distress. "The bare thought of going through again what I did the first year here, would *crush* me," he confessed.¹⁹

Lincoln was renowned for his empathy to others. Here are two of his letters written during the war years — both considered to be pieces of literature. The first was a letter to Fanny McCullough, endeavouring to alleviate her grief on her father's death:

It is with deep grief that I learn of the death of your kind and brave Father; and, especially, that it is affecting your young heart beyond what is common in such cases. In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all; and to the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares. The older have learned to ever expect it. I am anxious to afford some alleviation of your present

15. See *Lincoln's Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, pp. 27-28.

16. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 155.

17. William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Life of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 392.

18. Rufus Rockwell Wilson, editor, *Intimate Memories of Lincoln*, p. 52 (William Herndon).

19. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 703.

distress. Perfect relief is not possible, except with time. You can not now realise that you will ever feel better. Is not this so? And yet it is a mistake. You are sure to be happy again. To know this, which is certainly true, will make you some less miserable now. I have had experience enough to know what I say; and you need only to believe it, to feel better at once. The memory of your dear Father, instead of an agony, will yet be a sad sweet feeling in your heart, of a purer, and holier sort than you have known before.

Please present my kind regards to your afflicted mother.²⁰

The other was a touching letter expressing condolences to a widow who it was believed had lost five sons in the Civil War:²¹

Executive Mansion, Washington, Nov. 21, 1864

Dear Madam,

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant-General of Massachusetts, that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle.

I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save.

I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours, to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of Freedom.

Yours,
very sincerely and respectfully,
Abraham Lincoln²²

Lincoln's compassion and generosity was not limited to his own Unionists but went out even to the opposing hostile Confederates. In the midst of the Civil War, in October 1862, Lincoln visited a hospital where wounded Confederate soldiers lay. He asked a soldier whose leg had been amputated, "Would you shake hands with me if I were to tell you who I am." When the Confederate said yes, Mr. Lincoln told him, "I am Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States." The eyes of both men filled with tears.²³ Elsewhere, a Confederate colonel recalled being visited by the

20. Roy P. Basler, editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. VI, pp. 16-17.

21. Subsequently it was ascertained that only two of Mrs Bixby's sons had died.

22. See website: www.civil-war.net

23. Website: www.mrlincolnanfriends.org (Charles M. Segal, editor, *Conversations with Lincoln*, p. 210)

President, “He halted beside my bed and held out his hand. I was lying on my back, my knees drawn up, my hands folded across my breast. Looking him in the face, as he stood with extended hand, ‘Mr. President,’ I said, ‘do you know to whom you offer your hand?’ ‘I do not,’ he replied. ‘Well,’ said I, ‘you offer it to a Confederate colonel who has fought you as hard as he could for four years.’ ‘Well,’ said he, ‘I hope a Confederate colonel will not refuse me his hand.’ ‘No, sir,’ I replied, ‘I will not,’ and I clasped his hand in both of mine.”²⁴ Once, a young doctor was escorting Lincoln around in a Washington hospital to let him speak to the wounded soldiers. The escort bypassed the entrance to a large room, saying that he didn’t suppose the President wanted to go in there, as they were only Confederate rebels. “But I do want to go in there,” said Lincoln, “and don’t you call them ‘rebels’; call them ‘Johnnies.’ It sounds friendlier. Would you want to be called a ‘Yank’ and neglected because you did the best you knew?”²⁵

Lincoln’s legendary compassion earned him the title “Father Abraham” among thousands of Union soldiers. Journalist Noah Brooks recalled how the President prolonged a visit to the Virginia front in April 1863 — visiting military hospitals, “The President, with his usual kindness of heart, insisted upon going through all of the hospital tents of General Meade’s corps, and shaking hands with every one, asking a question or two of many of them, and leaving a kind word here and there. It was a touching scene, and one to be long remembered, as the large-hearted and noble President moved softly between the beds, his face shining with sympathy and his voice often low with emotion. No wonder that these long lines of weary sufferers, far from home and friends, often shed a tear of sad pleasure as they returned the kind salutation of the President and gazed after him with a new glow upon their faces. And no wonder that when he left the camp, after his long tour through it all, that a thundering cheer burst from the long lines of men as he rode away to the chief headquarters.”²⁶

During the Civil War Lincoln often went to the battlefield to visit his soldiers, at times at great risk to himself, to the consternation of his War Secretary, Edwin Stanton. The troops loved Lincoln. A soldier, reflecting universally the sentiment of all the army regiments, writes, “His benignant smile as he passed on was a real reflection of his honest, kindly heart; but deeper, under the surface of that marked and not all uncomely face, were the unmistakable signs of care and anxiety. . . . In fact, his popularity in the army is and has been universal.”²⁷

Lincoln’s love for the soldiers was well known but he had a deep empathy and concern for soldiers who were wounded whilst serving the country. Once, as he drove

24. Website: www.mrlincolnanfriends.org (Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, Vol. IV, p. 171)

25. See website www.coachwhipbooks.com

26. Website: www.mrlincolnanfriends.org (Michael Burlingame, editor, Noah Brooks, *Lincoln Observed: The Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks*, pp. 41-42)

27. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 452.

up to a hospital, Lincoln saw one of the inmates walking directly in front of his carriage, and he cried out to the driver to stop. The horses were checked none too soon to avoid running the man over. Then Lincoln saw that the poor fellow, only a boy, had been shot in both eyes. He got out of his carriage, and, taking the blind soldier by the hand, asked him in a trembling tone for his name, his service, and his residence. “I am Abraham Lincoln,” he himself said as he was leaving, and the sightless face of the youth was lit up with gratitude as he listened to the President’s words of honest sympathy. The next day the chief of the hospital laid in the boy’s hands a commission as first lieutenant in the army of the United States, bearing the President’s signature, and with it an order retiring him on three-quarters pay for the years of helplessness that until then had stretched before him through a hopeless future.²⁸

Once, he learnt that a woman he had seen in the halls of the War Department was there to secure a pass to visit her husband in the Army of the Potomac, which was against the rules, in order to show him their first-born. Lincoln did not rest until he had telegraphed for the husband to come to Washington, and a bed had been assigned to the mother and child in one of the Washington hospitals.²⁹

When Democratic attorney Usher Linder’s son Daniel enlisted in the Confederate Army and was captured by Union troops, President Lincoln sought his release. Attorney General Edwin Bates wrote that “the Prest: is anxious to gratify, the father, who is his old friend . . .” In his April 1865 eulogy of Mr. Lincoln, Linder remembered: “Mr. Lincoln did so, without any hesitation, and he took the pains — it was the day before Christmas a year ago, and it made my home happy — to telegraph me of the fact. . . . He said to me: ‘Your son has just left me with my order to the Secretary of War to administer the oath of allegiance. I send him home to you and his mother.’”³⁰

Undeniably no personal quality of Lincoln’s has become more celebrated than his compassion. Thomas Lowry studied 37,000 Civil War-era army court martial records, and discovered that 792 of them bore a notation or endorsement by Lincoln intervening in the Union Army’s military justice system time and again, to save sleeping sentries from the firing squad, reunite miscreant husbands with tearful wives, and restore last-surviving sons to their widowed mothers. In the files or cases that reached Lincoln his written comments overwhelmingly favoured clemency, even though Lincoln himself admitted that “long experience has shown that armies can not be maintained unless desertion shall be punished by the severe penalty of death”.³¹ In early 1863, Lincoln overruled the death sentence of the military courts for deserters in 96 percent of the files he reviewed. Only where meanness or cruelty was shown by the offenders did he not overrule the death sentence. In the cases of the 78 soldiers sentenced to death for sleeping at their posts, Lincoln pardoned every one

28. See website www.coachwhipbooks.com

29. See *Ibid.*

30. Website: www.mrlincolnandfriends.org

31. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 524.

of them.³² In passing upon a case of a lad condemned to death for falling asleep at his post, Lincoln said: "I could not think of going into eternity with the blood of that poor young man on my skirts. It is not to be wondered at that a boy raised on a farm, probably in the habit of going to bed at dark, should, when required to watch, fall asleep; and I cannot consent to shoot him for such an act." The impressive sequel to this act of mercy was brought to light when the dead body of this soldier boy was found on the battlefield of Fredericksburg, and next to his heart a photograph of the President, across which he had written, "God bless Abraham Lincoln."³³

Lincoln found relief and vigour when he exercised his powers of pardon. Presidential aide John Hay marvelled "at the eagerness with which the President caught at any fact which would justify him in saving the life of a condemned soldier". Lincoln acknowledged to Gen. John Eaton that some of his officers believed he employed the pardoning power "with so much freedom as to demoralise the army and destroy the discipline." Although "officers only see the force of military discipline," he explained, he tried to comprehend it from the vantage of individual soldiers — a picket so exhausted that "sleep steals upon him unawares", a family man who overstayed his leave, a young boy "overcome by a physical fear greater than his will." Lincoln's liberal use of his pardoning power created the greatest tension with his War Secretary, Edwin Stanton. Stanton felt compelled to protect military discipline by exacting proper punishment for desertions or derelictions of duty, while Lincoln looked for any "good excuse for saving a man's life." When he found one, he said, "I go to bed happy as I think how joyous the signing of my name will make him and his family and his friends."³⁴ Once, the stern Stanton apologised for rejecting an appeal of a soldier which Lincoln subsequently overturned. "No, no," said Lincoln, "you did right in adhering to your rules. If we had such a soft-hearted fool as I am in your place, there would be no rules that the army or the country could depend on."³⁵

Attorney General Edward Bates told the painter Francis Carpenter: "Mr. Lincoln comes very near being a perfect man, according to my ideal of manhood. He lacks but one thing . . . the element of *will*. I have sometimes told him, for instance, that he was unfit to be entrusted with the pardoning power. Why, if a man comes to him with a touching story, his judgment is almost certain to be affected by it. Should the applicant be a *woman*, a wife, a mother, or a sister, — in nine cases out of ten, her tears, if nothing else, are sure to prevail." Bates wrote in his diary, his "chief fear" was "the President's easy good nature."³⁶

32. See website: www.civilwarnews.com

33. Website: www.coachwhipbooks.com

34. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 539, 671.

35. See website: www.coachwhipbooks.com

36. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 675.

There are innumerable incidents of Lincoln's clemency to those who personally visited him on behalf of their loved ones. Narrated are three personal visits — amongst many — which reflect his consideration to those who approached him for pardons:

As a teenager, John M. Bullock visited the White House in the winter of 1865 in search of a parole for his dying Confederate brother. Bullock later recalled: "Much has been said and written in regard to Mr. Lincoln's character for kindness, his disposition to be merciful, his gentleness toward those in trouble, his leniency to those in distress, his clemency, and desire, when possible, to pardon those who were condemned to death. Before approaching the President I felt a natural diffidence, not to say awe, of the man who was Chief Executive of the nation, commander-in-chief of the army and navy, as well as the man who held the life of my brother in his keeping. To a boy of fifteen this feeling was only natural. The closer I approached the great man, however, the less I feared him, the higher my courage rose; and before the interview was over I was as much at my ease with President Lincoln as if talking to my own father. The reasons for this are to be found in just the qualities of heart with which he is accredited, and rightly so, by all the world. No sooner had he laid his hand upon my shoulder and said, 'My son,' than I felt drawn to him, and dreaded less and less the interview he had granted me; and each successive question he asked me put me more at my ease, until, when I was alone with him in his private office, all my embarrassment vanished, and I saw before me the countenance of a man I could trust, one which invited confidence."³⁷

A teenager was sentenced to be shot, to the great shock of his parents. Their little daughter who had read the life of Lincoln, and knew how he had loved his own children, said: "If Abraham Lincoln knew how my father and mother loved my brother he wouldn't let him be shot." That little girl went to the White House and found Lincoln surrounded by his generals and counsellors, and when he saw the little country girl he asked her what she wanted. She told how her brother, whom her father and mother loved very dearly, had been sentenced to be shot; how they were mourning for him, and if he was to die in that way it would break their hearts. The President's heart was touched with compassion, and he immediately sent a dispatch cancelling the sentence and giving the boy a parole so that he could come home and see that father and mother.³⁸

Lincoln biographer Robert Ingersoll recounts that one day a woman, accompanied by a Senator, called on the President. The woman's husband, a rebel, had been condemned to be shot and she came to ask for the pardon of her husband. The President heard her story and then asked what kind of man her husband was. "Is he

37. Website: www.mrlincolnandfriends.org (Rufus Rockwell Wilson, editor, *Lincoln Among His Friends: A Sheaf of Intimate Memories*, pp. 365-66)

38. See website: www.north27worshipcenter.wordpress.com

intemperate, does he abuse the children and beat you?” “No, no,” said the wife, “he is a good man, a good husband, he loves me and he loves the children, and we cannot live without him. The only trouble is that he is a fool about politics — I live in the North, born there, and if I get him home, he will do no more fighting for the South.” “Well,” said Lincoln, after examining the papers, “I will pardon your husband and turn him over to you for safe keeping.” The poor woman, overcome with joy, sobbed as though her heart would break. “My dear woman,” said Lincoln, “if I had known how badly it was going to make you feel, I never would have pardoned him.” “You do not understand me,” she cried between her sobs. “You do not understand me.” “Yes, yes, I do,” answered the President, “and if you do not go away at once I shall be crying with you.”³⁹

During his presidential years, his personal secretary, John G. Nicolay wrote: “Benevolence and forgiveness were the very basis of his character. His nature was deeply religious, but he belonged to no denomination; he had faith in the eternal justice and boundless mercy of Providence.” Lincoln’s other personal secretary, John Hay wrote: “He belonged to no Church. Yet he was the uncanonised saint of all the Churches.”⁴⁰ Lincoln disliked organised religion for its dogmatism and fierce sectarian disputes hence he never joined a church. But he believed in a God, a Supreme Being, who guided individual destinies and believed that the human mind is impelled to action, or held in rest by some power, over which the mind has no control. Lincoln held that, “A simple faith in God is good enough for me, and beyond that I do not concern myself very much.”⁴¹

The Mother has spoken of two categories of suffering. “The first is purely egoistic . . . The other category of suffering . . . is totally opposite in nature; it is the suffering that comes from divine compassion, the suffering of love that feels compassion for the world’s misery, whatever its origin, cause or effect. But this suffering, which is of a purely psychic character, contains no egoism, no self-pity; it is full of peace and strength and power of action, of faith in the future and the will for victory . . .”⁴² To a smaller or larger extent Lincoln symbolises the latter.

4. Lincoln — an epitome of honesty and truthfulness

Lincoln left his home when he was 22 years old and migrated to New Salem. By then his character was well formed and people in New Salem soon learned that Lincoln was utterly honest. Not only was he incorruptible but told the truth, come what may; so people always knew where they stood with him. Unlike others, he had

39. See website: www.charactercincinnati.org (compiled and written by Steve Withrow)

40. Website: www.abrahamlincolnclassroom.org

41. Website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org (Ervin Chapman, *Latest Light on Abraham Lincoln and War-time Memories*)

42. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, p. 338.

no vices like hunting, drinking, smoking or gambling. Lincoln was not influenced by others for he was independent-minded and trusted his own judgment. Due to his growing popularity and sense of fairness he was called upon to arbitrate disputes, referee fights, umpire games, and judge races.

