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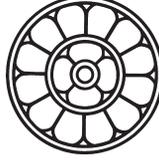
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXVII

No. 11

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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ALL HERE IS SPIRIT

All here is Spirit self-moved eternally
For Matter is its seeming or its form,
A finite motion of Infinity
Built up by energy's electric storm,

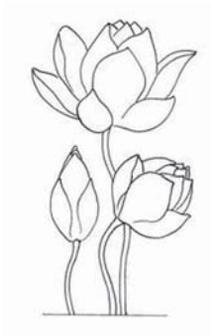
A flux of solid instability
Whirled into shape by a tremendous Force
That labours out the world's fabric endlessly,
Creates and then destroys without remorse

Titan and worm, the dew-drop and the sea,
Our fragile bodies like the aeoned star,
But through it all remains immortally
The secret spirit we for ever are.

Matter is Spirit's semblance glamorous
Self-woven for its own field and robe and house.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 597)



SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of October 2014)

MEETING THE MOTHER

Feeling the Mother's Touch at Pranam

Is it possible to receive the Mother's influence at a distance, for instance at the time of Pranam? Sometimes when I did not come for the morning meditation I felt the atmosphere of the meditation hall wherever I was.

It is possible to receive, but not in the same way. There is an element, a touch on the physical consciousness that is wanting.

30 May 1933

*

Today I saw with open eyes diamond white light descending on the sides of the Mother's ears; while doing pranam I felt a strange kind of touch and with it something entered inside me. When I returned home, I was still absorbed in pure bliss. What was it that descended into me?

There is always a touch coming from the Mother at pranam, one has to be conscious and open only to receive it.

14 November 1933

*

During the morning Pranam, when X went for darshan and the Mother pressed her hand on his head, at the same time I felt her hand on my head as a concrete touch. How does this happen?

It shows that the subtle physical is growing conscious and felt the touch and blessings of the Mother which is always there.

20 March 1935

*

Someone ignorant might ask how one can realise the value of pranam in the half-a-minute Mother has permitted to many. But one ought to know that inner things never depend on the time.

Obviously, the time has nothing to do with it. One hour's touch or a moment's touch — as much can be done by the one as by the other.

18 April 1935

*

The Mother's inner or subtle touch, which I have sometimes felt, simply had not the same effect as her physical touch during the Pranam. The inner touch came and disappeared within a few seconds, leaving practically no effect, whilst the Pranam touch left its impress for a long time even when there was depression and resistance.

It is because you have lived in your outer and not in your inner being that it is like that. But unless you open to the inner touch, the inner being cannot develop. I mean by the inner being the inner mind, the inner vital, the inner physical, the inner psychic.

3 February 1937

*

Could you explain what you mean by the inner touch?

The inner touch is the Mother's influence felt in the inner being.

When I was having experiences and realisations, why did I not feel the inner touch? It is said that without the inner touch, one cannot have such experiences, which are the fruit of the inner being's development.

You did not feel it because the inner being was not awake to it — it felt only the results — and these results were not experiences in the inner being itself but of the Self above.

6 February 1937

Flowers at Pranam

What does the Mother mean by giving us flowers at the Pranam?

Simply to put the power indicated upon you if you are willing to receive it. It is a progress suggested and offered.

*

I felt hurt when the Mother stopped giving me flowers, but now I feel that I have not yet learned the first lesson of Yoga — to surrender to the Mother and accept that whatever she does for me is done for the best. Also, have I not myself told her several times not to give me flowers. Once I got very disturbed when people asked me why Mother gave me such poor flowers. But now I have got on the right track again. You will change me completely so that all of me belongs to you and the Mother.

As regards what you say retrospectively about the giving of flowers, there were there two mistakes,

(1) The one you have yourself seen; you should accept what the Mother sees to be best and most helpful, not judging by your own standard, as it is she alone who has the right knowledge about those things.

(2) Never base yourself or your idea of the Mother and her actions on what others say — as when they told you you had wrong flowers. How can they judge or know? Their utterances may be the result of very wrong judgments and their statements may be misstatements.

Now that you have seen the right thing, go by the way I have indicated to you, the way of confidence and true self-giving.

May 1932

*

The Mother was so kind as to give me a message in the form of six flowers. Their significances are: Devotion, Faith, Mental Sincerity, Resolution, Divine Help and Peace in the Vital. But I did not understand the exact meaning of the message. Will you kindly explain it?

The Divine Help was put inside the flower of faith — when that is done, the two flowers form a single idea = faith in Divine Help.

The meaning was simply that these are the conditions for the realisation in the Yoga — devotion, faith in Divine help, resolution, mental sincerity, peace in the

vital — if these are there, the realisation will come.

10 February 1933

*

What is the significance of the Mother's giving us flowers at Pranam?

It is meant to help the realisation of the thing the flower stands for.

28 April 1933

*

When giving the Bhakti flower, it is the power of Bhakti, the possibility of it that Mother offers to you — if you can open yourself and receive it.

13 June 1933

*

When the Mother gives us flowers, are we to aspire for the things they stand for or does she give these things with the flowers?

There is no fixed rule — sometimes it is the one, sometimes the other. But even when the thing is given, it is given in power — it has to be realised by the sadhak in consciousness and for that aspiration is necessary.

17 November 1933

*

Today the Mother gave me a "Vital purity" flower, but my vital does not like this flower because it lowers the vital in the opinion of people. "Other people get flowers with good significances, I get only this kind of flower" — unable to repel this suggestion, my vital got roused and I suffered.

"Vital purity" is also a flower of good significance expressing a very high thing. When the Mother gives a flower like that, she gives the Force along with it. But you must receive the force, not think about people's opinion of you or your prestige with them which is a thing not worth a thought.

22 November 1933

*

Today the Mother gave me the flower Progress. I felt she was telling me that I am just sitting and I ought to move forward. What should I understand by it?

When the Mother gives a flower, she gives the power of the thing it means — if the sadhak is ready or willing to receive it, he can do so.

17 March 1934

*

X prophesies that I will get a “Divine Love” flower today; she wants half my share! I said I never get the nice white flowers she does. In any case we do not get what our mind thinks we should get.

Obviously not — the mind chooses according to likings or fancies or else to some mental idea of what should be; the Mother chooses by intuitive observation or else an inspiration of what is needed.

9 July 1934

*

At Pranam I observed that Mother was giving smaller lotuses to outside sadhaks and big, full lotuses to those she loves more. To my fate came a medium lotus and from that time all was finished. I could neither work nor sit steadily.

Why on earth do you get these fits of comparison and measurement? They are quite foreign to Mother’s thoughts or intention. She did not choose at all in giving to the sadhaks, — all were mixed together, whatever came to her hand she gave.

5 April 1935

*

You say there was nothing intended in the giving of particular lotuses, but I find it hard to believe. First, Mother cannot be unconscious of what she is doing. Second, it would not create so much disturbance as to make me give up work and lose all strength, if there were not something behind it.

All these ideas are formations in your own mind and suggestions from a wrong force. It is the usual trick of certain forces to represent the Mother as a sort of malignant and insincere tyrant taking a pleasure in disturbing and torturing people and lying to them at every step. I wonder that a clear mind like yours should get so clouded as not to see the trick or fail to perceive that if she is like that she cannot be

the Mother. But the singularity is that such ideas seem to spring up in almost everybody as soon as they get a little disturbed and they never seem to see the sheer illogicality of the thing. This has been a disease, it is true, that has sprung up and stuck in the Asram mind since almost the beginning and if it is somewhat diminished in generality and force, is still there. When it disappears altogether, it will be a great day for the collective sadhana.

5 April 1935

*

Are flowers mere symbols and nothing more? Can the flower symbolising silence, for example, help in the realisation of silence?

It is when Mother puts her force into the flower that it becomes more than a symbol. It then can become very effective, if there is receptivity in the one who receives.

19 July 1937

Avoiding Pranam

Is the idea of not coming to Pranam usually a hostile suggestion?

It is a hostile suggestion almost always.

How can the idea of not coming to Pranam be accepted, as some have done?

Various motives are played upon — pride, the desire not to be like others, not to be dependent on the Mother, the wish to protect some wrong movement from the Mother's control, the idea of doing the sadhana in one's own way free from the pressure of the Truth etc.

30 May 1933

*

I felt a disinclination to come to Pranam, a dryness and lack of interest in anything, an absence of love for Mother. What is the use of going to Pranam in such a dry manner or simply for protection or peace or any such selfish object?

That is a suggestion which should be entirely rejected. It is the usual attack trying to act on the physical consciousness through dryness and depression.

24 February 1934

*

I have often seen that X would be quite cheerful just before coming for Pranam, but when he came in front of Mother he looked sorrowful and displeased. What was the reason?

X is doing like many others — they are cheerful outside, but sorrowful or displeased or suffering when they come to the Mother or write to her. There is a sort of idea (which was long current in the Asram) and there is still a feeling in the vital that the more you do that with the Mother the more you will get out of her. Of course it is absurdly untrue — the truth is the opposite; the more one is cheerfully open to her and lives in the light and gladness, the more one is likely to receive.

Pranam and Non-Pranam Days

What are these stupid waves moving about the atmosphere? People say: “Non-pranam day means a day of rest for the sadhana.”

It is the ordinary attitude of the physical consciousness — but once the fundamental consciousness is fixed, there is no reason why the sadhana should stop for a single day or need rest.

1 April 1935

*

False suggestions have been telling me that I have no love for the Mother. But on every non-pranam day the sadhana refuses to move forward. How can this happen unless not only the inner being, but even the mind and the physical have a good deal of love for her? Only my love for the Mother is not outwardly expressed because it wants to take a psychic form, not a vital one. But as long as the outer mind and vital are not psychicised, it is not possible to have a psychic expression in the outer being all the time, but only for a few limited moments. Is this correct?

Yes, but the vital's test is very foolish. If the sadhana goes on whether you see the Mother or not, that would rather show that the psychic connection is permanently there and active always and does not depend on the physical contact. The vital seems to think the sadhana ought to cease if you do not see the Mother, but that would only mean that the love and devotion need the stimulus of physical contact; the greatest test of love and devotion is on the contrary when it burns as strongly in long absence as in the presence. If your sadhana went on as well on non-pranam as on pranam days it would not prove that love and devotion are not there, but that they are so strong as to be self-existent in all circumstances.

8 June 1936

Fixed Places at Pranam

Are the places in the pranam hall fixed for each individual person? Today I was meditating there when suddenly X came and told me to move, saying it was his place. There was an empty place at my side, so I told him to sit there, but he refused and told me I was sitting in his fixed place. Then I moved over, but Y came and told me to move, for it was his fixed place. To avoid any disturbance I quickly left the place, but I must confess that I was annoyed and it disturbed my meditation. In fact X comes only once in a blue moon to the morning meditation, yet he wants his place to be reserved for ever.

Mother has not fixed places for anyone but the rule of the “fixed place” does obtain in the morning Pranam. It is Nolini who sees after these things. So you had better find a place in the sun not claimed or pegged out yet by any imperial Power and inform Nolini that you now claim that country.

23 July 1936

The Change from Pranam to Meditation

The present arrangement about the morning Meditation is for so long as the Mother has need of rest. It is not intended as a permanent arrangement. Only, if the sadhaks really want the Pranam to continue as before, they should make a better use of it. Many spend the time looking at what the Mother is doing, whom she smiles on, whom she pats or how she blesses people and gossip about it afterwards — most take it as a routine. All that is a wrong spirit and it puts a great strain on the Mother who has to fight all the time against the wrong forces this wrong attitude brings into the atmosphere.

30 January 1937

*

There is a conspiracy among the gods to take away Mother into retirement: no Pranam henceforth. Sir, they have taken you away already and now if Mother withdraws, well, we can do the same one by one.

Well, if people withdraw into themselves, they might find the Mother there!

1 February 1937

*

Did your remark “people withdraw into themselves” carry a suggestion that Mother’s personal touch is not necessary or essential?

It is not essential — the inner touch is the essential thing. But it can be of immense help if properly received. For certain things it is essential but these certain things nobody yet is ready for.

Some people believe that the inner touch is not essential; whatever is necessary can be had through meditation or otherwise.

Whatever is necessary for the inner being, yes.

As a matter of fact, plenty of people are glad because now they can do whatever they please.

But there was never any necessity for such people coming to the Pranam! It is not obligatory.

I know from my own experience that we have abused the Pranam. To tell you frankly, when the morning meditation started I was glad, and I was not quite certain it was not better than Pranam, for I thought, “Now I am free from those worries about Mother’s looks.” Even then I believe that there is something great in the physical touch of the Mother, and one can’t afford to lose it under any circumstance; of course one must have the right attitude.

That is it. The Pranam (like the soup in the evening before) has been very badly misused. What is the Pranam for? That people might receive in the most direct and integral way — a way that includes the physical consciousness and makes it a channel — what the Mother could give them and they were ready for. Instead people sit as if at a court reception noting what the Mother does (and generally misobserving), making inferences, gossiping afterwards as to her attitude to this or that person, who is the more favoured, who is less favoured — as if the Mother were doling out her favour or disfavour or appreciations or disapprovals there, just as courtiers in a court might do. What an utterly unspiritual attitude. How can the Mother’s work be truly done in such an atmosphere? How can there be the right reception? Naturally it reacts on the sadhak, creates any amount of misconception, wrong feelings etc. — creates an open door for the suggestions of the Adversary who delights in falsehood and administers plenty of it to the minds of the sadhaks. This apart from the fact that many throw all sorts of undesirable things on the Mother through the Pranam. The whole thing tends to become a routine, even where there are not these reactions. Some of course profit, those who can keep something of the right attitude. If there

were the right attitude in all, well by this time things would have gone very far towards the spiritual goal.

What is the right attitude for real love and devotion? Is it to be psychically depressed because Mother is not coming for pranam any more or is it to try to get her within?

Psychic depression (a queer phrase — you mean vital, I suppose) can help no one. To try to receive within is always the true thing, whether through meditation or pranam.

2 February 1937

*

Even though I feel Mother during the morning meditation, it is not the same thing as the Pranam was. I feel as though a fundamental support has been taken away — something one could hold on to is not there. I was thinking how nice it would be if the Mother gave Pranam in the evening, so that after the struggle of the day we could turn a little more inward and have her soothing touch.

The difficulty is that apart from the slight incident to the eye that has happened, Mother badly needs a rest from the storm she has undergone physically so long and I don't think it would be wise to disregard the need any longer — for the storm has been there a long time. I hope that after a period of rest, things can be renewed but at present meditation is the only way, for there is no strain on her.

3 February 1937

*

In regard to the proposed change which would vary Pranam with Meditation — not stop pranam altogether. It had nothing to do with the temporary rest taken by the Mother — that was absolutely indispensable. I had often asked her to take some rest before but she had refused because it might disturb the sadhaks too much — what happened made the break physically indispensable. The sadhaks ought to concede that much to her after she has laboured night and day for so many years without giving herself any real rest even at night. You yourself wrote asking her to take the rest she needed. Even so she did not fail to begin going down morning and evening and renewing interviews as soon as it was physically possible.