In September 1832 Lincoln got a chance to join a business partnership at a general store. Lincoln's partner was not a shrewd businessman for they did much business on credit and then got steeply into debt when their debtors failed them. Fortunately, thanks to his pleasing demeanour, he got two part-time jobs — as a postmaster and a deputy surveyor. In 1835 his partner died, leaving Lincoln solely responsible to clear all the debts which amounted to \$1100. It was a huge sum and he could have reneged on his creditors by leaving the county, as many bankrupt businessmen previously had done. But he was determined to pay back every penny he owed — it took him about 15 years to clear the debt. After years of spotless probity he was nicknamed "Honest Abe" but strangely he detested the name, so none of his friends called him that to his face. Let us cast a glance on a few small instances of his integrity during his younger days.

Whilst working at a store he had inadvertently overcharged a woman customer by six cents. At the end of a tiring day, realising his mistake, he closed the store and walked more than two miles to refund the client. Similarly he once charged a woman customer for a half a pound of tea but realised next day he had given only 4 ounces. He then walked a long distance to deliver the remaining quarter-pound of tea.⁴³

During his legal career, Lincoln left all financial matters pertaining to his law business to his junior partner, William Herndon and it is said that he never entered any item in the account book. When someone made a payment to him for legal services, he would religiously divide it with his partner, although he was his subordinate. And if his partner was absent, Lincoln would wrap his share in a piece of paper, mark it "Case of Jones vs. Brown — Herndon's half," and deposit it in his drawer.⁴⁴ Referring to their scrupulousness and trust in financial matters lasting more than a decade and a half, Lincoln said, "Billy and I never had the scratch of a pen between us; we just divide as we go along."⁴⁵

Lincoln left Herndon in charge of the practice when he left for Congress in 1847. On his return to his law firm he refused a share of the profits although the firm was founded and established by him. Herndon, who was nurtured by Lincoln, wrote:

While a member of Congress and otherwise immersed in politics Lincoln seemed to lose all interest in the law. Of course, what practice he controlled had passed into other hands. I retained all the business I could, and worked

43. See *Lincoln's Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, pp. 17-18.

44. See *Ibid.*, p. 27.

45. Website: www.mrlincolnandfriends.org (Henry C. Whitney, *Life on the Circuit*, p. 460)

steadily on until, when he returned, our practice was as extensive as that of any other firm at the bar. Lincoln realised that much of this was due to my efforts, and on his return he therefore suggested that he had no right to share in the business and profits which I had made. I responded that as he had aided me and given me prominence when I was young and needed it, I could afford now to be grateful if not generous. I there recommended a continuation of the partnership, and we went on as before.⁴⁶

In another letter Herndon wrote about Lincoln's unparalleled integrity:

Mr. Lincoln was a kind, tender and sympathetic man, feeling deeply in the presence of suffering, pain, wrong or oppression in any shape; he was the very essence and substance of truth; and was of unbounded veracity, had unlimited integrity, always telling the exact truth, and always doing the honest thing at all times and under all circumstances. He was just to men, he loved the right, the good and true, with all his soul.

I was with Mr. Lincoln for about twenty-five years, and I can truthfully say I never knew him to do a wrong thing, never knew him to do a mean thing, never knew him to do any little dirty trick. He was always noble. In his nature he felt noble and acted nobly. I never knew so true a man, so good a one, so just a one, so incorrupt and incorruptible a one . . . he had unbounded charity for all men.⁴⁷

In his legal career, Lincoln was impeccably honest and fair. He represented all types of clients irrespective of their social status, and never overcharged his clients although, as a top lawyer, he was in a position to do so. He never compromised with his values and integrity as a lawyer, remarkable for a man in the legal profession. A note for a lecture that he had written in 1850 for young attorneys reflects his ideals as a lawyer:

The leading rule for a lawyer, as for the man of every other calling, is diligence. Leave nothing for tomorrow which can be done today. Never let your correspondence fall behind. . . .

Discourage litigation. Persuade your neighbours to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often a real loser — in fees, expenses, and waste of time. As a peace-maker the lawyer has a superior opportunity of being a good man. There will still be business enough.

Never stir up litigation. A worse man can scarcely be found than one who

46. William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Life of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 247.

47. Emanuel Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln*, p. 191. (Letter from William H. Herndon, January 15, 1874)

does this. . . .

An exorbitant fee should never be claimed. As a general rule, never take your whole fee in advance, nor any more than a small retainer. When fully paid beforehand, you are more than a common mortal if you can feel the same interest in the case as if something was still in prospect for you, as well as for your client. And when you lack interest in the case the job very likely will lack skill and diligence in the performance. Settle the amount of fee and take a note in advance. Then you will feel that you are working for something, and you are sure to do your work faithfully and well. Never sell a fee-note — at least not before the consideration service is performed. It leads to negligence and dishonesty — negligence by losing interest in the case, and dishonesty in refusing to refund when you have allowed the consideration to fail.

There is a vague popular belief that lawyers are necessarily dishonest. . . . Resolve to be honest at all events, and if in your own judgement you cannot be an honest lawyer, resolve to be honest without being a lawyer. Choose some other occupation, rather than one in the choosing of which you do, in advance, consent to be a knave.⁴⁸

Judge David Davis corroborated not only Lincoln's exceptional skill in addressing juries and his "warm-hearted" nature but also his "exceeding honesty and fairness."⁴⁹

When Lincoln was nominated by the Republicans for Presidency, Frederick Douglass, the most distinguished black man in the North, asserted that there was little difference between the Republicans and the Democrats, yet he admired Lincoln: "Mr. Lincoln is a man of unblemished private character; a lawyer, standing near the front rank at the bar of his own State, has a cool, well balanced head; great firmness of will; is perseveringly industrious; and one of the most frank, honest men in political life."⁵⁰

During Lincoln's Presidency, his friend Leonard Swett, having observed Lincoln's selflessness, said that his "ideas of money were always far from lavish. I never knew him to refuse to spend for anything he needed. Yet he was always rigidly frugal and in no way indulged in himself or others idleness or wastefulness."⁵¹ During his Presidency Mrs. Lincoln overspent on the budget for furnishing the house. Though the excess of the bills could have been easily bypassed, Lincoln would not approve these, stating, "I'll pay out of my own pocket first — it would stink in the nostrils of the American people to have it said that the President of the United States had approved a bill over-running an appropriation of \$20,000 for flub dubs for this damned old house, when the soldiers cannot have blankets."⁵² His wife once complained, "Poor

48. Abraham Lincoln, *Speeches and Letters of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 34-37.

49. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 150.

50. F. Douglass, P. S. Foner, Y. Taylor, Frederick Douglass: *Selected Speeches and Writings*, p. 393.

51. Website: www.mrlincolnandfriends.org

52. Website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org (Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington*, pp. 363-64)

Mr. L. is almost a monomaniac on the subject of honesty.”⁵³

Another aspect of his honesty was truthfulness. Dr. Jason Duncan, who knew him in New Salem, wrote, “If there was a trait of Mr. Lincoln’s character which stood out more conspicuously than any other it was his regard for truth and veracity, he had less prevarication than almost any man with whom I was ever acquainted.”⁵⁴ The Mother has said: “To speak always the truth is the highest title of nobility.”⁵⁵

Lincoln’s intimate friend, Joshua F. Speed, recalled, “Unlike all other men there was entire harmony between his public and private life. He must believe that he was right and that he had truth and justice with him or he was a weak man. But no man could be stronger if he thought he was right.”⁵⁶ One is reminded what Sri Aurobindo told his student Rajaram Patkar on the eve of his final departure from Baroda:

. . . You will come out successful and triumphant only if you remain honest and good and obey the dictates of your conscience. If you observe this dictum your path will be smooth and you will be happy.⁵⁷

Another facet of Lincoln’s honesty was keeping his word, which followed him all the way to the Presidency. In his Inaugural Speech on the day he became President he stated, “Those who nominated and elected me did so with full knowledge that I had made this and many similar declarations and had never recanted them.”⁵⁸

Even his opponents conceded that he was incorruptible, a rare honest politician who could be unbending when it came to his principles.⁵⁹ One Illinois contemporary recalled that even Lincoln’s bitter political rival Senator Stephen A. Douglas accepted Lincoln’s uprightness stating, “Of all the . . . Whig rascals about Springfield, Abe Lincoln is the ablest and most honest.”⁶⁰

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

53. See website: www.lewiselehrman.com/lincoln

54. Website: www.mrlincolnanfriends.org (Letter of J. Duncan to W. H. Herndon, late 1866-early 1867)

55. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 201.

56. Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner, editors, *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters*, p. 180.

57. *Mother India*, June 2012, p. 432.

58. Website: www.ushistory.org

59. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 58.

60. Rufus Rockwell Wilson, editor, *Intimate Memories of Lincoln*, p. 148.

REVOLUTIONARY BEYOND THE BORDERS — THE MANY LIVES OF TARAKNATH DAS

(Once mentored by Bagha Jatin, Taraknath Das visited the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the Fifties of the last century and had a special meeting with the Mother.)

India stands for world peace. World peace, in my mind means the freedom of every nationality, and I go farther and say that no nation on the face of the earth can be really free when the other nations are in bondage.¹

C. R. Das quoted by Taraknath Das

THE story of Taraknath Das illuminates our understanding of Indian settlements in North America; it explains the nature of the Indian intellectual presence abroad, and the Indian freedom struggle in the West. The compelling desire, indeed the necessity, to leave the Indian shores for greener pastures abroad for a more progressive and emancipated vision for the subjugated Indian people becomes the driving force for many. To see this significance, a brief review of the life history of Taraknath may be necessary.²

Born into a middle-class Bengali family, Taraknath Das (1884-1958) joined in early life the *Anushilan Samiti*, an anti-British secret society in colonial Bengal. He fled the country for the United States via Japan and reached Seattle on 16 July, 1907. Initially working as a farm hand to support himself in an alien land, he enrolled himself (for a while) in the University of California, while securing at the same time employment in the US Immigration and Natural Service in Vancouver, Canada. Commanded to report against his disembarking compatriots, especially from eastern India, he aided the poor and unlettered immigrants and the Sikh population of British Columbia. In 1908 he started a monthly magazine called *Free Hindustan* as well as a school for the Indian immigrants, teaching English and legal rights. According to his biographer Tapan K. Mukherjee, the presence of a large number of Asian immigrants, especially those who came from India, provoked a backlash among the White Canadians at Vancouver on 7 September 1907. As Mukherjee records:

Taraknath began organising the Indian community at the height of the Vancouver riot by forming the Hindustani Association. In an interview with a reporter from Vancouver's *Daily Province*, he said that the Hindus were coming to Canada because of high taxes and bad conditions at home, but here they

were put in even worse conditions because no one would rent them a place to live. The purpose of his formation of the Hindustani Association was to fight for the immigration rights of Hindus. The association would look after their safety and welfare, once they landed. Thomas McInnes, a secret service agent of the Dominion Government was sent from Ottawa to investigate whether Hindus from the United States instigated the riot. In a confidential report analysing the causes of public resentment against the Hindus, he identified Taraknath as the principal ring leader of Hindu agitation. During a conversation with McInnes, Taraknath defiantly declared that he was going to start a Hindu Liberation League to promote the interests of all Hindus in Canada. McInnes recommended to the Dominion Government that Hindu immigration be stopped altogether.³

Urged by his mentor Jatindranath Mukherjee (Bagha Jatin), Taraknath joined the Norwich Military Academy in Vermont, U.S. in 1908 in order to train himself for armed insurrection in India. He received free boarding and a small scholarship. Before he joined the college, he wrote in the July issue of *Free Hindustan* spelling out his strong views regarding the freedom of India from the foreign yoke:

The policy of the British government is to plunder Hindustan and oppress the people by keeping them in utter ignorance. Her secret agents at British Columbia are scared at the educational movement among Hindu labourers. We are not afraid of threats by the London *Times*, and will do our best to get our people educated. We advocate India for the Indians, and must be governed by them. We implore the aid and sympathy of our friends all over the world to help our educational movement. Education alone can change the condition of 300 millions of people in Hindustan.⁴

His plans, however, were aborted. The British Military Attaché in Washington, Lt. Col. B.R. James asked the Chief of the second section of the U.S. Army for a confidential report about Taraknath. This is what army instructor Captain Chapman at the Vermont Academy wrote about the Indian cadet.

The man is bitterly hostile towards England, and voices his opposition on all occasions, appropriate or otherwise. He writes also for everything which will publish his communications — and writes pretty well. He makes every endeavour to speak before clubs and societies of which there are several in this vicinity, wholly unconnected with the university. His topic invariably is 'Free Hindustan'.⁵

As a result of this and other reports, Taraknath was expelled from the Military

Academy of Vermont. Back in Seattle, Taraknath completed his B.A. in Political Science, and later, aided by Seattle lawyer Edward Holton James, obtained his M.A. Records in the University of Washington show that during 1908-1915, there were nearly 20 students of Indian origin⁶ including Taraknath pursuing many disciplines at the university.⁷

Taraknath was closely associated with the Gadar Party led by Har Dayal,⁸ a fiery intellectual from Delhi who came to the US in 1911. Dayal who taught Sanskrit and Philosophy at Stanford was forced to resign because of his outspoken criticism of the British.⁹ Another close associate, Vishnu Ganesh Pingle (Pingley) was arrested in India in March, 1915 and hanged on 16 November, 1915 along with 28 other men as accused in the Lahore Conspiracy Case.

Taraknath realised that for his purpose, an American citizenship would be an essential requisite. After several efforts, he succeeded in becoming a US citizen. In 1914, he “took part in an unsuccessful Indo-German Mission to destroy the British controlled railway along the Suez Canal”. Journeying to the Far East, he studied ‘Japanese Expansion and its Significance in World Politics’. In 1917, this treatise appeared in the form of a well cited book entitled *Is Japan a Menace to Asia?* In this book Taraknath devoted considerable space to the defence of Japan and her role *vis-à-vis* China, he was quite forthright that India would never tolerate Japanese expansionism in the subcontinent. He wrote:

There are some sincere friends of India who are constantly warning the Indian people not to trust Japan because they say Japan wishes to replace British supremacy in India by her own, and Japanese rule in India will be much more tyrannical than the British. If there is such a party in Japan [which] cherishes this wild dream, it should not forget first that India is not Korea; secondly, that the India of the twentieth century is not India of the eighteenth century; thirdly, while the Indian people are anxious for their freedom, they will never welcome the Japanese or any other yoke in place of the present one.¹⁰

Here is the classic case of the Indian young man in the West who is following in the footsteps of Tagore. [Das used a quotation from Tagore in the Preface to his book and advocated Japan’s leadership in Asia, a position similar to the one by Paul Richard in his book, *The Dawn Over Asia*.] In doing so, he seems to repose faith in the eastern form of cosmopolitanism and modernity that many of his fellowmen seemed to be doing at that time. Subhash Chandra Bose would continue to do so when he led the Indian National Army much later during World War II. It is a moot point of course what the Japanese would have done in India after its occupation. Their record in the countries they occupied in the South East Asia certainly does not inspire confidence. In any case, Taraknath’s book on Japan met with excellent reviews and brought him recognition in Japan.¹¹ It must be stated at this stage that

the Japanese art critic and art historian Okakura was blind to the Japanese militarism and expansionism in Korea and other neighbouring nations. Indeed, despite serious misgivings, Tagore had to wait till 1929, during his second visit to Japan, when he spoke out in public against the dark side of Japanese culture. Similarly, while Paul Richard spoke eloquently about the fabled aestheticism of the Japanese, he remained somewhat silent about fascist forces in Japan that believed in violence and terror.

Taraknath had to witness later developments in the Far East before getting disenchanted with the leadership of Japan. Recalled to the U.S. he was convicted in the Indo-German conspiracy case in 1917, and sentenced to two years imprisonment in Leavenworth, Kansas.¹² Pressing the charge of disloyalty to his host country, the hostile prosecutor Preston declared:

Now this brings us to one of the despicable Hindus in the case, speaking from record, Taraknath Das. I believe he is the most pronounced figure of the war for infamy and treachery. I don't believe the entire war, in this country, at least had shown a greater criminal and a greater enemy and a more dangerous character to our peace and welfare than this man. At the very moment that he was in this very building — not in this very room but in the room just opposite to you here, holding up his hand and taking the oath of citizenship that he would uphold and defend his country against all enemies, foreign and domestic, at that self-same moment he had the bomb manual in his possession.¹³

The passage is worth quoting because it tells us how Das was being perceived in America, given the war hysteria. It is primarily America's well known commitment to Freedom and intellectual tradition that had attracted Taraknath to this land in the first place, a faith that would be broken very soon. Cosmopolitan America that had sided with colonial India was now prepared to side with a blatantly colonial power. It is worth noting that in jail, Taraknath made a determined effort to put his expertise in international relations to good use. The letter that he wrote to a high official in the U.S. State Department shows that he saw his role as a national liberator of India as inseparable from his commitment to the values the United States was founded upon:

I like to do my share of service for the cause of Democracy in the best possible way. If I were free today, I would have placed before our government my services so that our government would be better supplied with important news about Japan and China, so that our government would be able to establish the friendliest relations with these countries which would play the most important part in the drama of the Pacific. If you think it to be wise, please take it up with the proper authorities. I do not think that our government would be so disposed as not to use the useful services of a citizen because misunderstanding exists about his sincere intentions.¹⁴

Taraknath continued his correspondence from jail with colleagues in the Indian freedom movement based in America. Seizing an opportune moment, he prepared the draft of 'An Open Letter to the British Labour Party' and asked Sailen Ghose to get it published in *Novi Mir*, the socialist paper published by the Russian immigrants in New York. The letter is hopeful that with the winds of change blowing in the British politics, much could be expected in terms of political and social emancipation of the subject people in India:

Allow us to congratulate you for your splendid programme promising a higher order of society. If we are not mistaken, we are inclined to think that your attitude towards India has been largely determined by Mr. Ramsay A. McDonald, who possesses first-hand information about the aspiration of the Indian people. India appreciates your sense of justice. The freedom of India can be quickly achieved if the people of India are allowed to work out their destiny. But as things stand today, in India those who most sincerely aspire for freedom are either rotting in prison or are exiled in the Andaman Islands. We learn from press reports that the British Labour Party has demanded the release of political prisoners in India and Egypt, especially thousands of those who are victims of the most elastic and pernicious Defense of India Act.

Our aspiration is to achieve the political, economic, and industrial freedom of the people of India. Sooner or later, this goal will be achieved by the efforts of the Indian people and through the cooperation of all those who sincerely love liberty. There is no power on earth to crush it forever.

The British Labour Party, championing the cause of the Freedom of India, should help us so that Indian political prisoners, the torch bearers of liberty, be released, because they would be the real vanguard of the March of Indian Freedom. Long live the cause of political, economic and industrial democracy in all lands and all ages.

(Sd). Sailendranath Ghose
Indian National Party

Notice the idealistic urge in the language and style, and the desire to see the liberation of India as inseparable from the question of the larger emancipation of mankind. This is characteristic of most of the writings of Taraknath. The modern project, for him, is inalienably part of the cosmopolitan approach to life. After release, Taraknath went back to studies. However, trouble never left him. He was disenfranchised in 1923, thanks to a new regressive legislation enacted by the Supreme Court of America. This did not deter him, though. His book *India in World Politics*, a brilliant study, dedicated to the 'Cause of World Peace with Justice and Liberty of all Peoples' was published by B. W. Huebsch, New York, 1923, with a fine introduction by his teacher/mentor Robert Morss Lovett.

Lovett wrote in brilliant and adulatory terms in the Introduction highlighting the importance of Taraknath's book in the contemporary context:

The classic and typical case of empire in the world today is that of the British, and the core of that empire is India. Never before has a single group of such magnitude been held in subjection to another. The British Empire has indeed two aspects, that presented by the association of self-governing commonwealths and that presented by the foreign possessions of which India is incomparably the chief. When they think of the former, British statesmen have ceased to think imperially, they have learned to think in terms of commonwealths. When they think of India, though they profess and even believe that their thought is entirely in the interest of India's welfare, they necessarily think in terms of British rule. India is the foundation of that imperial edifice which Lord Curzon felicitously compares to Tennyson's Palace of Art, possibly forgetting the tragedy of the soul which inhabited it. The question of imperialism, therefore, and if history means anything, this is a question which the world must continue to face with arms until it is settled by reason, is peculiarly a question of India, and the freedom of India is thus essentially an interest of the world.

It is the special merit of Mr. Das's book that he brings out, largely by citations from British authorities, the extent to which the foreign policy of Great Britain has been determined by the possession of India. Since the end of the eighteenth century, when the immense legacy of the Moguls fell into her hands, her heart has been increasingly with this treasure; and her attitude with respect to her neighbours has varied from conciliation to suspicion and hostility in the measure as their looks toward it became covetous or their gestures threatening. And on the other hand this treasure has been a challenge, a temptation, and an example to her rivals, who, moreover, have not failed to take advantage of this preoccupation of Great Britain to disturb her domestic security by alarms and to embroil her people in distant quarrels. It was the Napoleonic feint toward India that made the enmity of Great Britain implacable. It was the advance of Russia in Asia that committed Great Britain to the long continued policy of favouring the Turks. The possession of India determined the Asiatic policy of Great Britain, and her relations with Persia, Japan, and, to a greater extent than appears on the surface, with China. Fear for the Suez route to India forced Great Britain's hand against Egypt, and jealousy of the Bagdad route arrayed her against Germany. It is not too much to say that this gold hoard in the East caused Great Britain, like the giant . . . to turn herself into a dragon, watchful, warlike, and ready to rush from its cave breathing fire, its existence a curse and a menace. Only this must be added, that instead of a mass of metal, the treasure over which Great Britain stands guard is composed of human beings. It would be a subject for a companion study to this of Mr.

Das's to show how this tortuous and faithless foreign policy finds its reflection point by point in India, in a domestic regime of suppression and cruelty.¹⁵

Taraknath is conscious of his location in the United States even as he surveys the position of India on the global scene. He makes a conscious appeal to his American audience and attempts to win them over to the side of the Indian cause on grounds of shared civilisational values. For him, independence from the British rule is more than a political need, it is vital for India as a future civilisation. He wrote:

American political philosophy, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the greatest of political documents, is influencing India's struggle for freedom, as it has served as an impetus to establish a republic in China. America will find in India a friend of immense potential strength. But if an Anglo-American Alliance be the guiding principle of American international policy, is she then prepared to go to war to uphold British imperialism? All Asia and such European nations as are suffering from British world domination will not look favourably on the proposed Anglo-American Alliance. America, true to her traditions of a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people," should not under any circumstances ally herself with a nation keeping hundreds of millions under subjection.¹⁶

As we approach the end of the book that underlines the role of India in world politics, we find a sudden change in the authorial style. Instead of the hard-boiled political analysis that has been followed in the major part of the volume, there is a distinct alteration of the idiom and style towards the end. The tone becomes declamatory and exhortative. India's freedom from foreign yoke becomes supremely important; indeed, it seems to be divinely ordained for the betterment of all peoples around the globe. As Taraknath declares:

India, the greater India, is a fact today, for her children are now scattered to the seven corners of the world, but they are treated as slaves and the title of an Indian of however high standing is no better than that of a coolie. Today every Indian is marked with the badge of slavery, and slaves cannot command due respect and equal opportunity. Freedom, absolute independence must be achieved so that hundreds of millions of people in India may contribute their fullest expression of manhood and womanhood, and work for human liberty and world peace. So far as we can judge, India has a higher destiny than merely to be a factor in the British imperial system, providing balance of power in Asia, Africa, or Europe to Britain's advantage. Her future is to play a role in world politics independently. European balance of power will be influenced by the Federated Republic of the United States of India, free from all foreign

control, because all nations will have independent relations with free India, and the magnitude of Indian support politically and economically will not be a negligible factor. China and India lived for more than three thousand years without a war. If China and India can cooperate, it is quite feasible that it will bring about a new peaceful equilibrium of Asia, if not the world.

A free India will cooperate with all nations, not excluding England. It may be that if British policy changes and there be common interest of preserving peace between the United States of India and England there will be cooperation. If the Republic of India does not embark on an imperialistic policy of her own, she will serve as a check against any aggression against China, Persia and other nations. If Japan gives up her imperialistic scheme it is not too much to think that there can be Indo-Japanese cooperation to preserve peace in Asia. The Republic of India will be on the friendliest terms with the United States of America, the greatest of all republics, and this will help to insure better understanding between the nations of the world. World peace is India's ideal. Mr. C. R. Das, the President-elect of the All India National Congress of 1922, speaks for India when he says: "India stands for world peace. World peace, in my mind means the freedom of every nationality, and I go farther and say that no nation on the face of the earth can be really free when the other nations are in bondage."¹⁷

Two years later, Taraknath Das received the first Ph.D. from the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University. With Mary Keatinge Morse, founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, who became his wife, Taraknath set up 'The Mary Keatinge Das Fund' in 1935 to help promote educational and cultural ties among nations. It still exists today at the Columbia University as the Taraknath Das Foundation,¹⁸ New York. With a restored citizenship in 1946, Das continued to speak for India — (he was greatly disillusioned by the Indian Partition) — in the West till his passing in 1958.

The centre stage of this eventful life was clearly the debate Taraknath carried out with the celebrated Russian writer, pacifist and internationalist, Leo Tolstoy in 1908. Tolstoy's essay on the necessity of adopting peaceful methods for Indian independence, and the spirited rejoinder by Taraknath, appeared serially in the *20th Century Magazine*. Each side wrote with passion and conviction, each relied on documented facts, their language characterised by razor sharp wit and erudition.

Tolstoy's essay 'A Message to Young India' remains central to texts of this kind. Beginning on a sympathetic note, Tolstoy wrote:

I received your letter and the two issues of the magazine. Both were intensely interesting to me; indeed, the oppression of a majority is a phenomenon which has always occupied my mind and at present is entirely occupying my attention.

I will endeavour to convey to you what I think, both in particular and a general way, about these causes from which those dreadful calamities have arisen and do arise, of which you write in your letter and which are also mentioned in the two numbers of the Hindoo magazine you sent me.¹⁹

After invoking the “highly interesting writings of the Hindoo Swami Vivekananda”, Tolstoy laid out his differences on the table. Quoting Indian scriptural literature liberally, especially from the Bhagavad Gita, Tolstoy maintained:

One has already seen, not only from your letter and from the articles in Free Hindustan, but also from the entire Hindoo Political literature of our time, that the majority of the leaders of public opinion among the native races of India, while no longer ascribing any significance to those religious teachings which were professed by the Hindoo people, now find the sole possibility of deliverance from the oppression they endure, in embracing those anti-religious and subtly immoral forms of social order in which the English and other pseudo-Christian nations live today. Nothing shows more clearly the total absence of religious consciousness in the minds of the present-day leaders of Hindoo peoples, than does this tendency to instill into the hearts of the natives the acceptance of the forms of life in operation among European nations.²⁰

He added significantly:

Meanwhile in the absence of this true religious consciousness and the guidance of conduct flowing from it, in the absence which is common in our times to all the nations of the East and the West, from Japan to England and America lies the chief if not the sole cause of the enslavement of the Indian peoples by the English.²¹

In part II of ‘A Message to Young India,’ Tolstoy developed his earlier arguments, and basically blamed the Indians for the state they found themselves in. There can only be a justification of violence, he said, of pseudo science and pseudo religion. He went on to declare:

You say that the English have enslaved and keep the Hindoos in subjection because the latter have not resisted sufficiently and do not resist the violence by force.

But it is just the contrary. If the English have enslaved the Hindoos, it is because the Hindoos recognised and do recognise coercion as the main and fundamental principle of their social order. In the name of this principle they submitted to their little Rajahs, in their name they struggled with each other,

fought with Europeans, with the English, and at present are preparing to struggle with them again.

A commercial company enslaved a nation comprising two hundred millions. Tell this to a man free from superstition and he will fail to grasp what these words mean. What does it mean that thirty thousand people, not athletes, but rather weak and ill looking, have enslaved two hundred millions of vigorous, clever, strong, freedom loving people? Do not the figures make it clear that not the English but the Hindoos, have enslaved themselves?²²

Taraknath's elaborate reply was given in four parts, under the title 'Young India's Reply to Count Tolstoi'. Taraknath cited statistics from Western and Indian sources to prove the point that tyranny under any guise can never be justified. "Non-violence is an absolute Dogma . . . violence and benevolence are measured by relative value of the actions and the motives underlying them." He added in unambiguous terms: "We are believers in universal fellowship but we are intolerant of any action of exploitation of any nation, race, society, family or individuals by others." Invoking the Magna Carta of King John in 1215, he concluded: "Love is God but at the same time . . . divinity is best represented in humanity, and *resistance to despotism is first of all human duties*." [Emphasis in the original]

The debate between the two clearly threw up questions which are deeply philosophical in nature. There have been no conclusive answers then and now regarding the ethics of violence and non-violence. The conversation of Tolstoy would continue later with Mahatma Gandhi until the former's passing in 1910. Gandhi himself was deeply influenced by Tolstoy's notion of passive resistance and non-violence.