10 February 1937

*

X feels the stopping of pranam so profoundly that he is depressed. But to make one's sadhana or life depend on the Mother's touch is to have a vital sadhana and a vital life, transient and superficial.

It is only if one can feel the inward touch of the Mother without the necessity of the physical contact that the true value of the latter can be really active. Otherwise there is a danger of its becoming like a mere artificial stimulant or a pulling of vital force from her for one's own benefit.

2 March 1937

*

Some people seem to think that to prepare themselves for the inner touch of the Mother, they have to go through the preliminary stage of having her physical touch at Pranam. So the question is: Is it possible for all, at the very beginning, to develop the inner touch without the physical touch?

If they are so dependent on the physical touch that they cannot feel anything when it is not there, this means that they have not used it at all for developing the inner connection; if they had, the inner connection after so many years would already be there. The inner connection can only be developed by an inner concentration and aspiration, not by a mere outward pranam every day. What most people do is simply to pull vital force from the Mother and live on it — but that is not the object of the Pranam.

4 March 1937

*

Pulling is a psychological act — people are always pulling vital force from each other though they do not do it consciously, i.e. with a purpose in the mind — it is instinctive in the vital to draw force from wherever it can. All contact is in fact a receiving and giving of vital forces in a small or great degree. You have yourself said that after meeting such and such person you felt empty and exhausted — that means the person drew your vital force out of you. That is what people do at pranam, instead of being quiet and receptive, they pull vitally. It can be stopped by cutting off connection, but if the Mother did that at pranam, then the pranam would be useless.

5 March 1937

*

For many people the present morning meditation with the Mother has had a good result. They are able to receive better than when there was only pranam. But in my case the withdrawal of pranam has meant a reduction of psychological pressure by 84 percent.

Different people react differently to the change. Pranam had become to many a routine, to many a mere occasion of pulling the Mother's vital forces away from her so as to supply themselves with vital provender for the day, to many a mere occasion for gossip as to how the Mother had behaved with this one or that one (all founded on their own "observation", imagination and inference); the attitude to it had become twisted. If there had been the right attitude in all and the right use of the contact, it would have been a different matter.

25 March 1937

*

Mother has told you what to reply to X about other points. You may add this from me, that all this about Mother's smile and displeasure is simply the wrong play of the vital in her. It is because so many of the sadhaks were indulging in this wrong play of the vital about Mother's smile and her pleasure and displeasure and all kinds of revolts and jealousies and anger against the Mother and canvassing despondency and talk of going away etc. that the Pranam had to be stopped. Nothing can be worse for the sadhana than to give play to ignorant vital movements like these. She must throw these things away from her if she wants to make any progress in sadhana.

22 April 1937

Outsiders at Pranam

The permission for Pranam and meditation cannot be given. In between the Darshans it will now be no longer allowed to people from outside or only in exceptional cases.

14 December 1935

*

Why on earth can't people wait for outsiders to ask for Pranam instead of goading them to come to it? It makes the Pranam cheap and makes people think we are yearning for them to come and make Pranam, which is a damned mistake and not conducive to the dignity of the spiritual life.

25 September 1938

Making Pranam at a Distance

I am trying to sit in concentration [in Bombay], but I am unable to do anything except offering pranams to the Mother.

Am I proceeding correctly?

Write to him that what he is doing is quite right. While making the Pranam he should aspire to be open to the Mother's influence and her workings in him and to become conscious of her workings.

29 August 1930

Making Pranam to Others

Why is there this imagination? X is as human as she can be and not in the least superhuman. Nobody is to be bowed down to except myself and the Mother. Be on your guard against allowing these or other imaginations to take hold of you — they come easily when the mind is exalted and should be looked at carefully, not accepted without discernment.

22 November 1932

*

It [*the wish to make pranam to others*] is a wrong suggestion from somewhere. It is very necessary not to take the attitude of Pranam to others or to give even in thought a place at all approaching or similar to the Mother's.

27 July 1934

*

In a dream it was Pranam time. There was a boyish looking person to whom all had to do pranam by the Mother's order. Someone made pranam to him and I noted that the boyish person spoke some words in anger. I hesitated, but since Mother had told us to do it, I had to do pranam and so did all the others. Why these wrong pranams and Mother's order?

It was evidently a vital formation, as Mother's order could not possibly be for the pranam to be to another, since such a thing is forbidden and would be disastrous.

It is the kind of formation X was persistently making that all must approach and realise the Truth through him and he even hoped that one day we would realise the fact that the supramental Truth had descended into him and into him alone and

would order all to approach it and us only through him! You probably saw in your dream something like that moving about and the dream gave it form. Several people had this delusion before, but I think with X it went out of the Asram. Still some remnants may be floating still.

9 September 1934

Pranam in the Reception Hall

It seems X has often criticised Y for sitting and doing pranam and meditation in the Reception Hall near the photographs. I do not understand this propaganda of X — does the Mother want him to do that?

It is X's own idea. The only thing Mother insisted on is that the Reception Hall is primarily meant for visitors and at the time when visitors come sadhaks should not occupy the place or do meditation or pranam there. There has never been any restriction on meditation or pranam before our photographs as such — external worship was never forbidden. It is only a question of the place being kept mainly for its original purpose. Z had at one time almost occupied the place keeping some kind of mattress or something there and meditating for long periods — that was objected to certainly. Idolatry comes in only when the image pushes out the Person — there were one or two who said that for them that (the photograph there) was the Mother (more even than the living Person). There was a growing atmosphere of excess about all this and the Mother had to recall people to a sense of measure. That is all. But there is no prohibition of it on principle.

15 March 1935

The Soup Ceremony

I saw in dream: The Mother is giving me soup. I am taking the soup from the Mother's hand and bowing down at her feet. What is the reason for this dream? What is the spiritual meaning of the soup which the Mother used to give us?

The soup was instituted in order to establish a means by which the sadhak might receive something from the Mother by an interchange in the material consciousness. Owing to the past association probably you see like that when your material consciousness in dream receives something from the Mother.

27 July 1933

The Value of Darshan

The Mother is within but the darshan of her helps to realise the Divine on the physical plane also.

11 May 1933

*

I would like to know if it is harmful to talk while waiting for the Mother to come out? I sometimes cannot help talking, laughing and joking.

If you attach any value to the darshan, it is better to be *recueilli*. If her coming is only one incident of the day's routine like taking dinner, then of course it does not matter.

24 July 1933

*

*Is there any difference between *recueilli* and *concentrated*?*

Recueilli means drawn back, quiet and collected in oneself.

25 July 1933

*

The best way for Darshan is to keep oneself very collected and quiet and open to receive whatever the Mother gives.

12 February 1937

Public Darshan Days

Mother, Lord, on the 24th I shall take my food only after having your darshan. Mother, Lord, destroy all my wrong thoughts and feelings.

That is quite wrong. Fasting will not in the least remove any bad things — it is by receiving the Mother's Light and Force in you that they will go. You must eat tomorrow.

23 November 1933

*

I wonder if it is pleasant on Darshan days for the Mother to be touched by 300 people with various things in their vitals and physicals. Perhaps above the Overmind one feels all as the Divine, so the touch and all else is taken delight in as a play of the Divine behind all. Yet her body must be feeling a little uneasy at these touches.

Not uneasy; but it is not easy to absorb and deal with all that when the number is so many and so much is foreign matter.

1 September 1934

*

X is hopeful that the Mother will see Y before they leave Pondicherry. If bringing her for Darshan is not possible, could Mother see her at some other time?

Mother cannot see her. The most we can concede is that she may be brought for Darshan in the way proposed, but she must simply take the blessing and pass, there must be no lingering. It is a mistake to bring sick people or the insane to the Darshan for cure — the Darshan is not meant for that. If anything is to be done or can be done for them, it can be done at a distance. The Force that acts at the time of Darshan is of another kind and one deranged or feeble in mind cannot receive or cannot assimilate it — it may produce a contrary effect owing to this incapacity if received at all. If the Force is withheld, then Darshan is useless, if received by such people it is unsafe. It is similar reasons which dictate the rule forbidding children of tender years to be brought to the Darshan.

13 August 1937

The First Blessing

No — we don't put our picture inside anybody when we give the first blessing. But if you go on looking inside, you will one day find the Mother there.

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 554-70)

‘ALWAYS TO CONTEMPLATE IN EVERYTHING AND EVERYWHERE ONLY THY IMMUTABLE ONENESS!’

May 4, 1914

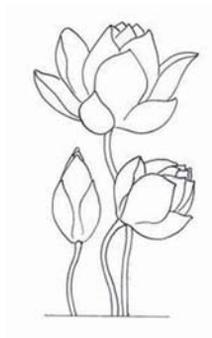
To be merged both in Thee and in Thy work . . . to be no longer a limited individuality . . . to become the infinitude of Thy forces manifesting through one point . . . to be freed from all shackles and all limitations . . . to rise above all restrictive thought . . . to act while remaining outside the action . . . to act with and for individuals while seeing only Oneness, the Oneness of Thy Love, Thy Knowledge, Thy Being . . . O my divine Master, eternal Teacher, Sole Reality, dispel all darkness in this aggregate Thou hast formed for Thy service, Thy manifestation in the world. Realise in it that supreme consciousness which will awaken the same consciousness everywhere.

Oh, no longer to see appearances which incessantly change; always to contemplate in everything and everywhere only Thy immutable Oneness!

O Lord, all my being cries to Thee in an irresistible call; wilt Thou not grant that I may become Thyself in my integral consciousness, since in truth I am Thou and Thou art I?

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 135)



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

(A Compilation)

(Continued from the issue of October 2014)

[K. D. Sethna's essay "The War behind the War" reproduced from *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*, 1992, pp. 33-40.

The "three preceding letters" mentioned below are the letters published as the two essays preceding "The War behind the War", i.e. "Sri Aurobindo and the Philosophers" and "Aurobindonian Viewpoints" in *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*. — Ed.]

THE WAR BEHIND THE WAR¹

[Adapted in places and slightly enlarged from a reply, during the course of the Second World War, to the recipient of the three preceding letters, this study was first published on the fourth anniversary of the end of that conflict and subsequently reprinted when Totalitarianism was on the rampage from Red China.]

Now that Hitler is past history we are liable to forget the true significance of those six years of sweat and tears and blood which were required to beat Nazism to its knees. And, forgetting it, we may fail to see how there can arise new threats which may really be of a piece with the terrible menace of that period.

The truth about World War II will not be grasped simply by looking at the material surface or even by examining the ideological forces at work. The New Order of Hitler, in the aid of which his Panzers and Luftwaffe went out to battle and the Gestapo and the Fifth Column of Quislings spread everywhere their tentacles, was not a mere man's conception. Its origin was occult, lying in the mystery that the world has always felt vaguely as the background against which the mundane drama is enacted. The truth, therefore, about it will best be seized if we consider the support given to the Allied cause from the very outset and all through its darkest hours by one who has stood in the modern world as the greatest explorer of the occult background — Sri Aurobindo.

1. "The War behind the War" was published as the editorial in *Mother India*, 14 May 1949. In *Champaklal Speaks* (3rd edition 2002), p. 123, we read:

14.9.1944: Mother said, regarding Amal's article on 15th August: "'The War behind the War' is very well written — specially well written." — Ed.

The support was given with an extreme decisiveness that cut down to roots deeper than a difference between one human way of life and another, between even a human civilisation and a human barbarism. That extreme decisiveness coming from a master of spirituality like Sri Aurobindo pointed to a vision of Hitlerism as the arch-enemy not just of Britain's or France's or America's outer dominion and of their type of culture but also of all that Sri Aurobindo himself has made it his mission to accomplish. He saw much more at stake than a political, social or cultural issue. He saw an issue beyond the human, the growth of God in man opposed from regions occult to our normal consciousness. And he saw that secret opposition as the most colossal in history and not confined to a brief outbreak.

Many people believed that Nazism would be a temporary phase and its enormities would pass and the true Germany automatically rise to the fore and there would again be lovely music and great literature and towering philosophy. Sri Aurobindo never subscribed to this sunny view. On the contrary, he held that Nazism, in the form in which we then saw it, was, in spite of its horrible ugliness, no more than a small and slight beginning of a darkness of which we had no idea! It was to him the spearhead of an all-out offensive from the Pit. Its success would not be a passing phenomenon which would exhaust itself and let human life return to its old way of understandable frailties relieved by admirable strengths. Its success would herald the beginning of an age in which the diabolic would reign over the human and make the advent of divine forces impossible for untold centuries and render the fight for the Spirit, whenever the fight did manage to come, a far more difficult and doubtful Armageddon than anything we could know during those days. Nazism, in Sri Aurobindo's opinion, had to be struck dead: there could be no tolerance of it, no sitting on the fence comparing it to the savageries of past times and hoping for a swing-back to normal humanity.

From the occult standpoint, Nazism is the exact opposite pole to the Aurobindonian dynamic. It is no brief outbreak touching the superficialities of material life or a few domains of it but an attempt at total supremacy because the Aurobindonian dynamic is also bent on an all-comprehensive integrality of effect on earth. Sri Aurobindo's spirituality is not a grand escape from life's riddle: it is a radical solution of it. If his work had been meant to be nothing more than a going inward and upward from the material plane to a hidden soul-status unborn and unmanifest, he would not have bothered about the Hitlerite colossus striding over mankind. Sri Aurobindo is for creating *lebensraum* for the Spirit here and now. And what is finally determinative of his being the upper pole to Hitler's nether is that he is for divinising the material consciousness and substance and form no less than the subtle parts of our nature — a transformation never clearly envisaged by the saints, sages and prophets of the past despite their intuition that the material world has come originally from the Divine. The Yoga of those saints, sages and prophets, even when not thoroughly escapist, would not be completely baulked if its function of

manifesting the Divine on earth were checked or nullified, for its ultimate goal is still a fulfilment in some Beyond at the end of earth-life. But a unique Yoga insisting on fulfilment by an integral divine manifestation in matter itself and not proceeding to an unearthly hereafter, a Yoga aiming to lay hands on every side of us for the creation of a new race would have its bottom blown clean away by the triumph of Nazism. Conversely, if the Aurobindonian New Order were allowed to make headway, the powers embodying themselves in movements like Nazism would suffer definite defeat and their hold on earth be fundamentally loosened. So, against this divine march upon the terrestrial plane with the purpose of basing there for good the Truth-consciousness, there is the counter-march from the occult home of Falsehood to gain a permanent grip. Because Sri Aurobindo knew what he himself was luminously labouring at, he perceived in one flash the whole character and menace of Nazism.