Like many of his associates of the early 20th century, Taraknath Das cherished a life of courage and idealism. He befriended some of the most noteworthy men and women of his times. Although he had differences with Indian Marxists, he enjoyed intimate friendship with several liberal intellectuals, socialists and communists in the West. As Prithwindra Mukherjee, grandson of the legendary Jatindranath Mukherjee and the author of one of the most comprehensive works on militant freedom struggle in India, wrote to me in an email from France: "Taraknath introduced his friend Professor Sailen Ghosh to Agnes Smedley", one of the most outstanding feminist revolutionaries of the 20th century. Agnes later became a close companion of the talented Viren Chattopadhyaya (Chatto), brother of Sarojini Naidu. Both lived in Germany and strove for the Indian freedom struggle until Agnes broke away from the relationship and devoted her energies to the Communist revolution underway in China under the leadership of Mao. Her ashes lie buried in a memorial in Beijing.

Another legendary revolutionary, one time associate of V. I. Lenin, and leading light of the Communist International, who would, in early life, follow Taraknath to the United States, is Narendranath Bhattacharya, who was reborn on Stanford campus

as M. N. Roy.²³ In his autobiography, Roy speaks very highly of the role of ‘veterans’ like “Bhupendranath Dutta (brother of Swami Vivekananda) and Taraknath Das before the latter went over to Germany on the outbreak of the war.”

In the second decade of the new millennium, we need to reflect upon the many lives Taraknath Das lived as an intellectual, revolutionary and internationalist. He travelled widely in many parts of the world, embraced different cultures, ideas and ideologies. He sought the liberation of India from the foreign yoke, strove for pan-Asian unity and aligned himself with the founding values of his adopted land — America. He was rooted to the Indian soil and its culture, and fashioned his own brand of cosmopolitanism, a belief in one world that respected the particularities of national cultures and civilisations.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

Notes and References

1. Taraknath Das, *India in World Politics*, New York: B. W. Huebsch 1923, p. 131.
2. A good archival source of the biography and educational career of Taraknath Das in America is the library at the University of Washington. See: <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/southAsianStudents/das.html>. A more comprehensive account in the form of a book-length study is offered by Tapan K. Mukherjee. See *Taraknath Das: Life and Letters of a Revolutionary in Exile*, Calcutta: National Council of Education, Bengal, 1977. Although quite informative, Mukherjee’s account at times makes sweeping generalisations of a complex mind. I am grateful to Anurag Banerjee of the Overman Foundation, Kolkata for passing on a copy of this valuable book.
3. See *Taraknath Das: Life and Letters of a Revolutionary in Exile*, p. 11.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
5. Leslie A. I. Chapman to W. W. Wotherspoon, January 26, 1909, R. G. 165, NA.
6. For the list of students, see <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/southAsianStudents/Students.html>
7. It must be noted that there was entrenched opposition to the presence of Indian immigrants to the United States around this time. The role of a fellow student, Jogesh Chander Misrow who attended the University of Washington and was active in the campus Cosmopolitan Club and the Hindustan Club becomes relevant in this context. ‘Earning his B.A., Misrow migrated to the Bay Area where he earned his M.A. from Stanford. In his thesis entitled ‘East Indian Immigration on the Pacific Coast’ Misrow discussed ‘the reasons for immigration and the agitation in Canada and the western U.S. for exclusion of East Indian immigrants.’ He refuted ‘the alleged [economic menace] such immigration posed.’ Such a menace appears to have the following character: as an economic burden on the public purse, secondly, as an economic menace to the American labour causing unemployment by unequal competition, thirdly, as a menace to the national wealth, according to the Economic Drain theory. This theory maintained that the regular remittances the immigrants sent to families at home constituted a drain on the local economy. And finally, such immigrants were accused of being ‘birds of passage’ not to reside permanently in the country, but to return to their native country after having achieved material prosperity. Misrow refuted such charges and added in defence that the activities of the various Indian

associations represent 'an earnest endeavour to assimilate American ideals, an endeavour which will be the more fruitful the more it evokes a spirit of sympathetic cooperation on the part of the native population of the countries of their adoption'. Note the careful manner in which Misrow is reading American cosmopolitanism as an argument for the legitimacy of Indian immigration. See, 'New Thinking, Agile and Patriotic: Hindu Students at the University of Washington, 1908-1915'. <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/southAsianStudents/misrow.html>

8. Emily C. Brown's early study *Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist*, Arizona University Press, 1975, New Delhi: Manohar, 1976, remains a sympathetic reading of a complex personality with contradictory impulses. Brown successfully brings together insights gathered from material from archival sources from many continents. There is perhaps the need of a more updated study, given the advancement in the social scientific research since the publication of Brown's critical biography. Har Dayal's revolutionary activism, widely recognised, needs to be balanced with some of his prejudiced and regressive views expressed in many of his memoirs such as his views of Germany and the Germans that he recorded during World War I.

9. Emily Brown offers a more balanced view and suggests that though Har Dayal was 'never personally identified with violence, his career was both directly and indirectly influenced by the cult of the bomb (p. 35). She finds his elusive personality difficult to pin down, but declares that he was 'heroic, incisive, imaginative, exciting and provocative', at the same time that he was 'selfish, devious, petty and pedestrian'. See the review of 'Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist' in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 96, No. 3 (Jul-Sept. 1976), p. 467.

10. *Op. Cit.*, p. 102.

11. *The Far Eastern Review* considered *Is Japan A Menace to Asia* as the magnum opus of the Pan Asia Movement. See, Mukherjee, p. 102.

12. For a record of Taraknath as a prisoner in the Leavenworth (1918-1919) see Mukherjee, pp. 144-163. He was the first Asian-Indian inmate in this federal penitentiary.

13. See *Taraknath Das: Life and Letters of a Revolutionary in Exile, op. cit.*, p. 126.

14. *Op. cit.*, p. 149.

15. Taraknath Das, *India in World Politics*, p. xiii.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 130-31.

18. See <http://sai.columbia.edu/tdas.html>

19. See 'A Message to Young India' by Count Leo Tolstoy in <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/southAsianStudents>. The editor's note at the bottom of the opening page provides the context to the debate: 'This extremely interesting message, one of the last that in all human probability will come from the pen of the great prophet of peace of Russia is printed now for the first time. It was written some months ago to Mr. Taraknath Das, editor of *Free Hindustan* in response to a letter from the editor asking for the count's views in regard to the struggle that Young India is making for constitutional government. As will be seen, Count Tolstoy takes the extreme position of non resistance which he has consistently maintained since his renunciation of a worldly, frivolous Russian noble. The second and concluding half of the Count's appeal will appear in our April issue, and it will be followed by Young India's reply, written by Mr. Das in which the author presents the cause of Young India in an exceptionally strong paper.'

20. 'A Message to Young India', See, <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/southAsianStudents>, pp. 518-19.

21. <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/southAsianStudents>, p. 519.

22. *Twentieth Century Magazine*, pp. 41-42. See 'A Message to Young India', <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/southAsianStudents>.

23. See Verinder Grover Ed, *M. N. Roy's Memoirs*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1964, p. 31; M. N. Roy, *Beyond Communism*, New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1947; rpt.1999; M. N. Roy, *Men I Met*, New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1968; rpt.1981.

THE MOMENTOUS MEETING AND THE GREAT TRANSITION

This was a seed cast into endless Time.
A Word is spoken or a Light is shown,
A moment sees, the ages toil to express.
So flashing out of the Timeless leaped the worlds;
An eternal instant is the cause of the years.

Sri Aurobindo (*Savitri*, p. 315)

An Exceptional Hour

NEARLY a hundred years back Sri Aurobindo wrote in the very first issue of the *Arya*:

We are in an age, full of the throes of travail, when all forms of thought and activity that have in themselves any strong power of utility or any secret virtue of persistence are being subjected to a supreme test and given their opportunity of rebirth. The world to-day presents the aspect of a huge cauldron of Medea in which all things are being cast, shredded into pieces, experimented on, combined and recombined either to perish and provide the scattered material of new forms or to emerge rejuvenated and changed for a fresh term of existence. ('The Synthesis of Yoga', *Arya* 15 August 1914, p. 36)

The full import of this revelation may well have gone unnoticed at that time. But when we look back from the vantage point of distance in Time we can clearly see that the twentieth century was indeed an age of new conceptions and new ideas that would have far-reaching implications upon the way humanity looks at itself and at the world at large. Many or rather most of these ideas were like seeds of light encased in a hard crust and covering of darkness that our ignorant mind sometimes provides to great things which descend upon us from the heights. The world was going through a massive shake-up, as if a great many-sided revolution had begun that would change the very face of this earth beyond recognition. Whether the changes were for better or for worse is perhaps too early to tell. Perhaps like all things in Nature they are neither. Rather, they are indicative signs that invite and caution us, surprise and inspire us, taking us to the edge of the precipice where danger sports with delight but also, in the process, open new and unprecedented horizons before our eyes which were accustomed only to the dead, mechanical routine of life. The idea challenges and attracts; it threatens and repels us. Some of

the new conceptions that emerged at the start of the previous century created anticipation and hope among those intuitively attuned to the universal will; some created awe and fear.

It is perhaps the fate of every new becoming that it comes with a double face and it is through the clash and conflict of two mutually opposing forces that the truth behind each is born. Light and Darkness are the two faces of the One Reality and each is needed for the completion of the other. But for that integrality to happen we must learn to go behind and beyond both. Nature achieves this by bringing them into a mutually opposing conflict. The conflict and the battle wear out the outer covering and release the new forces that each carried for the good of the earth. It is this that is so meaningfully conjured in the image of Rama and Ravana, Pandavas and Kauravas, Krishna and Kansa who come together and must fight as opponents. While our ordinary mind is caught up in the conflict and the confusion, the seer vision sees beyond and behind the play and declares and ushers and works for the New Dawn that is about to break after the storm has passed and the night of confusion is over.

The Mother noted something similar around the same time. While speaking to the women of Japan even as the flames of the First World War were thick, she observed:

For we are living in an exceptional time at an exceptional turning point of the world's history. Never before, perhaps, did mankind pass through such a dark period of hatred, bloodshed and confusion. And, at the same time, never had such a strong, such an ardent hope awakened in the hearts of the people. Indeed, if we listen to our heart's voice, we immediately perceive that we are, more or less consciously, waiting for a new reign of justice, of beauty, of harmonious good-will and fraternity. And this seems in complete contradiction with the actual state of the world. But we all know that never is the night so dark as before the dawn. May not this darkness, then, be the sign of an approaching dawn? And as never was night so complete, so terrifying, maybe never will dawn have been so bright, so pure, so illuminating as the coming one. . . . After the bad dreams of the night the world will awaken to a new consciousness.

The civilisation which is ending now in such a dramatic way was based on the power of mind, mind dealing with matter and life. What it has been to the world, we have not to discuss here. But a new reign is coming, that of the Spirit: after the human, the divine. . . .

Once again Nature feels one of her great impulses towards the creation of something utterly new, something unexpected. And it is to this impulse that we must answer and obey.

(CWM, Vol. 2, pp. 158-59, 161)

The Birth Pangs and Whispers of a New World:

These revolutions were clearly, to the seer vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the birth pangs of a New World. But what were the new things that were showing up as a far-off distant glimpse upon the horizons and what were the old things that were dying down before our disenchanted eyes? A quick glance will reveal this to us. The twentieth century started with certain whispers and rumblings that would soon grow into a big explosion. It declared itself through certain ideas which were to change the way we look at life. These ideas, as they grew from seed into full-fledged tree would soon make the age-old paradigms crumble.

Foremost among these ideas was **the idea of evolution** which suddenly opened up the doors of an endless possibility for the future. Creation was no more a closed and finished thing but an ever-growing process where a Conscious Force was at work, albeit wearing the mask of 'Necessity' and 'Chance'. Difficulties were actually challenges and opportunities to evolve and adapt. Perhaps Darwin who felt the hand of evolution at work himself did not realise the scope of his intuition. It was an intuition because despite all the speculative reasoning, there was never any direct observation either of the process itself, nor indirect evidence in the form of all the possible missing links. And yet science accepted the idea despite the resistances from conventional thought and the Church. The idea was not in itself new. Ancient Indian thought had already elaborated the idea of evolution which included the soul migrating through eighty-four lakh species to arrive at its fullness. This idea of evolution was almost entirely soul-centric. The evolution of forms was incidental, only so far as it helped the inmost soul to evolve, except of course in the famous myth of the *Dasavatara* where the evolution of form was given as much importance as the evolution of the consciousness. In a less elaborate way this idea was also present in ancient Greek and Egyptian thought. The novelty of Darwin, however, lay in the fact that he had arrived at these ancient truths by modern scientific thought, in keeping with the spirit of the Age. Its defect was that it missed the core of evolution, its direction or its purpose, let alone the deeper forces at play behind 'Chance and Accidents'. His was more of an observation waiting for confirmation as well as a theoretical frame to be built around it. The idea was reborn in the latter part of the nineteenth century but the confirmation came as genetics started making inroads at the beginning of the twentieth century. Modern science has, however, yet to find a fitting apparel of theoretical paradigm to account for all the aspects of the 'evolutionary' idea. Nevertheless, this idea was going to revolutionise the way mankind would look upon life and living systems. Evolution was happening but we did not know the 'why' or the 'how' of it. It was left to Sri Aurobindo to give the process of evolution its full scope and sense. Drawing from ancient Vedantic and modern Science, adding to it his own unique experiences, Sri Aurobindo revealed as early as 1911:

Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that man is full of divine possibilities — he is not merely a term in physical evolution, but himself the field of a spiritual evolution which with him began and in him will end. It was only when man was made, that the gods were satisfied — they who had rejected the animal forms, — and cried सुकृतमेव, “Man indeed is well and wonderfully made; the higher evolution can now begin.” He is like God, the sum of all other types and creatures from the animal to the god, infinitely variable where they are fixed, dynamic where they, even the highest, are static, and, therefore, although in the present and in his attainment a little lower than the angels, yet in the eventuality and in his culmination considerably higher than the gods. The other or fixed types, animals, gods, giants, Titans, demigods, can rise to a higher development than their own, but they must use the human body and the terrestrial birth to effect the transition.

(*Essays Divine and Human*, p. 7)

The man who dwells in the higher or divine & now hidden hemisphere of his consciousness, having rent the veil, is the true superman and the last product of that progressive self-manifestation of God in world, Spirit out of matter, which is now called the principle of evolution.

(*Ibid*, p. 102)

Man is a transitional being, he is not final; for in him and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees which climb to a divine supermanhood.

The step from man towards superman is the next approaching achievement in the earth's evolution. There lies our destiny and the liberating key to our aspiring, but troubled and limited human existence — inevitable because it is at once the intention of the inner Spirit and the logic of Nature's process.

The appearance of a human possibility in a material and animal world was the first glint of a coming divine Light, — the first far-off intimation of a godhead to be born out of Matter. The appearance of the superman in the human world will be the fulfilment of that distant shining promise.