To gauge that character and menace we must look through Sri Aurobindo's eyes at Nature and her evolution towards the Spirit. Nature on earth starts with an involution of the Divine, an immense "Inconscience". Out of this, life and mind and soul emerge, by slow purblind groping through the potentialities of life and mind and soul involved in matter and by a strong guiding pressure of these things from the planes above the material, where they have their own occult organised activities. Spirit and Supermind are the highest terms involved, holding in themselves the key to an entire fulfilment of all the others in a perfected physical frame. The difficulties of evolution lie, in the first place, in the pervading unconsciousness which is our base as Nature and the separative half-consciousness which crystallises out of it. These are undivine factors, posited at the beginning of a special form of manifestation of the Divine, the working out of a particular possibility, the possibility of the Divine's emergence from what seems at the outset the very negation of Him. But there is another factor at work which derives from beyond material Nature. This is not merely undivine: it is also anti-divine. The undivine resists by sheer inertia, the anti-divine by a various strategy of attack. And the attack comes from occult dimensions of being.

Behind the evolutionary earth-scene there are typical worlds fixed in a certain order and harmony of their own. These worlds are of darkness as well as of light. There is no progress on their own levels, they are content with their own types, possessing their peculiar nature fully expressed and deploying it in diverse fashions. But that contentment with full self-play does not preclude their desire to extend the play of their satisfaction from the occult to the material. They make the earth-scene their battlefield. And, as the earth-scene starts with an involution of the Divine, a concealment of the Spirit, the occult worlds of darkness find an easier role than those of light. "On the black rock of the Inconscience" they build their edifices with greater immediate success. That is why evolution is not only aeonic but chockful of stupendous setbacks, demolitions of half-achieved good, perversions of delicately

established beauty. That is why man in spite of his Godward urge makes so little advancement and centuries see him but grandiosely shifting from tweedledum to tweedledee, remaining pitifully the same in his heart under all variations of outer form. That is why every truth gets twisted in the long run and becomes actually a species of untruth, religion grows an obscurantist blight and art a decadent saturnalia, philosophy a riot of sophisms, and politics a huge machinery for exploiting the many in the interests of the few. O so slow is the journey of the Gods! Always the path is clogged and broken by jagged masses of influence from mysterious worlds where brutality and blindness are the principles on which existence is founded in a non-evolving immutable mould.

Three kinds of beings dwell in the hideous harmony of those worlds. The Indian terms are: Asura, Rakshasa, Pishacha. In English they may be translated: Titan, Giant, Demon. Each has his special function. The Asura is a being who comes with great powers of thought, not a beautiful and systematic turn but a formidable vehemence of it. He has also great "moral" powers, he can be self-controlled, ascetic and chaste in his own life, a sort of inverted Yogi, but all his gifts of *tapasyā* he uses for selfish and violent ends. His aim is to pluck civilisation from the roots, destroy all humane and progressive impulse, regiment the spontaneous diversity of life into a ruthless movement of robots, drink the exultation of triumph by breaking with an iron heel the dreaming heart of man. The Rakshasa is a devourer without brains, the ravager who builds nothing save a pyramid of skulls. He ploughs up the world into a myriad graves and leaves it a chaos of corpses. He is pure greed run amok. The Pishacha fouls and pollutes all things, he is the wallower in dirt and the necrophage, the inventor of obscene tortures, the mutilating maniac. The Asura is the General, the Führer of the army of darkness; the Rakshasa is the lieutenant, the henchman; the Pishacha is the private, the storm-trooper.

They are no symbols or imaginary figures by which man visualises his own imperfections and evil instincts. Rather the evil instincts are the signs in him of the subtle presence of powers and personalities that have their habitat in non-human and preternatural spheres. It is because these spheres are of a perverse bliss in which the wry, the cruel and the filthy are hideously harmonised for ever to yield enjoyment, that man feels a pleasure in his own basenesses, an attachment to his crookedness and suffering, a reluctance to give up his blindness and lust in spite of all the misery his higher self sees and feels in them — a reluctance as if blindness and lust were things to be cherished, precious components of the life-drama, indispensable art-elements of the cosmic scheme. But man's love of the base and the torturous becomes not just one part of his nature but almost his whole being when the Asura, with his attendant Rakshasa and Pishacha, so clutches human nature that it becomes one with that occult and rigid reality. Then we have an incarnation of adverse forces, the dark deities, and they shape out a collectivity, a nation, a State with the purpose of goose-stepping on the world and smashing the entire fabric of civilisation. Such

a catastrophic invasion has taken place in our own times and with a thoroughness proportionate to the thoroughness with which the spiritual Light has sought embodiment and outflowering.

Hence the last war was not like any other war and Nazism was not a recrudescence of man's ignorance but the attempt to begin a new era of changeless horror and terror, the most monstrous onslaught made from Preternature to found here the empire of Satanism. The human consciousness is well-nigh dead in those who embody the preternatural hierarchy — for the simple reason that the human has become as good as possessed. And because the possession is so extreme, the task of defeating the Asura and his band was both so imperative and so arduous. It is no wonder a large number of combatants as well as neutrals kept asking: "Can Hitler be defeated?" Yet the very enormity of the invasion called forth the hidden powers of Light from behind the veil. And though it is harder for the human instrument to be a channel of the Divine than to be a medium of the Diabolic, we must remember that the Divine is the infinite while the Diabolic is nothing save the immense. If the Diabolic finds an easier role, the Divine brings a vaster capacity — and slowly, step by step, the forces of Light were mobilised and trained and hurled against the foe. There could be no parleying, no compromise, no appeasement. The Asura cannot be converted: he has got to be broken.

However dimly, this truth was seized by the Allied nations. Churchill gave it the most dynamic push possible, short of direct occult and spiritual vision. When France lay prostrate and Hitler announced that on the fifteenth of August that year he would address the world from Buckingham Palace and the endless Luftwaffe over Britain seemed a goddess of winged victory for him, Churchill knew that there could be neither turning back nor knuckling under. Whatever his defects in colonial policy, he was magnificent under that day-to-day rain of high-explosive, and his instinct of the superhuman truth at stake marked him out as an instrument *par excellence* of the Divine in the war. In far-away India was raised a voice guided not by instinct but by a shining insight. Strangely enough, the voice was of one whose day of birth was the fifteenth of August, the exact day on which Hitler hoped to celebrate the death of all that mankind valued. It was the sole clear and clarion-like voice amidst a chaos of political quarrels that was confusing India's mind *vis-à-vis* the occult conflict which has made our world its stage. India, who had known God as no other country in the past, was weak, fumbling and hesitant, obsessed by her political animosity against Britain and oblivious of the wider and deeper call to which Churchillian Britain had responded. Sri Aurobindo stood alone in his sunbright seeing of the war's inner significance. He declared his unrestricted sympathy, his unconditional support — "no matter what may happen", as his own words had it in his message to the Governor of Madras in connection with the Viceroy's fund. At the back of those words was the whole mystical puissance of an integral Yoga, a puissance that worked secretly like a dynamo sending out world-currents, driving a

vast invisible inspired strength into the armies and navies and air-forces ranged against Hitler.

When history-books are written, these armies and navies and air-forces together with the men at the head of the Allied governments figure large in them. The praise they get is amply deserved by their idealism, courage, perseverance and skill. But whoever understands the profound meaning of the war and senses the incorporeal clash of which it was the outer reverberation will surely recognise, as the active antithesis to the occult evil that threatened utterly to engulf mankind through Hitler, the occult good that promises to lift mankind utterly to the heights through Sri Aurobindo.

And whoever understands the war's profound meaning will also realise that Nazism, though defunct in its Hitlerite shape, may yet prepare a new attack and that it would be an error to regard all enemies of Hitler as having been children of Light. In the world of the Titan, the Giant and the Demon there are many principalities and the wrestle among them is part of the hideous harmony in which evil exists independently behind the earth-scene. Hence, against one principality trying to precipitate itself upon earth, another doing the same may be pitted side by side with the resistance-movement of evolving man. As soon as that principality has been crushed, those who were comrades because of a common enemy may break up and once again evolving man may confront man acting under the spell of the Titan, the Giant and the Demon. Some element of the anti-Nazism of the past may itself be dyed with essentially the same darkness. The future must learn to see behind the masks. The outward political structure may vary. There may not be any talk of the Master Race, of discrimination between white man and black or brown or yellow. But there may be an ideological colour that seeks to make all men "Red" and smear out from great slogans like "Equality" and "People's Democracy" all their true and deep shade of meaning. The face of the same evil can show itself in different circumstances as Hitlerite Nazism or as Stalinist Communism. The deceptive exterior must be pierced and the one dreadful reality identified through a combination of four signs — the denial of a Godward evolving divine spark in man, the totalitarian freedom-stifling grip on the individual's mind and body, the acceptance of aggressive violence as basic to self-expression, the conspiracy to spread by all available means discontent and disorder in every country whose government pursues the ideal of political democracy.

“Jasmine Villa”, Hyderali Road
MYSORE CITY June 12, 1945

My dear Sethna,

Your letter of November 26th was read with pleasure. I dislike having to apologise to you each time for the belated character of my replies but there is no help for it. I fell ill again last December and was in bed for some weeks. I have recovered fairly good health but owing to the nature of the fever there has been an aftermath of physical and nervous weakness. My physician ordered me to cut down all desk work 75% so I simply let all correspondence slide.

I read your arguments and appreciate their force. You put up an excellent case. But I am sure I can answer it in a personal discussion. It would demand an effort of which I am not now capable to put my answer into writing. So we must postpone this for a personal meeting, which will surely occur eventually somewhere.

I get *All India Weekly* and must compliment you on your articles. I particularly liked “The Fetish of Theory”² about six weeks ago and I hope you will include it in the preface to your next book of poems.

Sri Aurobindo’s fame and work is getting a wider and wider notice in the West, to judge from my mailbag. This pleases me greatly.

Did you ever hear from Mrs Hutchinson? Now that the European war has ceased it is safe to send a copy of your book to her, if she did not receive the other one. Her latest address is: Hesper Hutchinson, Ambassador Club, Bournemouth, Hants, England.

With all good wishes and my peace,

Paul Brunton

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(To be concluded)

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

2. See next issue of *Mother India*. — Ed.

ADDENDUM

SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE SECOND WORLD WAR

On World War II

You have said that you have begun to doubt whether it was the Mother's war and ask me to make you feel again that it is. I affirm again to you most strongly that this is the Mother's war. You should not think of it as a fight for certain nations against others or even for India; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future. It is the forces behind the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance. It is no use concentrating on the defects or mistakes of nations; all have defects and commit serious mistakes; but what matters is on what side they have ranged themselves in the struggle. It is a struggle for the liberty of mankind to develop, for conditions in which men have freedom and room to think and act according to the light in them and grow in the Truth, grow in the Spirit. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there would be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise. If the other side that has declared itself for the free future of humanity triumphs, this terrible danger will have been averted and conditions will have been created in which there will be a chance for the Ideal to grow, for the Divine Work to be done, for the spiritual Truth for which we stand to establish itself on the earth. Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the threatened reign of the Asura.¹

29 July 1942

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1. *This letter and the one that follows were later revised and issued as messages, first to the members of the Ashram, then to the general public. They are published, as revised, in Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 463-68. Here they are published as originally written. — Ed.*

I just received a long letter from Krishnaprem. He evidently wants to qualify his statement about violence. For myself I have no doubt as you who know have said so. Only one point gave rise to doubts in me, in regard to what Nolini wrote in his masterly analysis of the values at stake, comparing this war to Kurukshetra.² This is exactly what troubles Krishnaprem. How can the Allied Powers be compared to the Pandavas? I never doubted the wisdom of all efforts being directed against Hitler, but is it not unwise to compare him to Duryodhana and the Allied Powers to the Pandavas? I have received of late from correspondents and friends objections to that effect — that the Allies can hardly be dubbed “modern Pandavas”. The Pandavas were protagonists of virtue and unselfishness, which can hardly be said of the Allies who are all selfish (more or less) and exploiters of weaker races and imperialistic.³

What I have said is not that the Allies have never done wrong things, but that they stand on the side of the evolutionary forces. I have not said that at random, but on what to me are clear grounds of fact. What you speak of is the dark side. All nations and governments have shown that side in their dealings with each other, — at least all who had the strength or got the chance. I hope you are not expecting me to believe that there are or have been virtuous Governments and unselfish and sinless peoples? It is only individuals and not too many of them who can be described in that style. But there is the other side also. Your correspondents are condemning the Allies on grounds that people in the past would have stared at, on the basis of modern ideals of international conduct; but looked at like that, all big nations and many small ones have black records. But who created these ideals or did most to create them (liberty, democracy, equality, international justice and the rest)? Well, America, France, England — the present Allied nations. They have all been imperialistic and still bear the burden of their past, but they have also deliberately spread these ideals and introduced self-governing bodies and parliamentary institutions where they did not exist; and whatever the relative worth of these things, they have been a stage, even if a still imperfect stage, in a forward evolution. (What of the others? What about the Axis' new order? Hitler swears it is a crime to educate the coloured peoples, they must be kept as serfs and labourers.) England has helped certain nations to be free without seeking any personal gain; she has conceded

2. The reference is to the essay “Dharmakshetre Kurukshetre” written in Bengali by Nolini Kanta Gupta and published along with other material in a pamphlet entitled Sri Aurobindo o Bartaman Yuddha (“Sri Aurobindo and the Present War”) in Bengali year 1349 (1942-43). The title “Dharmakshetre Kurukshetre” is taken from the Bhagavad Gita and evokes the Kurukshetra war. At the end of the essay, the writer mentions Duryodhana and his ninety-nine brothers, who were on one side in that war, and the five Pandava brothers and Sri Krishna, who were on the other side. — Ed.

3. Here Sri Aurobindo wrote between two lines of the correspondent's letter: “Good Heavens, but so were the Pandavas, even if less than more! They were human beings, not ascetics or angels.” — Ed.

independence to Egypt and Eire after a struggle, to Iraq without a struggle. On the whole she has been for some time moving away steadily from Imperialism towards a principle of free association and cooperation; the British Commonwealth of England and the Dominions is something unique and unprecedented, a beginning of new things in that direction. She is turning in spirit in the direction of a world-union of some kind after the war; her new generation no longer believes in an "imperial mission"; she has offered India Dominion Independence (even, if she prefers it, she can choose or pass on to isolated independence) after the war, on the base of an agreed free constitution to be chosen by Indians themselves; though this, it has been feared, leaves a loophole for reactionary delay, it is in itself extremely reasonable and it is the Indians themselves with their inveterate habit of disunion who will be responsible if they are imbecile enough to reject the opportunity. All that is what I call evolution in the right direction — however slow and imperfect and hesitating. As for America she has forsworn her past imperialistic policies in regard to Central and South America, in Cuba, the Philippines, — everywhere apart from some islands in the Pacific which would go plop into other hands, if she withdrew from them. It is perhaps possible, some suggest, that she may be tempted towards a sort of financial imperialism, the rule of the Almighty American Dollar, by her new sense of international power, or led into other mistakes, but if so we may fairly assume from her other strong tendencies that she will soon withdraw from it. The greater danger is that she may retire again into a selfish isolationism after the war and so destroy or delay the chance of a possible beginning that may lead eventually to some beginning of a free world-union. But still there again is the evolutionary force. Is there a similar trend on the part of the Axis? The answer is plain enough both from their own declarations and their behaviour. Avowedly and openly, Nazi Germany today stands for the reversal of this evolutionary tendency, for the destruction of the new international outlook, the new Dharma, for a reversion not only to the past, but to a far-back primitive and barbaric ideal. She fully intended to reimpose it on the whole earth, but would have done so if she had had, as for a time she seemed to have, the strength to conquer. There can be no doubt or hesitation here; if we are for the evolutionary future of mankind, we must recognise that it is only the victory of the Allies that can save it. At the very least, they are at the moment the instruments of the evolutionary Forces to save mankind's future, and these declarations of their own show that they are conscious of it. Other elements and motives there are, but the main issue is here. One has to look at things on all sides, to see them steadily and whole. Once more, it is the forces working behind that I have to look at, I don't want to go blind among surface details. The future has first to be safeguarded; only then can present problems and contradictions have a chance to be solved and eliminated.