(*Ibid*, p. 157)

At about the same time the base was shifting in **the field of physics** — from solid matter to energy particles. Scientists discovered that the laws that defined solid surfaces of matter were no more applicable when one looked deep within the structures. In 1900, at a meeting of the Science Congress, Lord Kelvin had proudly declared that the physics spearheaded by Newton had finally explained almost everything in the universe except for two little mysteries, — the motion of stars and the photoelectric effect. Little did he imagine that with the sense of humour that the Time Spirit has, very soon these discoveries would take away the plank from below

the world-constructs of Newton's theories. Albert Einstein, Max Plank and a few others discovered or rather uncovered a strange mysterious world right below the concrete solidity of our everyday life, a world teeming with forces and energies rather than anything solid! It was an unseen world just like the micro-processes of evolution, a world mathematically true rather than sensorial. 'Probability' and 'Randomness' were the weavers of this new order of things where chaos walked hand in hand with order, and randomness created laws, and probability arranged an unpredictable crowd of particles into a predictable play! Was the world solid and real or an unreal illusion, a trick of our senses as the ancient Indian thought had once proclaimed? Was it hanging in a void of 'Nothingness' or was there some deeper unseen foundation of the universe — this was the next big puzzle where each answer raised fresh questions until the human mind began to reel and flounder in a 'real-unreal' world that constantly slipped between our fingers the closer we tried to hold them. This too would flower into a science that began to come closer to the intuitions of the ancient spiritual thought of India.

Commensurate with this new physics and its power to manipulate the subtler elements behind solid matter, there was born as a gift of the previous century a new technology with far-reaching consequences and literally so. **Man defied gravity** in the first aircraft that took off from the ground in 1903. This itself was nothing short of a miracle that was met with fear rather than enthusiasm and applause. Yet it was a trend-setter that would eventually lead us through the world of computers into the Space-age and the age of Internet with its mind-boggling consequences. One such indirect consequence was that the world began to shrink while man's consciousness began to grow wider like the Vamana Avatara of old. "We need more space" became the common refrain of the younger generation, unheard at first, until it increased to a point of revolt of the youth in the sixties. Strange have been the effects of these discoveries, — on the one hand it has precipitated the age of individualism where each one demands his own individual psychological space; on the other hand, it has turned the world into a global village with ultra-rapid information transfer and its remarkable possibilities — for good or for evil.

At around the same time when Darwin was formulating his theories of evolution as to how man evolved out of the beast and the beast out of the worm and the mud-fish, another great scientist was discovering still deeper and greater truths with even more far-reaching consequences. Born in the land of Shakti, the young Bengali J. C. Bose was surprising the world with one discovery after another. He is in a certain sense the father of modern communication by showing the possibility of **wireless telegraphy**. But this was still nothing compared to the fact that he demonstrated before a group of scientists in Europe that plants can feel and respond to stimuli just as we do. They were not merely alive but also had a rudimentary mind and sense and nervous system of sorts. As if this was not enough, he went on to demonstrate that **what we call dead inanimate matter was indeed living**; at least

that is what the behaviour of metals went on to show. His discoveries attracted not just scientists but also spiritual masters. He is mentioned in Paramhansa Yogananda's famous autobiography and is immortalised by the pen of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo saw in his discovery the scientific validation of a truth known to ancient Vedanta that 'involution' (termed the 'sacrifice of the Purusha') precedes the evolutionary emergence. It answers the greatest puzzle of a purely materialistic paradigm of science as to 'why there is *something* instead of nothing in the universe?' The involution of mind in life and of life in matter and eventually of the Spirit itself in the physical world would be a crucial element in Sri Aurobindo's explanation of the Yoga of evolutionary transformation.

Even as these sciences were exploring domains beyond the material ones, the science and art of medicine was beginning to show interest in **healing through higher and yogic processes**. This little infant step would eventually grow into a huge fruitful research towards the middle of the previous century whence yogic methods such as the techniques of pranayama, asanas and meditation would find a place in textbooks of modern science and be established as one of the important alternate healing systems. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who have spoken much about this were already preparing their disciples to develop trust in newer processes that would eventually displace what we today call mainstream medicine. Here is what Sri Aurobindo revealed to his disciples way back in 1925:

Disciple: Many people mistake passivity for inertia. I mistook it for a long time. I used to remain passive when I got an illness and then I found that I was consenting to it.

Sri Aurobindo: Real passivity is openness to the Higher Force; it is not inertia.

(After a pause Sri Aurobindo turned to the doctor disciple.)

Do you know of a Japanese healer, Dr. Kobayashi, a famous surgeon, who is a Yogi following the Amitabha Buddha school of Sadhana? During his medical practice he found that the method he was following was not correct. So he followed an inner process. He makes the patients sit in meditation with him and asks them to concentrate on the navel and to aspire that the Light may come down and set right the affected organ. By now he has cured thousands of patients; of course, his personal influence is indispensable in bringing down the Light.

He has cured tumours and many uterine complaints; he has even cured cancer. He is especially successful in curing diseases of women. His theory is that the disease is due to a passive congestion in the affected part. That is to say, the nerves there get congested and the vital force is not able to reach that part. What the Light does is that it brings about a subtle and quick vibration in the affected part, thereby restoring normal circulation. But whatever the theory, this is a method of curing diseases by pure, subtle force. Something from the

occult plane comes down and removes the obstacle from the physical plane.

Disciple: It seems like the method of auto-suggestion given by Dr. Coué.

Sri Aurobindo: No, it is not Coué's method. Coué gives the suggestion which works out in the patient; while this is a direct, occult method.

Disciple: Is his theory correct?

Sri Aurobindo: I can't say. What I think is that some occult force comes down and works on the disease. But it is very difficult to say what exactly happens on the physical plane.

Probably, the Hatha Yogins used to do what this Japanese doctor is doing, with their knowledge of the vital-physical currents. For instance, they could set right all the disorders below the navel by controlling the Vyana — the vital current that works in the whole system. They would find out which Prana is less, then send the required current of vital energy which would work the disease out of the system. . . .

All exercises, like the breathing-practices, are only devices which something that is behind them is using for manifesting itself. On the physical plane also, it is nothing else but certain devices — a system of notation — that we employ. But we give too much importance to the form of the device, because we think the physical to be the most real. If we only knew that the entire physical world is made up of energy and that it is nothing else but the working of a certain consciousness and power using certain devices then we would not be deceived.

(Evening Talks, pp. 172–74)

If physics and biology were taking a new turn could psychology be far behind? A Swiss psychologist by the name of Carl Gustav Jung was formulating his theory of the mind and its workings that were in a way an echo of ancient Vedantic truths. Formerly a friend of Sigmund Freud, Jung soon enough realised the limitations of his mentor's theories. Freud had also spoken of the domain of the unconscious that lurked behind the conscious waking life of man. This unconscious domain influenced human actions. Its stamp and stench was felt even in our nobler sentiments. It was a dark Unconscious so to say. Jung understood very well that this was but one half of the truth, in fact an incomplete and distorted truth if **the other half of human nature** was not brought in to complement it. The dark Unconscious was, as it were, a shadow of the bright Unconscious. If the dark domain pulled man backwards towards the shadow of its animal past, the bright domain carried within itself an intuition and a propulsion towards a more luminous godlike future. Though Jung did travel to India and was fascinated by its thought, he, however, frankly admitted that his psychology (or rather the psychology of his times) was not yet able to understand and integrate the concepts and experiences of what is termed in India as the Atman or the higher Self.

A New Science of Consciousness

But even as Freud and Jung, drawing their material from the study of abnormal mental conditions, were debating the true nature of man, Sri Aurobindo was drawing the outlines of a New Psychology and indeed a New Science of Consciousness based on the experience of yogis and his own spiritual realisations and deep observations during the study of consciousness and its mechanism, its normal, abnormal as well as supernormal operations:

Body, brain, nervous system are instruments of consciousness, they are not its causes.

Consciousness is its own cause, a producer of objects and images and not their product. We are blinded to this truth because when we think of consciousness, it is of the individual we think.

We look at the world in the way and speak of it in the terms of individual consciousness; but it is of the universal consciousness that the world is a creation.

(Essays Divine and Human, p. 302)

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Psychology is the knowledge of consciousness and its operations.

A complete psychology must be a complex of the science of mind, its operations and its relations to life and body with intuitive and experimental knowledge of the nature of mind and its relations to supermind and spirit.

(Ibid., p. 305)

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All psychology must result in and every complete statement of psychological truth must have for its frame a double schema of existence into which the facts it deals with must fall, a descending scale and an ascending scale.

The simplest elementary psychology deals with three notes of a limited scale, — the body and physical field and its impacts, the life and body and biological and physiological processes, the mental being and its conscious experience and action. This is a scale of ascension.

(Ibid., p. 307)

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At any rate, psychology has to regard the scale not only from the upward point of view of body creating life, life creating mind, but from the downward point

of view of mind creating new life in body.

Evidently mind is a greater thing, higher than life and body. In that case, besides the ascending scale of the lower rising to a highest possibility, we must regard a possibility of the descending scale, the highest reality involving itself in the lower conditions of being.

But the question arises whether mind itself is the highest possibility or the highest reality.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 310-11)

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Vedantic psychology explores the idea and intuition of a higher reality than mind.

The intuition can only be verified by psychological experience exceeding the normal action of mind. This experience may lead to constantly ascending intuitions verified by an ascent of experience to some summit of being.

Beyond mind psychological experience finds another power of energy, another note in the scale of being. This we will call the supermind. This supermind lives and acts natively in a domain of experience of which the mind becomes aware by a reflective experience and calls vaguely spirit or spiritual being.

(*Ibid.*, p. 311)

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Psychology is the science of consciousness and its status and operations in Nature and, if that can be glimpsed or experienced, its status and operations beyond what we know as Nature.

It is not enough to observe and know the movements of our surface nature and the superficial nature of other living creatures just as it is not enough for Science to observe and know as electricity only the movements of lightning in the clouds or for the astronomer to observe and know only those movements and properties of the stars that are visible to the unaided eye. Here as there a whole world of occult phenomena have to be laid bare and brought under control before the psychologist can hope to be master of his province.

Our observable consciousness, that which we call ourselves, is only the little visible part of our being. It is a small field below which are depths and farther depths and widths and ever wider widths which support and supply it but to which it has no visible access. All that is our self, our being, — what we see at the top is only our ego and its visible nature.

Even the movements of this little surface nature cannot be understood nor

its true law discovered until we know all that is below or behind and supplies it — and know too all that is around it and above.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 316-17)

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Consciousness is not an unaccountable freak or a chance growth or a temporary accident in a material and inconscient universe.

It may so appear on the surface and physical science, since by its very terms it is limited to the examination of appearances and must start from the surface phenomenon, may choose or may have no alternative but to treat it on that basis. But surface appearances are not the reality of things, they may be a part of the truth but they are not the whole reality. One must look beyond the external appearances of things before one can know things in themselves: especially first appearances are apt to be deceptive. It is not by regarding a flash of lightning as a chance ebullition of fiery temper in a cloud that one can know the truth of electricity. We must go far and dig deep before we can get at the truth about the Force that manifested the lightning. Consciousness may similarly appear as a phenomenon, an outbreak of sentience in the obscurity of an originally nescient being; but we must go far beyond that specious appearance if we would know the true nature and origin and discover the entire possibilities of this apparently strange and anomalous force. For anomalous it is, since it occurs in a fundamentally inconscient universe of Matter and strange and curious it is in its reactions, aberrations, workings, destiny.

Physical science — and psychology in its present methods is only an extension of physical science — conducts its search into things from down upwards; it regards Matter as the foundation and the bottom of things and having searched into that foundation, got as it thinks to the very bottom, it believes, or once believed, it has by that very fact understood their depths, their centre, their height and top. But this is a naive error. The truth of things is in their depths or at their centre and even at their top. The truth of consciousness also is to be found at its top and in its depths or at its centre; but when we enter into the depths of consciousness or when we try to reach its centre, we go off into trance and likewise before we get to its top, we go off into trance.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 320-21)

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Only if we can get away from this imperfection and ignorance to some top of its possibilities or to its latent depths or some hidden centre, can we discover

its true nature and through it the very self and reality of our being.

How do we know that there is a top to consciousness or an inner centre, since these are not apparent on the face of things? By its supernormal, not its normal manifestations and phenomena, for the top of things is always supernormal, it is only the bottom and what is near to the bottom that are normal, at any rate to our ordinary consciousness in the material universe. Especially we can know by the supernormal becoming normal to us — by Yoga.

(*Ibid.*, p. 322)

Sri Aurobindo has not only laid the base for a New Science of Consciousness but also answered with utmost clarity the problems and questions that would vex the human scientific mind towards the end of the century, — the problem of Consciousness and its origin. Of course what Sri Aurobindo reveals here has been known to ancient mystics, in essence though not in the details and fullness; but keeping in mind the yugadharma of the Age, Sri Aurobindo is the first yogi to reveal these truths in keeping with the scientific spirit of the Age that was soon going to pass beyond the limits of rational science to the Age of intuition and luminous faith. The closest we come to this detailed description is in the Gita but then Sri Krishna did not have to reconcile and synthesise the truths that were later discovered with the advent of modern science and its limited tools.

Through all this activity and churning of ideas and thoughts it seemed that the mind of the human race was beginning to stir as never before. It was picking up the threads of ancient truths; it was trying to find hints of a yet unborn future. It was as if the gods had descended to participate in the earthly *lila* of the Lord, to prepare the human mind to go beyond its present limits of percept and concept towards new horizons of light. Some scientists like Sir C. V. Raman indeed felt and acknowledged a guiding Light in their works.

Mentioning this brilliant activity of thought in various fields, the Mother observed on August 2nd, 1914:

What are these powerful gods whose hour of manifestation upon earth has come, if not the varied and perfected modes of Thy infinite activity, O Thou Master of all things, Being and Non-Being and What is beyond, Marvellous Unknowable One, our sovereign Lord? . . .

What are these manifold brilliant intellectual activities, these countless sunbeams illumining, conceiving and fashioning all forms, if not one of the modes of being of Thy infinite Will, one of the means of Thy manifestation, O Thou Master of our destinies, sole unthinkable Reality, sovereign Lord of all that is and all that is not yet. . . .

(*Prayers and Meditations*, p. 214)

Sri Aurobindo saw in this manifold and accelerated activity of the mind and its breaking into vast domains of knowledge a precursor for the advent of the Supermind. When a disciple asked him as to what indicates that the universal conditions of a New Supramental creation are more conducive now, Sri Aurobindo responded:

Firstly, the knowledge of the physical world has increased so much that it is on the verge of breaking its own bounds.

Secondly, there is an attempt all over the world towards breaking the veil between the outer and the inner mental, the outer and the inner vital and even the outer and the inner physical. Men are becoming more 'psychic'.

Thirdly, the vital is trying to lay its hold on the physical as it never did before. It is always the sign that whenever the higher Truth is coming down, it throws up the hostile vital world on the surface, and you see all sorts of abnormal vital manifestations, such as increase in the number of persons who go mad, earthquakes, etc. Also, the world is becoming more united on account of the discoveries of modern science — the aeroplane, the railways, the wireless telegraph, etc. Such a union is the condition for the Highest Truth coming down and it is also our difficulty.

Fourthly, the rise of persons who wield tremendous vital influence over large numbers of men.