Krishnaprem too has become doubtful about the Allies being compared to the Pandavas. Would you kindly throw some light on the question?

For us the question put by you does not arise. The Mother made it plain in a letter which has been made public that we did not consider the war as a fight between nations or governments (still less between good people and bad people) but between two forces, the Divine and the Asuric. What we have to see is on which side men and nations put themselves; if they put themselves on the right side, they at once make themselves instruments of the Divine purpose in spite of all defects, errors, wrong movements and actions (past or present or possible backslidings in the future) which are common to human nature and to all human collectivities. The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces; the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished. That is the whole question and all other considerations are either irrelevant or of a minor importance. The Allies at least stand for human values, though they may often have acted against their own best ideals (human beings always do that); Hitler stands for diabolical values or for human values exaggerated in the wrong way until they become diabolical (e.g. the "virtues" of the *Herrenvolk*, the master race). That does not make the English or Americans nations of spotless angels nor the Germans a wicked and sinful race, but as an indicator it has a decisive importance.

Nolini, I should suppose, gave the Kurukshetra example not as an exact parallel but as a traditional instance of a War between two world-forces in which the side favoured by the Divine triumphed, because its leaders made themselves his instruments. I don't suppose he envisaged it as a battle between virtue and wickedness or between good and evil men or intended to equate the British with the Pandavas, nations with individuals or even individuals with individuals, — shall we say, Stafford Cripps with Yudhishthir, Churchill with Bhima and General Montgomery with Arjuna! After all, were even the Pandavas virtuous without defect, calm and holy and quite unselfish and without passions? There are many incidents in the Mahabharat which seem to show to the contrary that they had their defects and failings. And in the Pandava army and its leaders there must have been many who were not angels or paragons of virtue, while there were plenty of good men and true on Duryodhana's side. Unselfishness? But were not the Pandavas fighting to establish their own claims and interests — just and right, no doubt, but still personal claims and self-interest? Theirs was a righteous battle, *dharmya yuddha*, but it was for right and justice in their own case. The Allies have as good or even a better case and reason to call theirs a righteous quarrel, for they are fighting not only for themselves, for their freedom and very existence, but for the existence, freedom, maintenance of natural rights of other nations, Poles, Czechs, Norwegians, Belgians, Dutch, French, Greece,

Yugoslavia and a vast number of others not yet directly threatened; they too claim to be fighting for a Dharma, for civilised values, for the preservation of great ideals and in view of what Hitler represents and openly professes and what he wishes to destroy, their claim has strong foundations. And if imperialism is under all circumstances a wickedness, then the Pandavas are tainted with that brush, for they used their victory to establish their empire continued after them by Parikshit and Janamejaya. Could not modern humanism and pacifism make it a reproach against the Pandavas that these virtuous men (including Krishna) brought about a huge slaughter (alas for Ahimsa!) that they might establish their sole imperial rule over all the numerous free and independent peoples of India? Such a criticism would be grotesquely out of place, but it would be a natural result of weighing ancient happenings in the scales of modern ideals. As a matter of fact, such an empire was a step in the right direction then, just as a world-union of free peoples would be a step in the right direction now, — and in both cases the right consequences of a terrific slaughter.

Who are the people who have such a tenderness for Hitler and object to his being compared to Duryodhana? I hope they are not among those — spiritual people among them, I am told, — who believe — or perhaps once believed? — Hitler to be the new Avatar and his religion (God help us!) to be the true religion which we must all help to establish throughout the wide world or among those who regard Hitler as a great and good man, a saint, an ascetic and all that is noble and godlike. I don't see why Hitler should not be compared to Duryodhana, except that Duryodhana, if alive, might complain indignantly that the comparison was a monstrous and scandalous injustice to him and that he never did anything like what Hitler has done. By the way, what about Krishna's *jitvā śatrūn bhuñkṣva rājyaṁ samṛddham?* An unholy and unethical bribe? Or what on earth did he mean by it? But battle and conquest and imperial rule were then a *dharma* and consecrated by a special form of sacrifice. We should remember that conquest and rule over subject peoples were not regarded as wrong either in ancient or medieval times and even quite recently but as something great and glorious; men did not see any special wickedness in conquerors or conquering nations. Just government of subject peoples was envisaged, but nothing more — exploitation was not excluded. No doubt, many nations in the past were jealous of their own independence and some like the Greeks and later the English had the ideal of freedom, more especially of individual liberty. But the passion for individual liberty went along in ancient times with the institution of slavery which no Greek democrat ever thought to be wrong; no Greek state or people thought it an injustice to take away the freedom of other Greek states, still less of foreign peoples, or deemed it immoral to rule over subject races. The same inconsistency has held sway over human ideas until recent times and still holds sway over international practice even now. The modern ideas on the subject, the right of all to liberty both individuals and nations, the immorality of conquest and empire, or, short of such absolutist ideas, such compromises as the British idea of

training subject races for democratic freedom, are new values, an evolutionary movement, a new Dharma which has only begun slowly and initially to influence practice, — an infant Dharma that would be throttled for good if Hitler succeeded in his “Avataric” mission and established his new “religion” over all the earth. Subject nations naturally accept the new Dharma and severely criticise the old imperialisms; it is to be hoped that they will practise what they now preach when they themselves become strong and rich and powerful. But the best will be if a new world-order evolves which will make the old things impossible, — a difficult task, but not, with God's grace, absolutely impracticable.

The Divine takes men as they are and uses them as his instruments even if they are not flawless in character, without stain or sin or fault, exemplary in virtue, or angelic, holy and pure. If they are of good will, if, to use the Biblical phrase, they are on the Lord's side, that is enough for the work to be done. Even if I knew that the Allies (I am speaking of the “big” nations, America, Britain, China) would misuse their victory or bungle the peace or partially at least spoil the opportunities opened to the human world by that victory, I would still put my force behind them. At any rate, things could not be one hundredth part as bad as they would be under Hitler. The ways of the Lord would still be open — to keep them open is what matters. Let us stick to the real issue and leave for a later time all side-issues and minor issues or hypothetical problems that would cloud the one all-important and tragic issue before us.

P.S. This is an answer to what is implied in your letter and, I suppose, in those of your correspondents, not to anything in K's letter. His observations are all right, but circumstances alter cases. Ours is a sadhana which involves not only devotion or union with the Divine or a perception of him in all things and beings, but also action as workers and instruments and a work to be done in the world, a spiritual force to be brought on the world, under difficult conditions; then one has to see one's way and do what is commanded and support what has to be supported, even if it means war and strife carried on whether through chariots and bows and arrows or tanks and cars and American bombs and aeroplanes, in either case a *ghoraṁ karma*: the means and times and persons differ, but it does not seem to me that Nolini is wrong in seeing in it the same problem as in Kurukshetra. As for war, violence, the use of force to maintain freedom for the world, for the highest values of human civilisation, for the salvation of humanity from a terrible fate, etc., the old command rings out once again after many ages for those who must fight or support this battle for the right, *mayaivaite nihataḥ pūrvam eva nimittamātraṁ bhava savyasācin*.

2 September 1943

(*Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 211-219)

On the War: Private Letters That Were Made Public

[1]

What we say is not that the Allies have not done wrong things, but that they stand on the side of the evolutionary forces.⁴ I have not said that at random, but on what to me are clear grounds of fact. What you speak of is the dark side. All nations and governments have been that in their dealings with each other, — at least all who had the strength and got the chance. I hope you are not expecting me to believe that there are or have been virtuous governments and unselfish and sinless peoples? But there is the other side also. You are condemning the Allies on grounds that people in the past would have stared at, on the basis of modern ideals of international conduct; looked at like that all have black records. But who created these ideals or did most to create them (liberty, democracy, equality, international justice and the rest)? Well, America, France, England — the present Allied nations. They have all been imperialistic and still bear the burden of their past, but they have also deliberately spread these ideals and spread too the institutions which try to embody them. Whatever the relative worth of these things — they have been a stage, even if a still imperfect stage of the forward evolution. (What about the others? Hitler, for example, says it is a crime to educate the coloured peoples, they must be kept as serfs and labourers.) England has helped certain nations to be free without seeking any personal gain; she has also conceded independence to Egypt and Eire after a struggle, to Iraq without a struggle. She has been moving away steadily, if slowly, from imperialism towards co-operation; the British Commonwealth of England and the Dominions is something unique and unprecedented, a beginning of new things in that direction: she is moving in idea towards a world-union of some kind in which aggression is to be made impossible; her new generation has no longer the old firm belief in mission and empire; she has offered India Dominion independence — or even sheer isolated independence, if she wants that, — after the war, with an agreed free constitution to be chosen by Indians themselves. . . . All that is what I call evolution in the right direction — however slow and imperfect and hesitating it may still be. As for America she has forsworn her past imperialistic policies in regard to Central and South America, she has conceded independence to Cuba and the Philippines. . . . Is there a similar trend on the side of the Axis? One has to look at things on all sides, to see them steadily and whole. Once again, it is the forces working behind that I have to look at, I don't want to go blind among surface details. The future has to be safeguarded;

4. *The paragraphs that follow were extracted from a letter that Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple in answer to questions raised by him. [The complete letter is reproduced on pp. 877-881 of this issue of ML.] The extracted passages were revised by Sri Aurobindo and published in 1944 in The Advent, an Ashram-related journal, and in a booklet issued by the Ashram. — Ed.*

only then can present troubles and contradictions have a chance to be solved and eliminated. . . .

* * *

For us the question does not arise. We made it plain in a letter which has been made public that we did not consider the war as a fight between nations and governments (still less between good people and bad people) but between two forces, the Divine and the Asuric. What we have to see is on which side men and nations put themselves; if they put themselves on the right side, they at once make themselves instruments of the Divine purpose in spite of all defects, errors, wrong movements and actions which are common to human nature and all human collectivities. The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces: the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished. That is the whole question and all other considerations are either irrelevant or of a minor importance. The Allies at least have stood for human values, though they may often act against their own best ideals (human beings always do that); Hitler stands for diabolical values or for human values exaggerated in the wrong way until they become diabolical (e.g. the virtues of the *Herrenvolk*, the master race). That does not make the English or Americans nations of spotless angels nor the Germans a wicked and sinful race, but as an indicator it has a primary importance. . . .

* * *

The Kurukshetra example is not to be taken as an exact parallel but rather as a traditional instance of the war between two world-forces in which the side favoured by the Divine triumphed, because the leaders made themselves His instruments.⁵ It is not to be envisaged as a battle between virtue and wickedness, the good and the evil men. After all, were even the Pandavas virtuous without defect, quite unselfish and without passions? . . .

Were not the Pandavas fighting to establish their own claims and interests — just and right, no doubt, but still personal claims and self-interest? Theirs was a righteous battle, *dharmya-yuddha*, but it was for right and justice in their own case. And if imperialism, empire-building by armed force, is under all circumstances a wickedness, then the Pandavas are tainted with that brush, for they used their victory to establish their empire, continued after them by Parikshit and Janamejaya. Could

5. Sri Aurobindo's correspondent had objected to a paragraph in an essay written by Nolini Kanta Gupta and published by the Ashram, in which Nolini compared the Allies to the Pandavas and the Axis powers to the Kauravas. — Ed.

not modern humanism and pacifism make it a reproach against the Pandavas that these virtuous men (including Krishna) brought about a huge slaughter that they might become supreme rulers over all the numerous free and independent peoples of India? That would be the result of weighing old happenings in the scales of modern ideals. As a matter of fact such an empire was a step in the right direction then, just as a world-union of free peoples would be a step in the right direction now, — in both cases the right consequences of a terrific slaughter. . . .

We should remember that conquest and rule over subject peoples were not regarded as wrong either in ancient or mediaeval or quite recent times, but as something great and glorious; men did not see any special wickedness in conquerors or conquering nations. Just government of subject peoples was envisaged but nothing more — exploitation was not excluded. The modern ideas on the subject, the right of all to liberty, both individuals and nations, the immorality of conquest and empire, or such compromises as the British idea of training subject races for democratic freedom, are new values, an evolutionary movement; this is a new Dharma which has only begun slowly and initially to influence practice, — an infant Dharma which would have been throttled for good if Hitler succeeded in his “Avataric” mission and established his new “religion” over all the earth. Subject nations naturally accept the new Dharma and severely criticise the old imperialisms; it is to be hoped that they will practise what they now preach when they themselves become strong and rich and powerful. But the best will be if a new world-order evolves, even if at first stumblingly or incompletely, which will make the old things impossible — a difficult task, but not absolutely impossible.

The Divine takes men as they are and uses men as His instruments even if they are not flawless in virtue, angelic, holy and pure. If they are of good will, if, to use the Biblical phrase, they are on the Lord’s side, that is enough for the work to be done. Even if I knew that the Allies would misuse their victory or bungle the peace or partially at least spoil the opportunities opened to the human world by that victory, I would still put my force behind them. At any rate things could not be one-hundredth part as bad as they would be under Hitler. The ways of the Lord would still be open — to keep them open is what matters. Let us stick to the real, the central fact, the need to remove the peril of black servitude and revived barbarism threatening India and the world, and leave for a later time all side-issues and minor issues or hypothetical problems that would cloud the one all-important tragic issue before us.

3.9.1943

*(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest,
CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 463-68)*

The War and Sri Aurobindo's Work

The other day X said that Hitler had so arranged things that the Allies will not be able to make any headway in Italy. Also that in Russia he has shortened his front so that the Russians will not move any further.

Well, they seem to be making some headway in spite of Hitler's arrangement. I seem to remember Hitler made arrangements for taking Stalingrad; the result was that he has been kicked out almost entirely from old Russia.

Also he said that Japan was going to crush China in three months.

It doesn't look like it; but perhaps they have confidential information?

Then the day before yesterday I heard about Y's remark about the Allied paratroops having been wiped out. X categorically declared that Y had said no such thing. I wondered about this, made inquiries and was told that he had said something. Did he? What?