These are some of the signs to show that the universal condition may be more ready now. . . .

(Evening Talks, pp. 523-24)

This was the backdrop of the coming together of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. On one side, an unleashing of new Idea-forces into this world like rays from an unseen Sun as if a new dawn was fast approaching the earth; on the other, a near-total darkness through which our errant race was groping for a way to reach out towards the future. It was not Dawn yet; Night had not yet receded.

(To be continued)

ALOK PANDEY

THE GOLCONDE GLOW

TODAY I met Mahalakshmi whom I hadn't seen for several months: "There's something different about you this time. You look younger — somehow fresher. Something has happened to you! Tell us, what is it?"

"Really?" — I queried — "The only difference this time is that I'm staying in Golconde. Perhaps it's the Golconde glow!"

This chance encounter triggered within me a deeper appreciation of Golconde and its effect upon one's being, so I began making a few notes during my stay there in preparation for an expanded appreciation later on.

But I'm not an expert on Golconde, having stayed there only short-term on two occasions, so this isn't a scholarly study. Nevertheless, I've enjoyed reflecting on my special time there and hope it pays adequate homage to the glory which is Golconde: Mother's Dream for her serious and worthy sadhaks, her precious diamonds — Golconde having been named after the famous Golconda diamond mines in Hyderabad whose minister had donated the funds for the building.

Diamonds are said to be a girl's best friend. Well I certainly love diamonds as a spiritual metaphor and I love it that highly evolved souls are described as being 'diamond personalities', having acquired so many brilliant and highly polished facets to their being through countless lives; and it's here that the multi-faceted Udar Pinto comes to mind, whom Mother used in countless ways in the realisation of Golconde and on other projects because of his diamond personality.

Divine Consciousness

Unlike ordinary dwellings Golconde (conceived and built over many years between approximately 1935 and 1948 in the first progressive modernist style of its kind in India) was designed and built according to Mother's vision for a new kind of dormitory to house the disciples of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. As Sri Aurobindo himself puts it:

First Mother believes in beauty as a part of spirituality and divine living; secondly, she believes that physical things have the Divine Consciousness underlying them as much as living things; and thirdly, that they have an individuality of their own and ought to be properly treated, used in the right way, not misused or improperly handled or hurt or neglected so that they perish soon or lose their full beauty or value; she feels the consciousness in them and is so much in sympathy with them that what in other hands might be spoilt or wasted in a short time lasts with her for years or decades. It is on this basis that she planned the Golconde.

A Selection

Golconde is the original and the only authentic “Mother’s House”. It is written in the booklet called ‘Golconde’ — to be found in each one of the 51 rooms in Golconde — that in Golconde, “Mother has placed a great working of Her Conscious Force and that is why generally there is a selection of people to stay here.”

So it is a privilege to stay in Golconde and an opportunity for accelerated growth and a deeper experience of Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s Transformation Yoga.

Transformation

This is the most meaningful way for me to understand their Integral Yoga: as a path of dedication to transform not only oneself on every level but also the material world from the bottom upwards including the dark and ignorant not-yet-transformed parts. Hence I regard Golconde not only as a huge Transformer, but also as a place of special bonding with Sri Aurobindo and Mother and a heightened receptivity and more intense devotion and dedication.

At its best Golconde is not only a long or short term home for dedicated spiritual aspirants but is a conscious being in its own right — almost an extension of Mother herself. In Golconde one might say that one is living inside the Mother in a womb-like protective environment where she is giving birth to something new inside every receptive sadhak.

Knowing this, one doesn’t enter Golconde lightly. It is like a calling, a unique time of privileged training, whether for the minimum one week or for a lifetime; and one is conscious of not wanting to waste a single moment of the opportunity being gifted to open oneself totally to Mother’s influence and to be as attentive to her as possible.

Precious Peace

The most precious gift of Golconde is not only this special attention one receives from both Mother and Sri Aurobindo but also the comparative peace and solitude one enjoys within its walls and gardens which facilitates the yogic processes one passes through with their help and guidance.

Rules

A minimum of rules were laid down by Mother to preserve this highly valued atmosphere of quiet concentration in Golconde. Naturally, one is encouraged to maintain silence as much as possible and to be careful not to disturb other residents. Headphones must be used for any audio equipment and alarm clocks muffled. Visitors are not allowed in one’s room except in the afternoon between 3.30 and 4.30 p.m. and must not be given a guided tour of the building.

Generally one is also not permitted to enter the room of another resident, thus

eliminating the possibility of constant to-ings and fro-ings and loud conversations developing.

I've stayed in numerous ordinary guesthouses in Pondicherry, Ashram ones included, where the internal noise can be very disturbing. At times large groups or families leave their doors open and use the corridor as a communal space, shouting across to each other and continuously walking into each other's rooms creating a din which has to be experienced to be believed.

Others have their music blaring out at all times of the day and even late into the evening forcing one to wear earplugs which isn't pleasant. Sometimes the greatest volume of noise comes from the service workers who yell to each other up and down the stairs — or from the manager who shouts orders to the workers in a monotonous drone.

Respect

But I found none of this in Golconde and how instantly heavenly it was. The workers keep to themselves and respect the need of each resident for quiet and solitude.

There is simply nothing to compare with Golconde in any way whatsoever for peace and progress.

Frogs and Dogs

Mind you, I say comparative peace, because if you happen to stay in a room on the first floor near to one of the ponds in the garden you will be serenaded by the croaking of the frogs and toads round the pond at night and the barking of dogs in the nearby street — the frogs and dogs! — or the cats' choir or rousing chorus of the crickets loud enough to awaken the dead!

But within the cloistered house itself there is generally an atmosphere of sacred silence which I've not encountered elsewhere in Pondicherry except in the Meditation Hall within the Ashram or at certain times in the Courtyard under the shelter of the Service Tree which stands guard over the Samadhi where the physical bodies of Sri Aurobindo and Mother have been placed.

Mosquitoes

If, like me, you are unfortunate enough to be not only loved by mosquitoes but also allergic to their bestial bites you will soon become an expert in protecting yourself in Golconde! And if you are lucky enough to have a dearth of the mosquito-attracting hormone in your glands I envy you — but do please have compassion for those who face a daily battle with them and do also forgive me for lingering on the subject here!

Oh the debates I've joined on how best to wage one's war upon them; on the places where they like to hide waiting for their chance to ambush and attack; on the numerous repellents and precautions, or the after-bite remedies when the precautions

fail and one finds to one's consternation a series of itchy swellings anywhere on one's body since mosquitoes are not fussy about where they find their meal so long as they get it.

Due to the harm which chemical sprays might do to the fabric of the rooms one has to become adept at finding natural solutions to the mosquitoes which find easy access to the interior through the many openings intended for maximum ventilation but which in turn give mosquitoes maximum opportunity to vent their hunger on tasty sadhaks!

Mother herself has informed us that certain harmful insects have been deliberately created by adverse forces to plague humanity by spreading life-threatening conditions such as malaria and that we are to kill them with impunity.

If you happen to be a champion tennis player you might choose to swat them dead, simultaneously electrocuting them with one of the battery-powered rackets now flooding the shops of Pondicherry, known for its density of mosquitoes. Or you might burn mosquito-repellent incense sticks or coils to discourage them and cover your skin with repellent oils or creams — chemical or otherwise.

Other Solutions

As always Mother has provided for us in the form of essential oils and other preparations which are on sale at her perfumery Senteurs.

I've found a cocktail of essential oils to be not only effective against mosquitoes but also pleasant as a body perfume. So often people have said to me: "You smell nice! What perfume are you wearing?" — only to laugh when I tell them it's meant to be insect repellent. I use a mixture of Lavender, Lemongrass, Cedarwood, Pine, Peppermint, Eucalyptus, Vetiver and Teatree oils.

You can add any blend of these to an inexpensive basic body cream or oil and experiment for yourself on the best combination and strength. Or there is a lemon-smelling mosquito repellent cologne in a pretty glass spray bottle for sale at Senteurs though I cannot attest to its effectiveness having already found my own oily solution. Finally, Mother's legendary multi-usage Friction cologne is soothing as an after-bite lotion, and also as a pick-me-up when feeling battle-weary as I sometimes did on days when a super-mosquito had stealthily sucked my veins dry!

If you want to read or write in the evenings it can be helpful to sit by the whirring fan since the disgusting creatures will find it impossible to land on you battling against such a fierce current of air; or one can always retreat under the mosquito net. Once I was offered a sewn-up sheet to pull up over my legs and feet when visiting a friend whose house doubled as a mosquito farm so it might be worth buying a cheap cover in town and getting a tailor to sew up two sides like a sleeping bag. Otherwise one can cover one's flesh as much as possible with loose light clothing.

There is no doubt a yogic alternative like the period when Sri Aurobindo himself

was left completely undisturbed by mosquitoes when he was practising Pranayam — the ultimate mosquito repellent! But that is best left to the experts.

Naturally, life on the battle-field has its moments and one can find oneself facing heightened challenges whilst living in Golconde, commensurate maybe with the level of examinations one sets oneself — as somebody once told me: One doesn't expect nursery examinations at university level.

But if mosquitoes fall in love with you and you are allergic to their ardent kisses that is an added challenge in a place like Golconde which allows them free access!

Cleanliness is next to Godliness

Apart from the confounded mosquitoes you will be hard pushed to find any other insects in Golconde because of the daily routine of cleaning by the team of heroic hard-working women who clean Golconde from top to bottom every morning for several hours — and with a calm and deft touch which is remarkable considering the amount of furniture they have to lift free of the floor for dusting and wiping, carefully placing chairs and stools on the stone ledge while they work.

Many people spend the mornings outside while the daily cleaning ritual in Golconde takes place, but when you get used to the routine and the workers become accustomed to your habits and needs there's no reason why one cannot remain in one's room to read or write, paint or make jewellery as I did (though not with diamonds!), or simply to relax. It is then that one fully appreciates the special way that the cleaning work is carried out in an orderly seamless flow, so that one can be quietly occupied in one's room oblivious to the fact that a huge number of workers are active in the same building cleaning every nook and cranny (almost!) in 50 rooms and more!

There is nothing in any other guesthouse I've stayed at to compare with the wonderful women workers of Golconde and when you read of the team spirit which went into the creation of Golconde by so many skilled and unskilled workers who all pitched in under often very difficult circumstances, you can see this spirit carried over in the way it is maintained today.

The necessity for maximum ventilation in a tropical climate means that the constant through-flow of air brings a continuous through-flow of dust with it, and dust and Divine Consciousness do not go together! So somebody has to organise thorough daily cleaning to ensure that the Diamond Ones do not lose their lustre!

Sounds of Golconde

In this cloistered quiet one gradually becomes aware of certain sounds unique to Golconde — apart from the frogs and dogs! — such as the swishing sound of the Burmese teak sliding doors being pushed open or banging if they are closed too hastily, though one tries to exert exactly the right amount of pressure when shutting

one's door to prevent the overshoot and inevitable bang. The workers are adepts at it!

Another type of squeaky clattery noise can be heard from the opening and closing of the solid hand-operated asbestos-cement shutters or louvres at the large windows in every room and in each corridor, contributing another unique sound to the Golconde symphony. Although they were specifically designed for maximum ventilation obviating the need for mechanical cooling aids such as ceiling fans or heaven forbid AC! — one sometimes requires a small free-standing fan to relieve discomfort during hotter periods and the whirring blades add another instrument to the orchestra.

Then there is the sharp clatter which makes one start if anything is accidentally dropped on the worn but handsome grey-black Cuddapah Stone floors by oneself or in the rooms overhead, encouraging one to be careful and conscious when handling things. And beware of the feisty little catch on the toiletry cabinet door and its unexpectedly loud popping-clicking sound when pulled open especially in the silence of the night! I nearly jumped out of my skin once when I needed something from it during the night and soon learned to keep it ajar before retiring in case its alarming sound woke the whole of Pondicherry!

Vessels within a Vessel for the Divine

The scraping noise of the large earthenware water vessel in each room, the Kuja jar, against its heavy ceramic stand when pouring oneself a drink or when being replaced daily by the workers becomes another familiar sound in the quiet of Golconde. These are collected from each room at about 7.15 a.m. by discreet workers who knock politely before entering and leave one undisturbed if still asleep as I sometimes was at that hour.

The water vessels are refilled daily and left opposite the door on the other side of the corridor until being returned home to their stand on each window-ledge after the room has been serviced — a useful way of indicating which rooms have yet to be cleaned with a respectful knock on one's door and a friendly 'Room clean, Ma!'

One has to admire the care with which these jars which are heavy when full of water are handled and carried by the workers. Although the majority have been slowly replaced over the years, albeit by jars of inferior quality since the high standard of Mother's originals cannot be matched today, it's incredible that a few have survived after more than 65 years of daily use. Naturally, one doesn't get the same Kuja back each day since all are gathered together for the ritual refilling and get mixed up with one another. So I enjoyed waiting to see which Kuja I would find sitting on my ledge ready to serve me water each day, each with its own story to tell.

Occasionally a vessel would arrive with hardly any of its deep chocolatey lustre remaining and with the odd chip, but oh what character! I used to muse on why some jars had preserved themselves much better than others; and on what wear

and tear they'd endured over the years; and on what scenes they'd witnessed as they sat immobile on their black stands on the window ledge of each chamber; and also on what quality of consciousness they might have absorbed from each resident sadhak.

Kuja Creativity

As an artist I fell in love with these oriental-looking vessels for their curvaceous contours, perfect proportions and deep lustrous colour. I sketched them, later making templates from my drawings from which to cut out jar shapes in a rainbow of colours from the gorgeous Ashram handmade paper I'd also fallen in love with.

I found many uses for these paper jars in my artwork which consists of painting not with a brush and water and tubes of paint but with a pair of scissors, glue and handsomely decorated handmade paper creating pictures which at first glance can seem like traditional paintings.

Then there is the card-making of course. There are many inspiring lines in *Savitri* about being a vessel for the Divine which I've written out in the Kuja-jar cards, some of which were donated to Golconde when I left, such as this one, my favourite:

In anguish we labour that from us may rise
A larger-seeing man with nobler heart,
A golden vessel of the Incarnate Truth.

Savitri 342: 24

Beauty of Simplicity

Harmony is another supreme feature of Golconde which is intrinsic to the beauty and simplicity of not only the structure itself but also of its furniture, furnishings and fixings which were painstakingly made by hand through Mother's dedicated sadhak Udar Pinto whom she put in charge of the work. They were fashioned in the nearby Harpagon Workshop which Mother had bought and requested him to organise especially for the manifestation of Golconde.

The building had been purchased from a wealthy but miserly man who exploited her need by forcing her to pay an exorbitant amount for it, but who got his just deserts when she named it after the miser 'Harpagon' in Molière's play *L'Avare* (The Miser). Just consider how many times he has been literally named and shamed as being miserly whenever anyone has asked the why and wherefore of the name Harpagon. So let us hope he is extremely generous wherever he might be now; and let it stand as a warning to any other idiot who might try to pull a fast one on the Divine Mother whose wrath is dire against treachery and falsehood.