People say that he did — on the authority of the man to whom he said it. Does Y deny his saying it?

Write to me if you find a little time whether I am right in feeling that speculating intellectually about Allied reverses is not a right movement as it may easily lead us, unawares, into sympathy with the hostile hordes who are against your work.

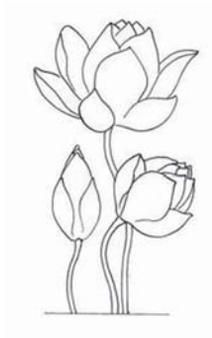
All these things are silly utterances in which the wishes of the mind are presented as truth and fact. That is a common habit in this very imperfect humanity and ordinarily it would be of no importance, except that such inventions and falsehoods are most improper in the mouth of a sadhaka and the habit must be a great obstacle to any progress. But here the wish behind, whether they are conscious of it or not, is that the Asura shall prevail against the Divine. That means a most dangerous giving of oneself to the Falsehood that is seeking to prolong its hold on the world and establish definitely the reign of Evil over the whole world. That is what the victory of Hitler would have meant — it would have meant also the destruction of my work. You are quite right therefore in resenting this kind of attitude (also there is the fact that it establishes a centre of support for the Falsehood and Evil in the Asram). The propagation of this Falsehood, false ideas, false feelings, false actions and persuading people that they are right is the chief instrument of the Asura and its prevalence and success a sign of the growth of darkness on the earth. Fortunately the intensity of

the peril is over, however long the struggle may still last. Other perils and manoeuvres of the Asura may follow afterwards; so it is good to discourage firmly the tendency so that it may not do harm hereafter.

10 June 1944

SRI AUROBINDO

(Letters on Himself and the Ashram, CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 219-21)



SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of October 2014)

Chapter: XXXVII

Trekkers of a Different Path — Dark and Dangerous (1)

His love for India for him was the utterly unreserved abandonment of the worshipper of God. His hatred of foreign rule was as intense as the feeling of a son who sees a monster sitting on the breast of his mother with a dagger in his hand. He had a lofty sense of national dignity and reacted strongly against unmanly conduct. His courage was magnificent. He could attack fearlessly his own countrymen when he considered them wrong and he was ruthless, almost fierce, in his denunciation of the anti-Indian measures of the Government. But he did not allow his indignation to betray him into saying anything unbecoming or vulgar, or overstep the bounds of law, as distinguished from the executive decrees of haughty administrators.

Tara Chand¹ on Sri Aurobindo

THE two earlier chapters focused on the lasting impact of the historic split at the 23rd session of the Indian National Congress at Surat on the nation's body politic. Lala Lajpat Rai, in his usual gentle style, gives a picture of the post-Surat situation concerning the Moderates vis-à-vis the resurgent Nationalists, from his point of view which should be objective to a great extent because he enjoyed the rapport of the adherents of both the ideologies within the Congress:

The Nationalist child was, so to say, brought up on the lap of the old Congressman and fed on the food provided by him; though, this bringing up and this feeding produced results for which the Congressman was not prepared and which shocked him a bit. The first shock over, some of them were happy to have lived to see the day and they blessed the movement. Some made up their minds to throttle it, but soon found that it was not in their power to do so. The worst they could do was to condemn it and to denounce it. All they could achieve was to cut the new movement, shake off all responsibility for it, and thus secure their own safety. We do not say that they did it to save their skin. But fortunately for them, their convictions led them the way their safety lay. In their heart of hearts they blessed the new movement and were heartily glad

that it came. It acted and reacted on their own movement. It made possible for them to put strength and force into their demands for concessions. Whenever an extremist leader recanted or used compromising language, they were sorry. They wanted the movement to continue and to live, though they would not join it and though they believed that it was harmful to the country in some respects. They deplore the lack of enthusiasm and sacrifice in their own ranks, but they admire the selflessness of the extremists and respect their real leaders. An Aurobindo Ghose and a Tilak simply compel admiration and respect.²

If the great Congress split dampened the spirit of the top Moderate leaders and left a number of their followers in a state of bewilderment, that was far surpassed by the new spirit it bred among the average freedom lovers all over the country. In Western India Sri Aurobindo found himself engulfed by surging crowds of admirers — the youth among them turning into his irresistible fans. He obliged them, visiting a number of towns and speaking at hurriedly arranged but largely attended meetings in an effort to turn their enthusiasm into an awakened spirit to work fearlessly for a new India. While he delivered two major public speeches at Mumbai on the 15th and 19th of January 1908, as we have seen in the previous chapter, numerous groups and individuals met him during his four-day stay in a simple chawl in South Mumbai.

On the 24th and 25th he delivered two speeches at Nasik and proceeded to Dhulia on the 25th itself. On the 26th he gave a talk at Dhulia where, among other things, he stressed the fact that boycotts did not indicate hatred towards anybody, but were a means of self-protection. On the 27th he stopped at Akola and spoke to an eager audience. Thence he went to Amaravati and was put up with the Khapardes. He gave two talks, at the Indubhushan Theatre on the 28th and at a sprawling public square on the 29th.

From the 30th of January till the 1st of February he was at Nagpur, giving two talks at the Venkatesh Theatre and the third one in the premises of a temple. After halts at Kampti and Bilaspur on the 2nd and 3rd of February, he was back in Calcutta on the 4th of February. Numerous tasks, organisational and also regarding the *Bande Mataram*, awaited his intervention. He attended to all that and, on the 4th of February, participated in a meeting of the National Council of Education.

While Sri Aurobindo was working to give shape to a lofty prospect of a nationwide social, educational and political awakening, a parallel scheme was being put into action by Barindra Kumar and his group of committed compatriots in their daring efforts at putting fear into the foreign rulers through violence. The irony is, they were and are still referred to as terrorists, a term that underwent a sea-change for the worse in later decades, as vainglorious power-seekers, misguided politicians, religious fanatics and rowdies patronised by native or foreign vested interests were all identified by that single term. Let us therefore call these freedom fighters who took recourse to violence ‘revolutionaries’.

These revolutionaries, from several accounts of their acts and utterances presented to us by history, poetry, drama and folklore, might appear to have been groups of youths inspired by impractical romantic ideas and thrills of adventure, though it was the ideal of freedom that was the basic inspiration and argument for their deeds, right or wrong. But that was not the essential truth, though, even from the confessions of some of them it was clear that wistful elements were not lacking in their nature. The undeniable truth that emerges from a serious study of their life is that most of them were not only idealists and men of courage determined to make any sacrifice for the cause of their motherland's emancipation from as horrendous and scandalous a situation as being ruled by a handful of foreigners inferior to them in many respects, but also highly intelligent and realistic. They were well-read in history in general and in the saga of revolutions too.

Groups which took to the cult of violence were not confined to Bengal. They were there in North India and Maharashtra and, though small in number, in other areas of the subcontinent too.

So far as Bengal was concerned, it was Bibhuti Chakravarty, a member of the "Atmonnati Samiti" (Association for Self-improvement) who was probably the first amateur to make a bomb for political use. Brahma Bandhav Mukhopadhyay named the product *Kalimayer Boma* (Mother Kali's Bomb). That was in 1906. With this one or one made subsequently, Barindra Kumar and Hemchandra — the latter was soon to proceed abroad to learn the science of bomb-making better — tried to eliminate Bampfylde Fuller, the Lieutenant Governor of the newly formed State of Eastern Bengal, notorious for arousing communal feelings among the people. Their efforts did not succeed.³

In an earlier chapter we read, as recounted by Nolini Kanta Gupta, how, while experimenting with a newly made bomb atop a desolate range of hillocks on the outskirts of Deoghar, Barindra Kumar, Nolini Kanta, Ullaskar Dutt and Bibhuti Bhushan Sarkar, lost their fifth comrade Prafulla Kumar Chakravarty, brilliant in many respects, because a slight lack of caution made the bomb explode a few seconds before the expected moment. The tragedy shocked them, but hardly dampened their spirit. That was towards the end of 1907.

Around the same time C. C. Dutt, an exceptionally daring man who, despite being a highly placed officer of the I.C.S., was a committed collaborator of the revolutionaries, tried to kill the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Sir Andrew Fraser, with Prafulla Chaki as his instrument. Their well-drawn plans failed due to factors unforeseen.

Barindra Kumar took up that task. After a couple of failures, he, Prafulla Chaki and Bibhuti Sarkar laid a powerful mine under the railway track at a spot near Narayangarh not far from Calcutta — it was done with genuine expertise as investigations established — a little before the Lieutenant Governor's special train was to cross it. It worked so far as the expected sound and fury were concerned, creating a

huge crater and twisting the rails like wires, but the intended target had a miraculous escape.

In this context it is interesting to look at a sample of the quality of inquiry into such incidents, identification of the guilty and the justification of the punishment. This is from the Intelligence report on this particular case.

L. F. Morshead, I.C.S., the then Inspector General of Police, wrote about the case: “After a prolonged investigation, eight railway coolies and a gateman were charged under section 126 of the Indian Railways Act. Of them one Nepal Dolai was sentenced to ten years transportation while Kumed Barik, Opi Dolai, Fakir Das, Gopal Dolai, Tara Dolai to terms of imprisonment varying from seven to five years.”

The accused were sentenced on the 9th of April, 1908, and the conviction and the sentences were upheld on appeal to the High Court on the 24th of August, 1908. The conviction was based on the confessional statements of the accused persons and other circumstantial evidence collected by a team of investigating officers, supervised by C.W.C. Plowden, the then D.I.G., Special Branch. But the entire case as built by the police was blown to pieces when Barindra Kumar Ghose and his associates arrested in connection with the Alipore Bomb Case in the 1st week of May 1908, made confessional statements before the Magistrate of Alipore Court, wherein they narrated the facts of the case.⁴

In January 1908 Hemchandra returned from France with some improved knowledge of bomb-making. In the fresh wave of enthusiasm his arrival aroused, it was decided to put an end to the menace that was Douglas Kingsford.

Why Kingsford? He clearly represented the uncivilised and vainglorious section of the British administration in India. The fact that he derived especial satisfaction from awarding whipping as punishment for political offenders, particularly if they were young ones hailing from respectable families, should adequately speak about his nature. The *Sanjeevani*, edited by Krishna Kumar Mitra, published an impressive list of people ordered to be whipped by him.⁵

The Intelligence reports of the time contain the English translation of an article carried by Brahmabandhav’s *Sandhya* under the title “A Butcher of a Magistrate at Lall Bazar” which was probably the popular image of Kingsford during the *Bande Mataram* trial when the young Sushil Sen was ordered by the magistrate to be flogged 15 times:

There was once a proposal made at Calcutta to set up a Kasai Kali (the image of Kali that is set up in the butcher’s shop). All the meat-sellers of the town were to go there and kill their goats before this Kali. The proposed Kasai Kali was not set up, but the Government of Bengal has set up a Kasai Kazi (the

butcher of a Magistrate) at Lall Bazar. We do not know Mr. Kingsford's genealogy; perhaps the Magistrate's father or grandfather was a butcher. How otherwise could his appearance be like this? And his understanding is like his appearance and as is the appearance so is his conduct. . . . This butcher of a Magistrate passed orders that Sushil was to be given fifteen stripes in jail. The Vakil drew his attention to a High Court notification that respectable youths should be whipped on the palm and he requested that the whipping should be administered in Court instead of in jail. But the butcher of a Magistrate said, "I do not know anything — he is to be whipped in jail."⁶

Among the bureaucrats, Kingsford's was the most merciless and shrill voice against the Nationalist press, against the *Yugantar* in particular. He would do everything possible to kill the publication. As the Presidency Magistrate trying the case of sedition against the newspaper, he said in his judgment about the items published in that newspaper:

They are of a grossly seditious nature and calculated to excite contempt, enmity and hostility to the Government established by law in British India. . . . It is impossible to peruse these articles without arriving at the conclusion that this newspaper is published with the deliberate intention to incite the ignorant and the misguided to the commission of acts of violence and rebellion against Government and its officers; and it is certainly a most unfortunate circumstance that the law should permit the paper to exist.⁷

These were only some of the factors active in the atmosphere when the revolutionaries decided to call it a day so far as this gentleman's conduct was concerned.

While Sri Aurobindo was meeting the demands of his enthusiastic admirers and visiting places in Western India at a hectic speed, Barindra Kumar was back from Surat with his revolutionary colleagues and followers — rather disillusioned with his dream of meeting at least some fellow-thinkers, if not fellow-travellers yet, along the dangerous radical path chalked out by him. In fact, the only secret meeting of a handful of supposed revolutionaries he could organise at Surat included, he found out to his dismay, a probable spy!⁸

He obviously forgot that the type of men he was looking for were not expected to attend an open Congress conference. He himself would not, but for a sudden and almost impulsive decision.

Be that as it may, disillusionment had bred in him a new determination; it was to concentrate on building up a secret army of fighters in his own milieu, without hoping for a synchronised nation-wise development of the same nature.

The Maniktolla Gardens, on the fringe of Calcutta as it then was, glimpses of

which we have seen earlier, grew more and more active in the midst of a quiet environment.

Let us have a few first-hand glimpses of this establishment which was to become a national sensation before long, from the reminiscences of one of its inmates, Nolini Kanta Gupta. He was then in his mid-teens. The passages also give us some clue to enable us to visualise the culture, minds and attitudes of a generation of freedom-fighters belonging to a more or less forgotten era:

At last I made up my mind finally to take the plunge that I must now join the Manicktolla Gardens in Muraripukur. That meant good-bye to College, good-bye to the ordinary life. . . .

I had already taken a vow about a year ago, in front of a picture of Kali at a secret ceremony at dead of night, a vow written out in blood drawn from the chest, that I should dedicate my life to the whole-hearted service of the Motherland. With me there was a companion, and also a local leader who had read out the oath. . . .

That I would definitely join the Gardens was conveyed to Barin . . . so one day I received a call — Barin would see me, as if at an interview for a post. . . .

This happened to be my first meeting with Barin. He received me with great kindness and had me seated next to him. I cannot now recall the details of the conversation we had, but perhaps there was nothing much to remember. One thing however I distinctly remember. He asked me if I had read the Gita. I said I had read it in parts. He handed me a copy and asked me to read aloud. I began reciting *Dharmakhetre Kurukhetre* . . . in a pure and undiluted Bengali style. He stopped me and cried out, "That won't do. One doesn't read Sanskrit here in the Bengali style. Listen, read like this." He gave a recital in the Hindi style, that is, with the pronunciation current in the other parts of India. . . .

Later I have heard the correct Sanskrit accent so often from Sri Aurobindo himself. I have heard him recite from the Veda, from the Upanishads, from the Gita. Today, I too do not read from Sanskrit in the Bengali way, even when reading from an article in Bengali.

It was settled that I would join the Gardens and stay there, but I did not give up my room at the Mess. . . I attended College as well, but at infrequent intervals. College studies could no longer interest me. . . .

Almost about the same period, I had thought of another childish plan, again in connection with the making of a bomb: the thing had so much got into my head. I was a student of the Calcutta Presidency College where the great Jagadish Chandra was professor at the time. Here was the idea and it was approved by my leaders — could I not join his laboratory, as some kind of an assistant? Then one could carry on research and experiments on bombs. But

how to get hold of him? I thought of Sister Nivedita. She was a great friend of Jagadish Bose and it was easy to approach Nivedita, for she was one among our circle of acquaintances. But the occasion did not arise for this line of advance, for things had been moving fast at the Gardens. . . .

One would not say that life at the Gardens had settled down to a definite routine yet, for we had just begun. There were about a dozen or fourteen of us in all. There were occasional visitors from outside who would come for a short stay and then go back to their work. Naren Goswami had come like that for a couple of days, so had Bhavabhushan who later became a Sannyasin. We began with readings from the Gita and this became almost a fixed routine where everybody took part. Even the local Inspector of Police expressed a desire to join in these readings with us *Brahmacharins*. But he had to pay dearly for that. He did not realise that these were no ordinary lessons in the Gita but served as a facade for our preparations for the bomb. For this he was, as we heard, later dismissed from the service. The poor fellow had wanted to acquire a bit of spiritual merit which seemed to turn against him. . . .

During my last days in College, I used to study Mazzini in place of *King John* or *The Faerie Queene*. One day I suddenly discovered that they had removed my Mazzini from the shelves of the library, and even the *Life and Death of Socrates* by Plato had disappeared. These books were no doubt supposed to turn the heads of our Indian students! . . .

Now, to come back to the Gardens and our organisational system. Nothing could be arranged by way of an armed force, for our work itself took another turn. A military organisation was now to give place to a terrorist organisation. In the earlier stages, we did not have much faith in terrorist methods, for, as we had seen about Russia, this path led only to mutual assassinations; murder and revenge seemed to follow in an endless succession, leading to no final issue. That is why we had decided on the military solution. To that end, our efforts had been directed towards forming a new military force on the one hand and on the other towards sowing the seeds of revolt among the British Indian troops. I remember about a military police force stationed at Rungpore where the commandant had been won over to a large extent, although I could not say how it would have turned out at the end. . . .

As I was saying, we gave up militarism and turned towards the terrorist methods. There had awakened in the country a keen demand and aspiration: must we bear in silence and give no answer to this tyranny and oppression that seemed to go on increasing day by day? So, we started getting ready for a fitting reply. It brought in the first place a greater courage to the general public, though it remained doubtful if it helped relieve the oppression. And secondly, it gave some satisfaction to men. Thus we directed our efforts to shooting at the Lieutenant Governor, derailing his train, and assassinating tyrants in the

official ranks. Governor Andrew Fraser, the District Magistrates Allen and Kingsford, Mayor Tardivel of Chandernagore, these became the targets of the terrorists. The members of the Manicktolla Gardens group were directly connected with these activities. But there is one thing to be noticed about these attempts that at least in the earlier stages almost all of them failed, with only one or two exceptions. . . .

At the Gardens there was some shooting practice too, with pistols. The trunk of a mango tree had been riddled with bullets — the police could very easily find that out later. This reminds me of Prafulla Chaki. He used to say taking a revolver in his hand, “I for one am not going to live on if they get hold of me. I shall neither be tortured by the police nor will I let their offers of confession tempt me. Look, this is the way I am going to finish myself.” He would then open wide his mouth, push in the revolver muzzle and press the trigger with his fingers, adding, “This is the one sure way. . . .” Prafulla committed suicide after the Muzzaffarpur bomb affair in exactly the way he had rehearsed — I should not say “suicide”, for it was really an act of martyrdom. Now let me come out with some of my own exploits. I did not, as I have said, want to be one of the law-abiding “civilians”; my aim was to be a “military man” with his law of the bomb. But first I must prove my mettle in that line. So, they set me a test. I was to carry a pistol and deliver it to a gentleman in Jalpaiguri. You seem to laugh at the instance of my “military” ability. But perhaps you cannot now imagine what it meant in those days to carry a real pistol. The police had its secret agents all over the place always on the lookout for victims. If you happened to be a young man, if you dressed in a manner even slightly out of the ordinary, if there was anything the least suspicious about your movements that might attract attention, it was enough. If the police came and gave you a search and found a lethal weapon like a revolver in your possession, you would get at least seven years — of that you might rest assured. Nevertheless, I managed to carry the weapon in a perfectly easy and natural manner all the way to North Bengal and reached it to the address given. This was the way in which they used to distribute weapons for future use to the different centres at various places. . . .

The household arrangements at our Gardens were of the most simple, natural and unpretentious sort, the aim being to avoid all unnecessary complications and save our time and labour. The cooking was done perhaps only once a day and almost every day it was *Khichri*. For the second meal, something ready-made bought from the market was found enough. We did the cooking ourselves and washed the dishes. The dishes and utensils were not of brass, they were all earthenware vessels, I believe. And the washing was done in the waters of the pond. What kind of pond it was could only be described by a Kalidasa, but perhaps some idea could be had from Bankimchandra’s

description of the Bhima tank: “The dark shades of the palms dancing to the rhythms of the dark waters” and so on. That is to say, it had more of weeds and mud than water, not to speak of the fish and the frogs and other animal species, including a fair complement of serpents. . . . But to us it seemed good enough and we used to take our dips there with great glee. In fact I had my first lessons in swimming in that very pool. . . . The gardens around were in an equally poor condition. They were no gardens at all, for all was primitive jungle, a tangle of shrubs and trees and creepers, with all sorts of insects and reptiles roaming within. And the house where we were supposed to live was in ruins. But in spite of all, the place was absolutely quiet and silent, a reason being that it was practically outside the city limits. The life we lived in such surroundings could be compared with that of nomads. The strange thing is that despite such irregular habits, or rather the habitual irregularities of our life there, we never fell ill. The abundance of vitality and the enthusiasm and joy kept at bay all attacks of disease. It was very similar to the kind of life we lived here in Pondicherry during the first few years. Motilal, when he saw us then, exclaimed in utter surprise, “What! Is this the way you live? And you keep him (Sri Aurobindo) too like this?” . . .⁹

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN — NOBLE AND RESOLUTE

(Continued from the issue of October 2014)

5. Lincoln's humility and magnanimity

ANOTHER exceptional Lincoln virtue was his humility. Lincoln never forgot his humble origins and though he attained the highest office in the land, he remained a humble man throughout his life. Robert McHenry, editor in chief of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, wrote, "Lincoln's humility is to be read in almost his every utterance and writing. No one of such humble beginnings could be other than painfully conscious of the great distance he travelled with none of the usual requirements of birth, breeding, education, or fortune."¹ Emilio Castelar, President of the First Spanish Republic, declared, "Lincoln is the humblest of the humble before his conscience, the greatest of the great before history."²

Lincoln had almost no vanity. He narrated this story himself:

In the days when I used to be on the circuit, I was accosted in the cars by a stranger, who said, "Excuse me, sir, but I have an article in my possession which belongs to you." "How is that?" I asked, considerably astonished. The stranger took a jack-knife from his pocket. "This knife," said he, "was placed in my hands some years ago, with the injunction that I was to keep it until I had found an uglier man than myself. I have carried it from that time to this. Allow me to say, sir, that I think you are fairly entitled to the property."³

Lincoln had a rare ability to laugh at himself and liked to quip that if he ever met anybody uglier than himself, he would shoot the wretch and put him out of his misery.⁴ When an artist brought in a portrait of the President towards the end of the Civil War, Lincoln said, "Why, yes, that is a very good picture of me, and do you know why?" He continued: "Well, I'll tell you why it is the best picture of me; it is the ugliest."⁵ Lincoln may have been overly modest, for on the flip side James R. Gilmore observed: "His deep-sunk, dark gray eyes had a soft, kindly expression, and I never knew a smile so positively captivating. It transfigured his whole face, making his plain features actually good-looking, so that I could agree with Caroline

1. Website: www.britannica.com

2. Rhodes and McClure publishing co., *Abraham Lincoln Speeches Complete*, preface p. 4.

3. *Lincoln's Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, p. 36.

4. Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 98.

5. Website: www.mrlincolnanfriends.org

M. Kirkland, who not long before had told me that he was the handsomest man she had ever seen.”⁶

No lawyer on the circuit was better loved than Lincoln, a fellow lawyer recalled. “He arrogated to himself no superiority over anyone — not even the most obscure member of the bar. . . . He was remarkably gentle with young lawyers. . . . No young lawyer ever practised in the courts with Mr. Lincoln who did not in all his after life have a regard for him akin to personal affection.”⁷

During his very first campaign for political office in 1832, he self-effacingly announced, “I was born and have ever remained in the most humble walks of life. I have no wealthy or popular relations to recommend me.”⁸ On another occasion he observed: “I am very sure that if I do not go away from here a wiser man, I shall go away a better man, from having learned here what a very poor sort of a man I am.”⁹

In February of 1855 the Illinois Senate was seated to elect the next Senator. After the ballot, Lincoln led with 47 votes but 51 votes were needed for a majority. Congressman Lyman Trumbull, who like Lincoln was aligned with an anti-slavery party led by Norman Judd, held 5 votes and it was expected he would eventually have to yield his votes to Lincoln. But Trumbull and Judd refused to yield and prevented Lincoln from getting the victory. At this point Lincoln realised that the only way for the anti-slavery coalition to win was to switch his votes to Trumbull and allow him to be the next Senator from Illinois. Lincoln “advised his floor manager, Stephen Logan, to drop him for Trumbull. Logan refused at first, protesting the injustice of the candidate with the much larger vote giving in to the candidate with the smaller vote.” Lincoln was adamant and said, “You will lose both Trumbull and myself and I think the cause in this case is to be preferred to men.” Lincoln was ambitious to succeed in life and the intense hard work — of late nights, working on weekends and spending interminable hours conversing and writing to fellow politicians — and years of patient waiting had proved futile and he personally suffered a brutal disappointment, describing the ordeal as “agony”. It was difficult for him to accept the manner of his loss. Lincoln had humbled himself and his ambitions. Trumbull became the next Senator from Illinois and Lincoln “expressed no hard feelings toward either Trumbull or Judd. He deliberately showed up at Trumbull’s victory party, with a smile on his face and a warm handshake for the victor.” Though deeply disappointed, to step back, without resentment, and allow a colleague with 5 votes to prevail when he was holding a near-decisive total displays exceptional magnanimity. The magnanimity was such that “Neither Trumbull nor Judd would ever forget Lincoln’s generous behaviour. Indeed, both men would assist him in his bid for the U.S. Senate in 1858, and Judd would play a critical role in his run for the

6. James R. Gilmore, *Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War*, p. 77.

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

8. William H. Herndon, Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon’s Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life*, Vol. 1, p. 103.

9. See *Lincoln’s Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, pp. 32-33.

Presidency in 1860.”¹⁰

In 1859 Jesse Fell, a leading Illinois Republican, told Lincoln that he could become a serious Presidential contender. Lincoln unassumingly yet candidly replied: “Fell, I admit the force of much that you say, and admit that I am ambitious, and would like to be President; I am not insensible to the compliment that you pay me, and the interest that you manifest in the matter, but there is no such good luck in store for me, as the Presidency of the United States; besides, there is nothing in my early history that would interest you or anybody else; and as Judge Davis says, ‘it won’t pay.’”¹¹

Fell then persuaded Lincoln to write a short autobiography. Lincoln responded with a short letter to Fell with a note: “There is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me. If anything be made out of it, I wish it to be modest, and not to go beyond the material.”¹² In this short autobiography he frankly admitted that both his parents had descended from “undistinguished families”, that he was “literally without education” and that when he came of age he “did not know much”.¹³

A year later, when Lincoln became the Republican candidate for Presidency, John Scripps, a journalist, asked him for an autobiography to enable him write a campaign biography so that the electorate could know him a bit better. Lincoln protested: “Why, Scripps, it is a great piece of folly to attempt to make anything out of my early life. It can be all condensed into a simple sentence, and that sentence you will find in Gray’s *Elegy*, ‘The short and simple annals of the poor.’ That’s my life, and that’s all you or any one else can make out of it.”¹⁴

Coming from a poor background Lincoln was anxious to make himself worthy in society, but his ambition was subject to modesty. He once said: “What kills a skunk is the publicity it gives itself.”¹⁵ Lincoln liked reciting selections of poetry, one of which he was very fond, “Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?”¹⁶

On being elected President in 1860 he was received by jubilant crowds during his train journey to Washington for the swearing in. David Donald observed: “Repeatedly, he emphasised that the tumultuous welcome he received was not a personal tribute. He had been elected President . . . ‘by a mere accident, and not through any merit of mine’; he was ‘a mere instrument, an accidental instrument’ of the great cause of Union.”¹⁷

10. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 171-73.

11. Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years*, p. 145.

12. Timothy Sean Good, *Lincoln for President: An Underdog’s Path to the 1860’s Republican Nomination*, p. 66.

13. See website: www.teachingamericanhistory.org

14. William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon’s Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life*, p. 2.

15. Thomas Freiling, *Walking with Lincoln: Spiritual Strength from America’s Favourite President*, p. 25.

16. See website: www.archive.org (Poem ‘Mortality’ by William Knox).

17. See website: www.whitehousehistory.org

It was Lincoln's humility that allowed him to incorporate some of his major political rivals into his Cabinet, creating a team of high-profile ambitious personalities with big egos, holding differing views, to deal with the issues of the Civil War. Some even tried to usurp his position. Instead of consigning his opponents to oblivion, he appointed them all to his cabinet. In the political field this was an unprecedented act. Recognising their great gifts, he concluded, "These were the very strongest men. Then I had no right to deprive the country of their services."¹⁸ He was humble enough to realise he did not have all the answers and that his goal could be reached through a synthesis of ideas from the best brains of the country. He had no need to prove his superiority or to be right all of the time just because he was the chief. He put his own ego aside to appoint whoever he thought was best for the country, whenever a post needed to be filled. Typically, cabinet members would come from a close-knit circle of advisers who had proved their worth and trustworthiness over a long period of time or during the hard campaign alongside their candidate. New Presidents rewarded loyalty, not rivalry. Making matters worse, none of his cabinet members initially liked, or fully accepted, their positions subordinate to a man they considered their inferior — in terms of family background, formal education or administrative experience. His humility and magnanimity allowed him to make the best use of the best people, and eventually, Lincoln would earn the steadfast loyalty of his team. Lincoln never imposed his will on his subordinates through temper but communicated through gentleness and clear logic. His self-control would cool fiery passions. In the long run, this approach won him friends and allies. They knew he was not a vindictive person, even when provoked, as he never kept any resentment or grudge that could be caused by any hurt pride. Some saw this as a weakness but those who knew him best knew it to be an expression of inner strength. In a letter to Mark W. Delahay on May 12, 1860 he wrote: "Be careful to give no offence, and keep cool under all circumstances."¹⁹ Mr. Lincoln himself told Attorney General Edward Bates in 1864 that some of his more radical opponents refrained from a frontal attack on him because "the blow would be ineffectual, and so, they would fall under his power, as *beaten enemies*; and, for that only reason the hypocrites try to occupy equivocal ground — that, when they fail as *enemies*, they may still pretend to be *friends*."²⁰

Though inwardly supremely confident Lincoln considered humility as the most important quality and repeatedly referred to it as an essential virtue. A *Newsweek* staffer recently wrote: "A Lincoln-esque leader is confident enough to be humble — to not feel the need to bluster or dominate, but to be sufficiently sure of one's own

18. Doris Kearns Goodwill, *Team of Rivals: Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 319.

19. Website: www.mrlincolnandfriends.org (Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, Vol. IV, p. 179).

20. *Ibid.* (Howard K. Beale, editor, *The Diary of Edward Bates*, p. 333).

judgment and self-worth to really listen and not be threatened by contrary advice.”²¹ Lincoln was also a people’s person, humbling himself to connect with those around him. His ability to empathically listen and understand people made him a great leader. Lincoln had an open-door policy in the White House, where he was universally kind to all types of visitors, from the wealthy to the poor. It is most likely that the hardship and depression that Lincoln wrestled with all his life enhanced his innate empathy and equanimity allowing him to connect to those in lowly places.