Truth-to-Materials

The lightweight but robust cane chairs, footstool and bed frame — initially designed by the Japanese architect George Nakashima (renamed Sundarananda by Sri Aurobindo) for the mini-Golconde room prototype, but thereafter by François Sammer when George had to leave — are exquisite not only in their harmony of design and elegant appearance, but also for their truth-to-materials and truth-to-environment ventilating properties which consider the bodily comfort of the residents as well as their need for aesthetic beauty — a synthesis of body, mind and spirit awareness and a simple blend of form and function characteristic of the modernism of that period.

This truth consciousness also vibrates in the natural beauty of the bare polished concrete, the more so since Mother asked for only ‘living pebbles’ to be used in the concrete — and presumably also only ‘living seashells’ in the crushed seashell plaster walls of the interiors.

One also feels this elevated consciousness every time one grips the handrails for support when climbing the staircase in Golconde since the wood was especially selected for its holes, knots and cracks normally regarded as defects and covered over but in Golconde consciously enhanced and polished to bring out their interesting individuality, and the truth of the tree from which they came with its own story of struggle and growth.

I couldn’t help but muse on this as a metaphor for our own individual human defects and how we might transform and polish them into pure but powerful facets of our own unique and sincere diamond personalities.

Sri Aurobindo’s Force

If you are especially sensitive you will also become aware of the Consciousness and Force of Sri Aurobindo in Golconde, whom Mother depended upon utterly for his support during the challenging moments of its construction.

If storm clouds gathered at the worst possible time Mother could be heard praying out loud: ‘Lord there should be no rain now!’ — and of course there wasn’t! But how many such prayers would have been sent up over the 10 years of Golconde’s manifestation during the innumerable monsoon months; and how much of Sri Aurobindo’s Force was and still is permeating the very walls and atmosphere of the Rishi Cave housing the privileged disciples of his Integral Yoga?

One day when I was sitting in the gardens of Savitri Bhavan I felt such a wonderful magnetic field of energy enveloping me that I could have stayed there forever. That night in a dream Sri Aurobindo asked me: “Did you notice my Special Force in the gardens of Savitri Bhavan?” — and joyfully I replied: “Yes! Actually I did!”

But you don’t have to go to Savitri Bhavan alone to experience his Force — you can feel it in Golconde at a far greater intensity if you open up to receive it.

After all, hasn't Mother herself told us:

Sri Aurobindo has more action — more power for action — now than when he was in his body.

Beauty is a Power

Mother has said that Beauty is a power as well as being the Divine language in form, and Golconde stands as a testimony to that.

Beauty is also a great transformer influencing one's inner consciousness and outer behaviour. It has been shown that those who live in a beautiful harmonious environment are changed by it, sometimes dramatically. A TV documentary I once watched demonstrated how a drab institutionalised rehabilitation house for mentally disturbed patients completely changed the disturbed occupants when it was overhauled, and made beautiful with inspiring works of art and tasteful furniture and interior decoration.

Previously the attitude had been completely the opposite: how could mentally ill people appreciate beauty? So the rooms had been very utilitarian with no consideration for aesthetics and were neglected by the occupants to the point of semi-squalor.

When interviewed about the transformation-through-beauty the residents said how uplifted they felt by the beautiful life-affirming surroundings, bringing feelings of self-esteem, wonder and contentment into their lives and giving them the incentive to look after themselves and their rooms better.

Reflections

One of the ever-changing beauties of Golconde is the play of light and image upon the many reflective surfaces purposefully incorporated into the consciousness of its design — upon the dark polished stone floors, the elegant but sturdy glass-fronted cabinets, the glass-topped desks and the wide polished stone ledges immediately under the louvres in each room where the dance of light and reflected image is a daily delight.

And of course the full-length vanity mirror — (did I really say vanity!) — provides its own image of oneself looking the best that one can manage depending on the circumstances! — and of the room in its various moods under the varying quality of light streaming through the louvres depending on how far one has them open. Mine were often kept shut in deference to the mosquitoes!

I remember being especially pleased to find that Mother had provided full-length looking-glasses in Golconde because I'd been staying at a guesthouse where they were strictly forbidden on the pretext that they encouraged vanity! I refused to believe that Mother, who laid such an emphasis on Beauty and Harmony, would approve of such a Puritanical outlook, since how on earth can one dress beautifully and harmoniously without a mirror to consult?

So my joy knew no bounds when my intuition proved correct and I found that

Mother had indeed furnished each room with a most beautiful generously-long mirror, paying no heed to the cries against vanity but only the God-given aspiration to look one's best as a temple of Divine Consciousness — the way one would maintain and beautify any external temple of the Divine who is the greatest lover of Beauty of all.

Golconde's Gardens

The garden ponds and small canals which create a passive cooling system around Golconde also provide a mirror-like surface where it is a wonder to see the outer building reflected on a calm day, and to watch the goldfish swimming playfully in and out of the reflected doors and windows, or to see the towering trees swaying overhead against a clear blue sky, or to look for faces in the clouds on a cloudy day.

The Japanese shrines in the Japanese-inspired parts of the garden, like the Kujas, are a source of inspiration for an artist and I sketched these too making templates for artworks as I'd done with the jars.

A Zebra in Golconde!

I remember being enchanted upon seeing my body covered in zebra-stripes of light and shadow caused by the strips of dawn light pouring through the slats of the bathroom door; and many times I loved to watch the watery reflections from the pond beneath my window dancing on the pale surface of the concrete shutters or upon the moonish gleam of the smooth crushed seashell plaster walls.

And then there are the moments of glory when you suddenly enter a dark corridor where most shutters have been closed since we're asked to shut them as well as our room louvres when going out, and the light is streaming through an open shutter like some revelation of the Divine which you feel you could reach out and touch, it is so intensely alive.

Teatime

Every day without fail at 3 p.m. sharp (you can set your watch by the Golconde clock!) the reverberating sound of a small gong being struck in the entrance hall of Golconde heralds the serving of afternoon tea outside in the tea basement — a kind of open air tunnel under the main building with tables and chairs set out for the afternoon ritual of tea-drinking though without any formal ceremony which I noticed. This affords one the opportunity of meeting members of the permanent Golconde family as well as other temporary selected aspirant visitors.

I remember being a bit nervous at my first teatime lest my presence as an outsider was an intrusion, but nothing could have been further from that. I was quickly made to feel welcome and the special Golconde brew was superb! Teatime also gives one the opportunity of sharing treats especially on birthdays, and two of us celebrated our birthday on the same day during my first stay there, so a feast was

to be had in the tea-basement that afternoon: chocolates and cashew toffees if my memory hasn't failed me!

Teatime Princess

But woe betide if you happen to sit on the throne of Princess, the pretty ginger queen cat of Golconde whose comfortable woven chair is rarely vacant!

A cat-lover friend of mine once told me how Mother had found Sri Aurobindo teetering on the edge of his seat not wanting to disturb the cat curled up thereon (which was probably absorbed in some highly important yogic practice of course!) — so which of us would have the heart to dislodge the Princess and upset not only the cat but also Sri Aurobindo!

One Step at a Time

One final memory: I was interested to find myself treading so unusually carefully on the stepping stones set into the grass which form a winding pathway from the wide reception hall across the lawned garden and down a few steps to the tea-basement.

I'm sure this is another metaphor for life as well as serving as a practical pathway across the lawn, because Mother had come in a dream and advised me to work things out step-by-step when confronting what seemed like an impossible situation in my life. At intervals she would say, 'Next Step!'

And this is only one of the many dreams I had from Mother whilst sleeping within the hallowed walls of Golconde, but it would take a great many more steps and a book in its own right to relate all the dreams, messages and visions bestowed upon me whilst staying in the only authentic Mother's House.

The Rishi Cave

So, for now, I will say: Farewell until next time! — cherishing the treasured memories of my two visits there, and with gratitude to all who were and still are involved in the heroic building and maintenance of Golconde past and present; and to Mother and Sri Aurobindo for giving me so much whilst staying within its wide and wonderful walls. And now to Mother:

Golconde is *not* a guest house. It is a dormitory (*dortoir*) in which those who reside there can meditate and do their sadhana in beautiful surroundings, in very fine rooms and with many of the little daily jobs done for them, to keep them more free for their sadhana. . . . In the old days the Rishis used to live in the mountains and their disciples lived in caves in these mountains. Golconde is the equivalent of the caves for the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

Golconde may have adapted its exclusive role as a cave for Rishis to accommo-

date also a select number of temporary visitor aspirants today but, even so, who would dare to call it simply another guesthouse when Mother has shown her deep displeasure at the use of such an ordinary term to describe her Glowing Golconde — built expressly for her Diamond Ones?

And if you care to study the history of Golconde in the book which SABDA sells and begin to appreciate the tons of dedication and consciousness which went into its construction along with the tons of steel and cement there will never be any doubt in your mind why Golconde is the only true Mother's House and never ever simply another guesthouse.

GLENYS NIVEDITA

For in his study of himself and the world he cannot but come face to face with the soul in himself and the soul in the world and find it to be an entity so profound, so complex, so full of hidden secrets and powers that his intellectual reason betrays itself as an insufficient light and a fumbling seeker: it is successfully analytical only of superficialities and of what lies just behind the superficialities. The need of a deeper knowledge must then turn him to the discovery of new powers and means within himself. He finds that he can only know himself entirely by becoming actively self-conscious and not merely self-critical, by more and more living in his soul and acting out of it rather than floundering on surfaces, by putting himself into conscious harmony with that which lies behind his superficial mentality and psychology and by enlightening his reason and making dynamic his action through this deeper light and power to which he thus opens.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Human Cycle, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 29)

RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of September 2014)

XII

It is time now to take up the figures based on sound. The ones that have been selected for discussion are: Alliteration, Assonance, Catachresis, Tautology, Anaphora and Epistrophe. Two very obvious figures, onomatopoeia and pun, have been omitted because his serious prose does not offer examples of them. Puns occur in his letters, but that is a different story and onomatopoeia is such an obviously poetic device that we find it in prose only when it is being consciously and deliberately introduced (Joyce, Lawrence) and, as has been pointed out again and again, that kind of attention-catching deliberate artistry is not to be found in our writer. That which adds glory to a Joyce or a Lawrence would seem to be but a cheap device in our writer.

Alliteration is so familiar a figure of speech that no introduction is necessary. Pope's "By apt alliteration's artful aid" is example enough. It can be found in prose quite frequently:

The rhythmic word has a subtly sensible element, its sound value . . .¹

Here the 's' sound is repeated in the beginning of three words, though the third is separated from the first two. But alliteration need not always be limited to the initial letters of successive words. If it occurs in words that are a bit removed from each other, it can still be very effective:

. . . it brings us the delight of the soul in the discovery of its own deeper realities.²

Here the initial 'd' sound does not come in successive words, but is nonetheless very effective. It can be called subtle alliteration.³

With assonance one is almost trespassing on the grounds of poetry. It signifies the repetition of vowels. A famous example of this is Gray's "The rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar", in which 'o' is repeated five times in an Alexandrine. It is not so obvious a figure as alliteration, and difficult to spot in prose:

1. *The Future Poetry* (1953 ed.), p. 14.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

3. This is not to be found in any book on rhetoric. The reader is referred to K. D. Sethna's *Talks on Poetry*, pp. 131-32.

For then the perfection of his sound-movement and style come entirely as the spontaneous form of his soul . . .⁴

‘O’ is repeated six times, and that is without counting “perfection”, “sound”, “movement” and “spontaneous” in which the “o” is pronounced a bit differently. Yet the beauty of the whole thing is that when one is reading the passage one is not aware of the assonance — it does not obtrude itself upon the attention. But this is the inherent feature of our writer’s artistry. It never obtrudes itself.

Catachresis is a figure in which a word is slightly altered to change the meaning, usually employed for comic purposes, e.g. “Nothing ventured, nothing sprained.” In this the original “gained” of the adage is changed to impart a comic meaning. That it can be used seriously in prose is clear from the following example:

. . . a new developing aesthetic temper and outlook, — or should we rather say, inlook?⁵

This particular sentence has been chosen as the writer gives both the original word and the catachretic one in the same sentence. At times one may come across what can be called an involuntary catachresis, depending on the reader. Thus in a sentence on p. 23:

All great poetry comes about by a unison of these three elements . . .⁶

At first I had taken the word “unison” to be a misprint for “union”. Later it became clear that “unison” is exactly what the writer meant. This is a curious case in which the reader, by mistake, substitutes for a word another very like it. This has been mentioned here because it is rather like one of the ambiguities mentioned by Empson in which no ambiguity is intended by the writer. The reader reads it differently. That is why it has been called an involuntary catachresis here. The catachresis occurs as a mistake of the reader.

There is a chance that catachresis might be confused with pun. In the latter a word sounding the same as another and often spelt the same is used. Witness the punning sonnets of Shakespeare in which the word “will” is used in three senses: as a verb, as a noun meaning will-power and also the last will and testament. At times Shakespeare’s own name “Will” is also added to this. Catachresis is totally different, for here the word is altered and one is expected to remember the original and enjoy the contrast.

4. *The Future Poetry*, p. 15.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Tautology, the next on our list, means repetition. Sometimes if the same word is not repeated but another having the same meaning is used it is still tautology. When this figure is used in the first sense it often emphasises the meaning and enhances the musical value:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.⁷

The repetition of “so long” and “this” is a burst of splendour. But then, this is poetry. It can be used as effectively in prose. Our author is writing about the creative ability of an artist — an inspiring subject described in inspired prose:

More truly, he throws into significant form a truth he has seen, which may be truth of hell or truth of heaven or an immediate truth behind things terrestrial or any other, but is never merely the external truth of earth.⁸

A better example of tautology used seriously and effectively in discursive prose can hardly be found. The word “truth” is used six times in one sentence, not in poetry or eloquent oratorical prose. The repetition is strictly functional, not merely decorative.

In anaphora the same word or phrase is repeated in the beginning of successive clauses. It's very effective in poetry:

Theirs not to make reply;
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.⁹

This is poetry, but it is equally effective in prose:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up.¹⁰

This repetition of “A time” at the beginning of successive clauses and sentences goes on for six more verses.

(To be continued)

RATRI RAY

7. Last 2 lines of Shakespeare's sonnet 18.

8. *The Future Poetry*, p. 8.

9. Tennyson, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, st. 2.

10. *The Ecclesiastes*, 3: 2.

AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

(Continued from the issue of September 2014)

11. One Hundred Somnambulistic Years

WITH Geoffrey Chaucer English writing was poised to reach the Pisgah visions of felicity soon. However, one had to trudge a long pathway, attempt, strive, and not unoften withdraw from public gaze. When we get close to the history of English literature, the question does confront us: After Chaucer, who?