Whilst selecting his Cabinet Lincoln had chosen an old colleague, Caleb Smith over the popular Schulyer Colfax for the Department of Interior. In a gracious letter to Colfax he explained: “I had partly made up my mind in favour of Mr. Smith — not conclusively of course — before your name was mentioned in that connection. When you were brought forward I said ‘Colfax is a young man — is already in position — is running a brilliant career, and is sure of a bright future in any event. With Smith, it is now or never.’ I considered either abundantly competent, and decided on the ground I have stated.” Mentioning that Colfax had not supported him three years ago during his Senate campaign against Stephen Douglas, Lincoln begged him to “not do me the injustice to suppose, for a moment, that I remembered any thing against you in malice.”²²

Lincoln had chosen Simon Cameron as Secretary of War, but the latter provoked a serious strain in their relationship. Lincoln complained that Cameron was not only ignorant and incompetent but plainly discourteous to him. Presidential aide, John Nicolay too commented that Cameron was “selfish and openly discourteous to the President.”²³ Yet Lincoln did not dismiss him. Matters came to a head when in December, just after Lincoln’s message to the Congress, Cameron made public his report on anti-slavery which was not exactly Lincoln’s policy. Finally in January 1862 after several complaints of mismanagement, corruption and abuse of patronage against Cameron, Lincoln was compelled to remove him. Cameron then recalled Lincoln’s magnanimity in seeking his counsel: “When I went out of the Cabinet Lincoln himself asked me whom I wanted for my successor. I told him I wanted Stanton. Well, said he, go and ask Stanton whether he will take it.”²⁴

Despite Cameron’s past misdemeanours, Lincoln defended him when Cameron was censured for the handling of War Department purchases. Lincoln took joint responsibility for the irregularity along with the other heads of departments — an act for which Cameron remained ever grateful. Lincoln did not want to humiliate Cameron and later reappointed him as United States Minister to Russia despite opposition.

21. See Evan Thomas, *A Long Time Coming*, p. 186.

22. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 316.

23. Website: www.longislandwins.com

24. Fletcher Pratt, *Stanton — Lincoln’s Secretary of War*, p. 132.

Following Cameron's resignation the appointment of Democrat Edwin Stanton, in a Republican Government, as a replacement was a revelation. Stanton had treated Lincoln with utter contempt at their initial acquaintance when the two men were involved in a celebrated law case in the summer of 1855. Unimaginable as it might seem after Stanton's demeaning behaviour, Lincoln offered him the most powerful cabinet post. A writer relates: "Stanton was astonished that Lincoln had appointed him Secretary of War. After all Stanton had publicly humiliated Lincoln long back in a legal case in Cincinnati. And in Washington this past year, Stanton had vilified this 'imbecilic' President, this 'original gorilla.' . . . But Lincoln made it clear that he bore Stanton no ill will. Lincoln had put that aside now. He never carried a grudge, he said later, because it didn't pay."²⁵ Even though Stanton was a sharp and abusive critic at the beginning of the war, Lincoln chose him for his scrupulous honesty, organisational abilities and unshakable loyalty to the Union cause, recognising that the very qualities that had brought irritable Stanton to insult him — his intensity, directness, and determination to succeed — gave him a certain tenacity.

Once when Owen Lovejoy told Lincoln that Stanton made a rude remark about him, he lightly brushed it aside, "If Stanton said I was a d—d fool, then I must be one, for he is nearly always right, and generally says what he means. I will step over and see him."²⁶ There were constant demands for the removal of Stanton as he was brusque, domineering and unbearably unpleasant to work with but Lincoln refused to be bullied and was determined to keep him, for he believed the very defects of Stanton could be explained by his concentration and intensity of his mind on the sole object of squashing the rebellion. Lincoln remarked, "Mr. Stanton has excellent qualities, and he has his defects. Folks come up here and tell me that there are a great many men in the country who have all Stanton's excellent qualities without his defects. All I have to say is, I haven't met 'em. I don't know 'em! I wish I did!"²⁷ Despite the occasional instance of dissent, Lincoln recognised Stanton's qualities and his sincerity to the Union cause. Ironically, the stern Stanton gradually developed a great regard for the President and on Lincoln's death was so heart-broken that he was unable to control his tears for weeks.

Lincoln's magnanimity was of such a high order that he was above insult and pettiness. Once in November 1861 President Lincoln, accompanied by Secretary of State, William Seward and Presidential aide John Hay, visited the then General-in-Chief, General George McClellan, but as he was away they waited for him, uncomplainingly, for more than an hour. When McClellan returned he ignored Lincoln and Seward and went straight to bed. Hay was incensed but Lincoln remarked that at these tense times it was best not to worry about protocol or individual dignity.

25. Pam Robbins, *The Principal Companion*, p. 36.

26. See website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org

27. See *Ibid.*

He however quietly asserted himself by stopping to call on McClellan and instead would summon him to the White House.

Lincoln, “it can be fairly said, never held a grudge,” noted psychobiographer Charles B. Strozier. “Like most lawyers, he could leave a bitter courtroom battle without an ounce of enmity. He never seemed to feel petty anger towards anyone.”²⁸ Lincoln was also open and tolerant towards criticism. When a visitor told the President that there were those pretending to be loyal to the government but yet opposing the administration, Lincoln responded, “I should regret to see the day in which the people should cease to express intelligent, honest generous criticism upon the policy of their rulers.”²⁹

Mr. Lincoln “was certainly a very poor hater,” recalled friend Leonard Swett. “He never judged men by his like, or dislike for them. If any given act was to be performed, he could understand that his enemy could do it just as well as any one. If a man had maligned him, or been guilty of personal ill-treatment and abuse, and was the fittest man for the place, he would put him in his Cabinet just as soon as he would his friend.”³⁰

In mid May, 1861, his Secretary of State and his chief rival in the cabinet, William Seward soon realised Lincoln’s unmatched abilities and humaneness, exclaiming to his wife, “His magnanimity is almost superhuman.”³¹

The high office of Presidency did not affect Lincoln’s humility. During this tenure an old, simple lady reminded him of his dining at her house at different times when riding the circuit as a young lawyer. She recounted an incident to him: “Well, one day you came along after we had got through our dinner, and we had eaten up everything, and I could give you nothing but a bowl of bread and milk, and you ate it; when you got up you said it was good enough for the President of the United States!” The woman had made a journey of eight or ten miles to relate this incident but Lincoln could not remember it — on the contrary he only remembered that he always fared well at her house.³²

Despite his prodigious talents, Lincoln was always modest. The foremost Black Leader, Frederick Douglass, said that Lincoln was the first white man of power who did not manifest superiority.³³ Journalist Edward Dicey wrote: “In my life I have seen a good number of men distinguished by their talents, but I never saw anyone, so apparently unconscious that this distinction conferred upon him any superiority as Abraham Lincoln.”³⁴

28. Charles B. Strozier, *Lincoln’s Quest for Union: Public and Private Meanings*, p. 223.

29. See Allen C. Guelzo, “Holland’s Informants: The Construction of Josiah Holland’s ‘Life of Abraham Lincoln’”, *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 23, Number 1, Winter 2002, pp. 50-51.

30. www.mrlincolnanfriends.org (Leonard Swett’s letter to William H. Herndon, January 17, 1866).

31. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 364.

32. See *Lincoln’s Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, p. 34.

33. Joshua Wolf Shenk, *Lincoln’s Melancholy*, p. 202.

34. Thomas Freiling, *Walking with Lincoln: Spiritual Strength from America’s Favourite President*, p. 26.

Even in the Second Inaugural Presidential Address (March 1865), with the Civil War drawing towards its end, Lincoln told the Northerners against taking a morally superior attitude toward the nearly defeated South and cautioned “let us judge not, that we be not judged.”³⁵

Another aspect of his humility was his simplicity. Even during his Presidency journalists noted that he was dressed more plainly than others with no sign of watch chain etc. and at times his clothes were a bit rumbled. Alexander Stephens, who served with Lincoln in Congress before becoming Vice President of the Confederacy wrote about Lincoln’s unpretentiousness: “Mr. Lincoln was careless as to his manners, awkward in his speech.”³⁶

With the likelihood of the Civil War coming to an end, General Ulysses S. Grant invited him, in end March 1865, to visit his camp. Accordingly a fast moving gunboat was arranged to carry him south. The commander of the gunboat, John Barnes visited the White House to brief Lincoln on the alterations to the interiors of the boat to make his journey more comfortable. Lincoln told Barnes “he wanted no luxuries but only plain, simple food and ordinary comfort — that what was good for me would be good for him.” Barnes returned to the Navy Yard to supervise the changes accordingly. The next morning Lincoln summoned Barnes back to the White House. Embarrassed at the thought that workers had stayed up all night to make alterations that might now require additional work, Lincoln explained apologetically that “Mrs. Lincoln had decided that she would accompany him to City Point, and could the *Bat* accommodate her and her maid servant.” The austere gunboat was unsuitable for a lady so a steamer had to be arranged. The change of plans was upsetting to Assistant Naval Secretary Gustave Fox, who “expressed great regret that the determination of Mrs. Lincoln to accompany the President” had forced the shift to an unarmed river-boat and made the President vulnerable to attack. Fox then directed Barnes to follow Lincoln’s steamer with his gunboat. Though aware of the danger, Lincoln remained relaxed and cheerful, talking about the problems of accommodating womenfolk at sea “in very funny terms.”³⁷

Whilst Lincoln inspected the troops and battle sites Mary returned to Washington with the steamer and Lincoln shifted to Admiral Porter’s flagship, *Malvern*, a far more compact and rugged boat. Concerned by Lincoln’s cramped cabin, the Admiral had offered Lincoln his bed, “but he positively declined it,” Porter recalled, choosing instead “the smallest kind of a room, six feet long by four and a half feet wide.” The next morning he insisted he had “slept well,” but teasingly remarked that “you can’t put a long blade into a short scabbard.” Realising that the President’s six-foot-four frame must have overhung the bed considerably, Porter got carpenters to knock

35. Website: www.bartleby.com

36. William E. Barton, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. I, p. 281.

37. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 707-08.

down the wall, increasing the size of both the room and the bed. When Lincoln awoke the next morning, he announced with delight that “a greater miracle than ever happened last night; I shrank six inches in length and about a foot sideways.”³⁸

Soon after the Confederate capital, Richmond, fell and the next day, 4th April, Lincoln entered Richmond only to be surrounded by a group of black labourers shouting, “Bress de Lord! . . . dere is de great Messiah!” Several blacks fell on their knees. An embarrassed Lincoln emotionally exclaimed, “Don’t kneel to me, that is not right. You must kneel to God only, and thank him for the liberty you will hereafter enjoy.”³⁹ He drew bitter criticism that day merely for placing his hand on a black man’s shoulder in public. “It was the great deliverer meeting the delivered,” marvelled an eyewitness.⁴⁰ The Mother has said: The greater beings are always the most simple and modest.⁴¹

With the Civil War almost at its end, Confederate President Jefferson Davis evacuated Richmond and left his wife and family behind. Lincoln made an unannounced visit to the Davis home. Mrs. Davis came to the door holding their baby in her arms, and was understandably shocked to see Lincoln at her doorway. Lincoln gathered the baby into his arms and the child proceeded to deliver a kiss on his face. He handed the child back, and said to Mrs. Davis, “Tell your husband that for the sake of that kiss, I forgive him (everything).”⁴² Lincoln demonstrated that he had no spirit of vindictiveness with even the most vicious opponent.

Two days later the question arose on what was to be done if the Rebel Confederate President, Jefferson Davis, was apprehended. When someone remarked, “Don’t allow him to escape the law, he must be hung,” Lincoln at once interjected: “Let us judge not, that we be not judged.”⁴³

Once, Secretary of State, William H. Seward found him polishing his boots and remonstrated that in Washington “we do not blacken our own boots”. The President was equal to the occasion, remarking good-humouredly, “Indeed, then whose boots do you blacken, Mr. Secretary?”⁴⁴ He loved narrating jokes and was often at the receiving end as well, once confessing wistfully: “I have endured a great deal of ridicule without much malice; and have received a great deal of kindness, not quite free from ridicule.”⁴⁵

On one occasion Seward ascertained from Lincoln that he had heard of an instance where Lincoln had stepped aside for a coloured woman at a muddy crossing

38. See *Ibid.*, p. 715.

39. See *Ibid.*, p. 719.

40. See website: www.washingtontimes.com (lecture by Harold Holzer)

41. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 151.

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

43. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 722.

44. Website: www.mrlincolnswhitehouse.org

45. See website: www.haroldholzer.com

— a gesture unheard of in those days. Lincoln replied, “Well, I don’t remember it, but I always make it a rule, if people don’t turn out for me, I will for them. If I didn’t there would be a collision.”⁴⁶ Benjamin Franklin said: “To be humble to superiors is duty, to equals, courtesy, to inferiors, nobleness.”⁴⁷

Even when spited, Lincoln refused to keep resentments against anyone. During his Presidency he constantly assuaged the hurt feelings, if any, of his cabinet colleagues and other subordinates in the military and civil administration. When a hastily written note to General Franz Sigel had upset the general, he quickly followed up with another. “I was a bit cross,” he told Sigel, “I ask pardon. If I do get up a little temper I have no sufficient time to keep it up.” In another incident a colonel had visited Lincoln at his home and sought help to recover the body of his wife who died in an accident. As Lincoln had an open door policy to the public he was constantly tormented in his office and residence by visitors asking for personal favours. Despite his hectic schedule with little rest he always responded with consideration but on this instance he lost his patience and snapped, “Am I to have no rest?” The disappointed colonel had to leave. The next morning, Lincoln appeared at his door. “I was a brute last night,” he said, and offered to help the colonel in any way possible.⁴⁸

During the Civil War Lincoln constantly had to soothe and motivate his difficult and bickering generals. This delicate task was made possible thanks to his innate humility and kindness. Another military superior, General William Rosecrans had taken offence to a note that Lincoln had sent. On learning of this Lincoln immediately wrote to his General, “In no case have I intended to censure you, or to question your ability. I frequently make mistakes myself, in the many things I am compelled to do hastily.”⁴⁹ On instances when Lincoln was wrong he would allow himself to be corrected, even if the corrector was arrogant or rude.