We will have to wait for a while to receive the brilliant flashes of creativity of the Elizabethan poets. Meanwhile we have to do with the hewers of wood and drawers of water in this area. There were, of course, many who kept the flame of English poetry alive — sincere poets, poetasters, translators, transcreators. Of them, John Lydgate (1373-1450) readily comes to mind. He proceeded on the lines laid out by Chaucer, and expanded the area too, for he has left behind close to 15,000 lines of poetry. He is primarily remembered now as a story-teller but in his own time he was quite popular because of his choice of tales from the past which were not quite new to his audience. *Troye-Book* is his first work and is a complete story of Troy, from its beginnings to its end. The work was commissioned by Henry V who has, as Prince Hal, gained a permanent place in English literature. Sri Aurobindo, the lover of Shakespeare, would at least have glanced at it. It has been pointed out that Lydgate's choice of the fall of Troy was intended to send a message to the very important persons of his land regarding the virtues needed for the art of living. King, noblemen and others handling power needed to be trained and this was Lydgate's way.

Sri Aurobindo would have been equally interested in Lydgate's *The Siege of Thebes*, a chivalric epic that touches our emotional chords even today. As Lydgate points out in his prologue, his is another pilgrimage to Canterbury. Only, the pilgrims are now returning and this would be the first story on the way back. Lydgate makes *The Siege of Thebes* a companion piece to Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale'. The events dealt with here occurred prior to the killing of the Theban king Creon and the tale of Palamon and Arcite. Creon is now the King of Thebes. The poem relates the founding of Thebes by the good King Amphion who was a musical genius, the terrible story of Oedipus proving the inexorability of Fate and the fraternal war for the throne between Eteocles and Polyneices, which would lead to the unforgettable incident of the siege of Thebes. It is a terrible scene and Lydgate loses no chance in describing the horror and commenting upon the irrationality and futility of war. But history is no teacher at all! How much has Mother Earth suffered since those days millennia earlier when brother killed brother and women turned into weeping widows! Hearing

of the tragedy the Greek women come lamenting but King Creon refuses them permission to bury their chivalrous husbands. It is then that Theseus comes, kills Creon and brings the city of Thebes under his control. The poem is particularly remarkable because of Lydgate's several references to Chaucer couched in words of admiration and gratitude.

John Lydgate's esteem for Chaucer can be gauged from his *The Temple of Glass* inspired by the latter's *The House of Fame*. It is a vision poem about love, adulterous in this case because the lady is already married. Or is it a historical poem on the marriage of Henry V and Katherine of Valois presented as an allegory? So many speculations in the world of critics. Lydgate has received brickbats in later centuries but of late the bouquets are being readied too. If some spoke of the "voluminous, prosaick, and driveling monk" (Joseph Ritson), others have begun to hail him as a herald of England's Renaissance. Now that there is widespread interest in the works of Lydgate, we ought to have soon good translations of his poetry into modern English.

Of Lydgate's works mention must needs be made of the *Fall of Princes*, which was inspired by Boccaccio and contains innumerable tales. The title explains the subject-matter and was commissioned by Henry V and his brother Humphrey, the Duke of Gloucester. How men who had been hailed as great had fallen in their time due to some weakness or the other forms the story-line. As in an encyclopaedia we meet here characters from the Bible, from ancient Greek mythology and also from history. Story after story of the names we have grown familiar with and not so familiar gets re-written in Lydgate's simple (if pedantic) style. Among the nearly 500 heroes and heroines chosen are Theodosius, Julian the Apostate, King Arthur, Haman (a minister of Persia), the decadent ruler Sardanapalus, Jocasta, Oedipus, Lucrece, Julius Caesar, and Adam with Eve as well. Literally a treasure-book of stories, it must have been very popular in the 15th century. Incidentally, it is a prolonged tragedy. When heroes or heroines suffer, we suffer with them too when we read about them or see them represented on the stage, something that prompted Hamlet to exclaim:

What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba
That he should weep for her? What would he do
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appall the free . . .¹

But just be the sufferer! There would be the constant question: do I deserve the suffering? In *Fall of Princes* everybody suffers, for "sceptre and crown must tumble

1. *Hamlet*, Act II, sc. ii.

down"! With some characters we exclaim: "Well deserved punishment!" For others we simply say fate is exorable. The mystery of existence is not fathomable at all.

Was the book commissioned for rulers and courtiers to learn a lesson? This piling up of life-stories — did it have any effect upon the temperament of the rulers in those tremendously unsettling times? It certainly had one effect. It was a prelude to one of the richest areas of England's literature, Fiction in English. Such is the pointer that comes from Sri Aurobindo. Speaking of the interim century between Chaucer and the Elizabethans, Sri Aurobindo agrees that here we have no scintillating poetry. From Chaucer to Lydgate and his contemporaries, it is just story telling: the tale of the Chanticleer, the story of Theseus and Hippolyta, the rape of Lucrece, the hanging of the Persian Haman from the gallows he had built to hang Mordecai . . . so many dramatic turns, "realistic projections of ancient tales". But this prosaic poetry also waited to serve English literature, as a model for its rich future in prose. Sri Aurobindo speaks of this hundred-year pause in creative exuberance in his *The Future Poetry*:

Many outward reasons might be given for that abrupt cessation, but none sufficient; for the cause lay deeper in the inner destiny of this spirit. The real cause was that to have developed upon this line would have been to wander up and down in a cul-de-sac; it would have been to anticipate in a way in poetry the self-imprisonment of Dutch art in a strong externalism, of a fairer kind indeed, but still too physical and outward in its motive. English poetry had greater things to do and it waited for some new light and more powerful impulse to come. Still this external motive and method are native to the English mind and with many modifications have put their strong impress upon the literature. It is the ostensible method of English fiction from Richardson to Dickens. . . .²

This detailed picturisation of the external happenings in life, not daring to wander in the interior landscapes that contain craters and volcanoes of passion, degradation, greed and hunger for power, will be seen by us again in the history of the novel in English literature. Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens believed in mammoth recordation of the external life of the land. Scott preferred mostly historical contexts; the novels of Dickens are witness of his times. There is no hurry, the pen works tirelessly to immortalise his contemporary world for all time. For instance, his third novel, *Nicholas Nickleby* brings to us London and Portsmouth, Yorkshire and Devon as they were two centuries ago. And the institutions! Villainy in the person of Ralph Nickleby, Mr. Squeers! And the style as leisurely as Lydgate. Eight hundred pages of *Nicholas Nickleby* have not lost their important space in the history of English literature. As Sri Aurobindo said, this was a facet of the English genius, the recordation of external life with a tinge of the romantic. As in the narrative

2. *The Future Poetry*, p. 68.

poems of the medieval period, English fiction too had an abundance of characters, good and bad, and grown so real to us that we exult in the good fortunes of the good and feel relieved when evil people get their just deserts.

The post-Chaucer period has given us other poems too to remember. The author of a charming poem of this period, 'The Flower and the Leaf' remains untraced, though for sometime it was thought Chaucer or Gower had written it. We have a striking translation by John Dryden of the poem which celebrates Nature. It is a vision-poem on the nature of leaves and flowers, the former hailed as the enduring presence. Always a lover of poetry, Sri Aurobindo seems to have taught Dryden in the Maharajah's College in Baroda in 1900-1. He would surely have enjoyed the celebration of nature in Dryden's accents when the elderly Dame tells the dreamer of what seemed Nature's Festival:

Where we with green adorn our fairy bowers,
And even this grove, unseen before, is ours.
Know farther; every lady clothed in white,
And, crown'd with oak and laurel every knight,
Are servants to the Leaf, by liveries known
Of innocence; and I myself am one.
Saw you not her, so graceful to behold,
In white attire, and crown'd with radiant gold?
The sovereign lady of our land is she,
Diana call'd, the Queen of Chastity.³

Love, chastity, Nature: generally speaking, these have been the immediate reasons for a person to record his emotions as poetry. Sri Aurobindo was no exception. His early poems have plenty of it all. The earliest, 'Songs to Myrtilla':

. . . How various are thy children, earth!
Behold the rose her lovely birth,
What fires from the bud proceed,
As if the vernal air did bleed.
Breezes and sunbeams, bees and dews
Her lords and lovers she indues,
And these her crimson pleasures prove;
Her life is but a bath of love;
The wide world perfumes when she sighs
And, burning all the winds, of love she dies.
The lily liveth pure,

3. John Dryden, 'The Flower and the Leaf'.

Yet has she lovers, friends,
 And each her bliss intends;
 The bees besides her treasure
 Besiege of pollened pleasure,
 Nor long her gates endure. . . .⁴

These elements were also staple food for the poets who wrote after Chaucer as though they were keeping the spring alive till the singing birds of the Elizabethan nest would be heard with infinite joy. But why was there this falling-off, this decadence in English poetry after Chaucer? One of the reasons given is the continuous disturbance of everyday life by the contenders for the throne. Almost the whole of the fifteenth century was taken up with the Wars of the Roses. The House of Lancaster and the House of York battled for the throne of England. It ended only when Henry Tudor (of the Lancaster group) married Elizabeth of York. The loveliness of Nature in England has always marked its lifestyle, perhaps the one major comfort for Sri Aurobindo when he was undergoing tremendous financial crunch as a student in England. Not surprising then, that 15th century England went through a prolonged civil war in the name of that exquisite creation, the rose, “the damask force of Infinity”! However, this period may be likened to the masses of mud from which rise the loveliest lotuses. For we would have great plays on the period from William Shakespeare like the Lancastrian tetralogy, *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, chronicling the way the playboy Prince Hal is transformed into the ideal king, Henry V, wise in administration, brave in battle:

We are in God’s hand, brother, not in theirs.
 March to the bridge; it now draws toward night:
 Beyond the river we’ll encamp ourselves,
 And on to-morrow, bid them march away.⁵

Among the reasons why we remember John Skelton of Medieval English poetry is his teaching assignment in the royal household. King Henry VIII had many teachers but it was Skelton that he loved most. Interestingly enough, Skelton seemed to have studied at Cambridge. Considered a great scholar, he was created a Poet Laureate for his mastery of rhetoric and ability to translate important works. In his last days he was a rector of Diss. His turn for humour seems to have got him into trouble once or twice, but he seems to have been unruffled. He went on merrily attacking his victims, among them, Cardinal Wolsey and was imprisoned a couple of times. But nothing could stop his irrepressible wit and satirical barbs.

4. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 12.

5. *Henry V*, Act 3, sc. 6.

When I was a student, Lydgate and others remained distant to us (as there were no translations) but Skelton was familiar enough. The histories of English Literature which we read always had a good word or two for him. The verse form he used is now known as Skeltonics. He was himself not very proud of his versifying:

Though my rime be ragged,
Tatter'd and jagged,
Rudely raine-beaten,
Rusty and moth-eaten;
If ye take well therewith
*It hath in it some pith.*⁶

Commenting upon this, Legouis and Cazamian say:

The pith is mostly satire. In this age of dull repetitions, Skelton pleases because he is brutal and coarse. No one has handled prelates more roughly, not even the Protestants among whom he is not numbered.⁷

His *The Bowge of Court* is typical of his satirical works, as his fantastic flourishes with the English language seem to have caught the imagination of his contemporaries. It is an allegory and we connect merrily with Flattery, Disdain, Dissimulation and Suspicion who turn up as characters. They sound so contemporaneous even today! *The Book of Colin Clout* lashes out at the clergy of his day. Even criticism is wasted, he says, for nothing can move the clergy to improve themselves:

What can it avail
To drive forth a snail,
Or to make a sail
Of an herring's tail;
To rhyme or to rail,
To write or to indict,
Either for delight
Or else for despight
Or books to compile
Of divers manner of style,
Vice to revile
And sin to exile;
To teach or to preach,
As reason will reach?

6. John Skelton, 'Colin Clout'.

7. Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, *A History of English Literature*, J. M. Dent and Sons, London, p. 163.

Say this, and say that,
 His head is so fat,
 He wotteth never what
 Nor whereof he speaketh;
 He crieth and he creaketh,
 He prieth and he peeketh,
 He chides and he chatters,
 He prates and he patters,
 He clitters and he clatters,
 He meddles and he smatters,
 He gloses and he flatters;
 Or if he speak plain,
 Then he lacketh brain.⁸

Why Come Ye not to Court? was a direct attack on Cardinal Wolsey. Skelton is also credited with writing plays. His *Magnificence* is a no-holds-barred criticism of conspicuous consumption by the rich and the powerful. He was certainly a fearless personality in every way. It is interesting to note that among poets produced by the Cambridge University, Sri Aurobindo (from King's) leads the list with his epic *Savitri* and John Skelton has a prime place too as a Poet Laureate.

Mention may be made of the important segment of English poetry from Scotland during the 15th century. The *Acts and Deeds of the Illustrious and Valiant Champion Sir William Wallace* is a poem by a minstrel called Blind Harry. Popularly referred to as 'The Wallace', it is said to be about a Scottish freedom fighter of the 13th century. Some of the events, like the Battle of Stirling Bridge and the Battle of Falkirk are historical. The patriotic and brave hero is executed at the end of the poem. For some centuries, the poem seems to have been very popular with the common man. The opening lines have a Miltonic grandeur:

Of our ancestors, brave true ancient Scots,
 Whose glorious scutcheons knew no bars or blots;
 But blood untainted circled ev'ry vein,
 And ev'ry thing ignoble did disdain;
 Of such illustrious patriots and bold,
 Who stoutly did maintain our rights of old,
 Who their malicious, invet'rate foes,
 With sword in hand, did gallantly oppose;
 And in their own, and nation's just defence,
 Did briskly check the frequent insolence

8. John Skelton, 'Colin Clout'.

Of haughty neighbours, enemies profest,
 Picts, Danes, and Saxons, Scotland's very pest;
 Of such, I say, I'll brag and vaunt so long
 As I have power to use my pen or tongue;
 And sound their praises in such modern strain
 As suiteth best a Scot's poetic vein,
 First, here I honour, in particular,
 Sir William Wallace, much renown'd in war,
 Whose bold progenitors have long time stood,
 Of honourable and true Scottish blood.⁹

Among other Scottish poets of this time mention may be made of King James I, Robert Henryson and William Dunbar. There is variety in their works, scholarship, a closeness to the myths and legends of the past as also a penchant for writing in the allegorical mode. Scottish poetry being a little difficult to read because of the Welsh terms, we never showed much interest in reading them as students, though we were told that this poetry was far superior to what was being produced in England in the 15th century. Yet, we could perhaps have a taste of the sharp bite Dunbar has when he records his vision of 'The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins'.

And first of all in Dance was Pride,
 With hair wyld back, and bonnet on side,
 Like to make vaistie wanis;
 And round about him, as a wheel,
 Hang all in rumples to the heel
 His kethat for the nanis:
 Mony proud trumpour with him trippit;
 Through scalding fire, aye as they skippit
 They girmed with hideous granis.

Sri Aurobindo was surely conversant with all this poetry; he also gave high commendation to that 18th century poet of Scotland, the eternally young Robert Burns as having in him "the things which are most native to the poetry of our modern times." When we enter the world of Sri Aurobindo, we enter the mansions of the entire literature of the world.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

9. Translated by William of Gilbertfield.



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