And when Lincoln removed General Samuel Curtis from command in Missouri, he assured him that his removal was necessary only “to somehow break up the state of things in Missouri,” where Governor Gamble headed one quarrelling faction and Curtis, another. “I did not mean to cast any censure upon you, nor to endorse any of the charges made against you by others. With me the presumption is still in your favour that you are honest, capable, faithful, and patriotic.” Despite Lincoln’s diplomacy the quarrels in Missouri continued and Governor Gamble complained that one of Lincoln’s letters had been “grossly offensive” to him. When the President’s aide, Hay, presented Gamble’s note to Lincoln, he was told “to put it away”. Lincoln later explained to Gamble that as he was “trying to preserve [his] own temper, by

46. Don Edward Fehrenbacher, Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 447.

47. Website: www.en.wikiquote.org

48. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 512.

49. See *Ibid.*, p. 527.

avoiding irritants, so far as practicable,” he had decided not to read what his secretary had described as a ‘cross’ letter. Lincoln then assured the aggrieved Gamble: “I was totally unconscious of any malice, or disrespect towards you, or of using any expression which should offend you.”⁵⁰

But Lincoln’s patience and understanding had its limits. For when an aggressive general or cabinet colleague was unreasonable he could be forceful, stating his position with clear logic, yet appealing to the noble side of his colleague’s personality. When General Rosecrans grumbled that his request to secure a higher rank had been denied, Lincoln was unsympathetic: “Truth to speak, I do not appreciate this matter of rank on paper, as you officers do. The world will not forget that you fought the battle of ‘Stone River’ and it will never care a fig whether you rank General Grant on paper, or he so, ranks you.”⁵¹

At the beginning of the second term of his Presidency Lincoln said, “I think now I will not remove a single man, except for delinquency,” to New Hampshire Senator Clark. “To remove a man is very easy, but when I go to fill his place, there are *twenty* applicants, and of these I must make *nineteen* enemies.”⁵²

On another instance Republican stalwart Carl Schurz got into an unpleasant exchange of letters with the President. In the midst of the civil war crisis Schurz blamed Lincoln for some misguided appointments. An anxious Lincoln replied firmly to the allegations. Lincoln had always encouraged Schurz to freely express his views but in this instance Schurz feared he had transgressed his liberty. Lincoln then invited him to the White House. Slapping Schurz on the knee he smilingly said: “Now tell me, young man, whether you really think that I am as poor a fellow as you have made me out in your letter!” An embarrassed Schurz explained the reason behind his tirade and Lincoln explained his own position, elaborating that his terse reply had been provoked by a hailstorm of criticism being showered on him. Then slapping Schurz on the knee again he laughed and exclaimed: “Didn’t I give it to you hard in my letter? Didn’t I? But it didn’t hurt, did it? I did not mean to, and therefore I wanted you to come so quickly.” They both then talked for about an hour after which Schurz asked whether his letters would be still welcome. Lincoln replied: “Why certainly, write me whenever the spirit moves you.”⁵³

Salmon Chase was Lincoln’s staunch rival and critic. When Lincoln was elected President in 1861, he brought Chase into the Cabinet, in the interests of the country, as Treasury Secretary. Thereafter, bowing to pressure from a certain Senator, Lincoln did not renominate one of Chase’s appointees. Livid that he was not consulted, Chase threatened to resign from his position but Lincoln managed to pacify him.

50. See *Ibid.*

51. See *Ibid.*, p. 528.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 703.

53. See *Ibid.*, pp. 512-13.

Soon after Lincoln was compelled to remove one of Chase's appointees as he was accused of speculating in land. In response, an enraged Chase tendered in his resignation. Lincoln understood that Chase's sentiments were hurt and set about soothing his ruffled pride. Placing his long arms on Chase's shoulders, he said: "Chase, here is a paper with which I wish to have nothing to do; take it back, and be reasonable." He then explained that as Chase was away from the city he was compelled to take an independent decision, assuring his secretary that he would have complete authority to name the successor of the removed appointee. "I had to plead with him a long time, but I finally succeeded," Lincoln noted. Though Chase was often unpleasant to Lincoln, the President appreciated his superb work as Treasury Secretary.⁵⁴

Later Chase intrigued against Lincoln in planning to usurp Lincoln's position just prior to the Presidential re-election in 1864, yet Lincoln did not dismiss him. Finally when Chase sent him a letter of resignation once too often, Lincoln accepted it, as things between them had become intolerable and there were occasions when Chase was disrespectful to the President. Soon after, when the position of Chief Justice fell vacant, Lincoln, though still concerned about Chase's political ambitions, selected him, for he was an outstanding jurist and a dedicated Republican.⁵⁵

On Chase's appointment as Chief Justice his friend John Alley told Lincoln: "Mr. President, this is an exhibition of magnanimity and patriotism that could hardly be expected of any one. After what he had said against your administration, which has undoubtedly been reported to you, it was hardly to be expected that you would bestow the most important office within your gift on such a man." Presidential aide John Nicolay wrote: "Probably no other man than Lincoln would have had, in this age of the world, the degree of magnanimity to thus forgive and exalt a rival who had so deeply and so unjustifiably intrigued against him. It is however only another most marked illustration of the greatness of the President."⁵⁶ The Mother has said: "True *greatness*, true *superiority* lies in *kindness and goodwill*."⁵⁷

Chase's successor as Treasury Secretary was William Pitt Fessenden who like Chase was a radical and a Lincoln critic. Lincoln chose him as he was brilliant at his job and was not so vicious as some other radicals. Though reluctant, due to health reasons, Fessenden finally accepted the position with the proviso that he could leave once the finances of the Treasury were stable. Accordingly he resigned in March 1865. Lincoln was sorry to lose his brilliant, hardworking secretary. Fessenden, too, "parted from the President with regret." During his tenure at the Treasury, his initial critical attitude toward Lincoln had been transformed into warm admiration.

54. See *Ibid.*, p. 518.

55. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 402.

56. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 680.

57. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 16, 2nd Ed., p. 21.

“I desire gratefully to acknowledge the kindness and consideration with which you have invariably treated me,” he wrote to the President, “and to assure you that in retiring I carry with me great and increased respect for your personal character and for the ability which has marked your administration.” He went on, “no one can claim to have so largely contributed as the chosen chief magistrate of this great people.”⁵⁸

Ever since the Black Hawk War in 1832 there had been several stories on Lincoln’s physical strength and bravery. During his Presidency there was constant threat that he may be assassinated by a vengeful Southerner but he remained unconcerned. As President, Lincoln periodically displayed courage — while regularly disclaiming that he had any. Journalist Noah Brooks wrote that President Lincoln “said that he thought himself a great coward physically and was sure that he should make a poor soldier, for, unless there was something in the excitement of a battle, he was sure that he would drop his gun and run at the first symptom of danger. That was said sportively, and he added, ‘Moral cowardice is something which I think I never had.’”⁵⁹

During the Civil War Lincoln put his personal interests aside in order to uphold the sole object of preserving the Union. When he was being pressurised by the radicals to bring in a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery Lincoln knew it would be a historic decision but it was premature and could further divide the country. He objected: “I have never done an official act with a view to promote my own personal aggrandisement, and I don’t like to begin now.”⁶⁰

During his Presidency Lincoln told his journalist friend Noah Brooks: “I should be the most presumptuous blockhead upon this footstool if I for one day thought that I could discharge the duties which have come upon me, since I came to this place, without the aid and enlightenment of One who is stronger and wiser than all others.”⁶¹ Lincoln’s innate humility came from his belief that there was a power above that guided men. His proclamation of March 1863 stated: “It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and pray for clemency and forgiveness.”⁶²

Many leaders who have led their people into war have claimed God to be on their side or been convinced of their moral position. With reference to the Civil War, Lincoln, however, was adamant about not identifying God’s will with his own for he felt God’s will was often inscrutable to human beings. He felt, “The Almighty has His own purposes,” and believed it was not easy to know what those purposes

58. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 704.

59. Website: www.mrlincolnanfriends.org (from Noah Brooks, “Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln” first published in *The Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, May 1865).

60. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 572.

61. See *Lincoln’s Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, pp. 32-33.

62. Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. 6, p. 156.

were. Lincoln understood that the Southerners were fighting for a cause to protect their interests, and perhaps if he were in their shoes he probably would have felt the same, hence he never condemned them.

Even on the issue of slavery, Lincoln refused to say that God condemned slavery even though he deeply felt that human bondage was wrong. He said: “It is my earnest desire to know the will of Providence in this matter. And if I can learn what it is, I will do it. These are not, however, the days of miracles, and I suppose it will be granted that I am not to expect a direct revelation. I must study the plain physical facts of the case, ascertain what is possible, and learn what appears to be wise and right. Whatever shall appear to be God’s will, I shall do.”⁶³

Lincoln was confident enough about his beliefs to act on them, but humble enough to acknowledge the possibility that he might be wrong.

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

63. Abraham Lincoln, *Speeches and Letters of Abraham Lincoln*, September 13, 1862.

The more we advance on the Path, the more modest we become and the more we see that we have done nothing in comparison to what remains to be done.

*

We must learn that whatever our efforts, whatever our struggles, whatever even our victories, compared with the path still to be traversed what we have already travelled is nothing.

*

Do not think yourself big or small, very important or very unimportant; for we are nothing in ourselves. We must only live to become what the Divine wills of us.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother – II, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 152)

THE MOMENTOUS MEETING AND THE GREAT TRANSITION

(Continued from the issue of October 2014)

A giant Dance of Shiva tore the Past

THE MOTHER'S meeting with Sri Aurobindo took place against this background of a near total darkness. But the near total darkness also implied to the eyes that could see behind the dark curtain, the possibility of a new dawn, the possibility of a giant forward leap for mankind. The 'matrix of a New Time' began as soon as the two looked at each other on the 29th March 1914. A new hope stole through the heart of Earth. A new Dawn shone through the veil of Night. It was the coming together of the Supreme Nature, Shakti, and Her Lord, Iswara, so that a New Rhythm may be released into the play. The Mother noted in her diary:

It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance, He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, and Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.

(CWM, Vol. 1, p. 113)

But the Night was thick and obstinate, the Titan forces unwilling to concede even an inch. Writing about his own yoga on 28 July 1915, Sri Aurobindo compared it to the conditions of the War that had broken out all over Europe:

Everything internal is ripe or ripening, but there is a sort of locked struggle in which neither side can make a very appreciable advance (somewhat like the trench warfare in Europe), the spiritual force insisting against the resistance of the physical world, that resistance disputing every inch and making more or less effective counter-attacks. . . . And if there were not the strength and Ananda within, it would be harassing and disgusting work; but the eye of knowledge looks beyond and sees that it is only a protracted episode.

(CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 286)

The Great War had become the symbol of the internal war within man where on the one side stood forces of an upward ascension, the forces of Truth and Light and Freedom and Unity; on the other side the forces of Darkness, Falsehood, Unconsciousness and Division. The titans too had sensed the coming Dawn and

hurled themselves onto the earthly field and at man with all their fury. They had sensed that the ideas being unleashed preparatory to the New Age were going to create a field for the unity of the human race and eventually of the entire earth. They started their own game albeit masquerading under the garb of another kind of unity which was but an inverse truth or a shadow, an imitation of the true unity towards which the world was moving. It was perhaps the last-ditch effort of these forces of darkness to prolong their reign. The beginning of the last century saw a massive deluge that took not only many lives in **the Great War** but also crippled humanity, morally and psychologically. As if the first destructive onslaught was not enough, a second one followed in less than two decades. Fascism and Marxism replaced Imperialism and Colonialism. It was almost like choosing between the devil and the deep sea but one could still hope to swim out of the deep sea of Imperialism but the other two forces represented extreme forms of division. Fascism was based not only on a false sense of superiority of one group of humanity over another (something that was present overtly and covertly in Imperialism as well) but also on contempt and hatred for what it felt as inferior. Instead of trying to bend and lift the fallen (if indeed there was anyone inferior) with compassion, there was the senseless attempt to destroy and exterminate whatever was different. The Unity was being enforced through an elimination of all that was different! Marxism on the other hand also nourished itself on hate and violence. It saw all human beings as biologically one (rather than spiritually) and yet divided them into two camps that must clash and fight until one snatched the loaf of bread from the other. It was a warped sense of justice that led to a much greater injustice than anything before. The world saw the rise and fall of both these ideologies that preached blind violence and hatred.

Yet the titan too did his job; he too played his role in the great Advent. He shook the earth with alarm and fear and as he growled and snarled, behind his roar and thunder Shiva stood and sanctioned the battle cry — for thus alone could the old order be destroyed and the new ushered in. The Earth became flat once more following the war. The unleashing of the forces of terror and fear, destruction and blind violence also brought out the nobler side of humanity and its spirit of sacrifice and courage. Especially it brought the women out of their household into the open fields of war and demonstrated that they were no inferior species but as strong and capable as men in dealing with difficult and dangerous situations. The Mother had observed the first Great War at very close quarters. She had visited the trains that were bringing the injured by the hundreds. She saw behind their agony the mighty human spirit that bore the pain nobly and made them very receptive to the deeper forces that were seeking to manifest upon earth. But also giving **a new turn to the Feminist movement** that was one of the New thoughts that was stirring the soul of humanity, she noted on 7 July 1916:

You have asked me what I think of the feminist movement and what will be the consequences of the present war for it.

One of the first effects of the war has certainly been to give quite a new aspect to the question. The futility of the perpetual oppositions between men and women was at once made clearly apparent, and behind the conflict of the sexes, only relating to exterior facts, the gravity of the circumstances allowed the discovery of the always existent, if not always outwardly manifested fact, of the real collaboration, of the true union of these two complementary halves of humanity.

Many men were surprised to see how easily women could replace them in most of the posts they occupied before, and to their surprise was added something of regret not to have found sooner a real partner of their work and their struggles in her whom more often they had only considered as an object of pleasure and distraction, or at best as the guardian of their hearth and mother of their children. Certainly woman is that and to be it well requires exceptional qualities, but she is not only that, as the present circumstances have amply proved.

In going to tend the wounded in the most difficult material conditions, actually under the enemy's fire, the so-called weak sex has proved that its physical energy and power of endurance were equal to those of man. But where, above all, women have given proof of exceptional gifts is in their organising faculties. . . .

Is it not time that this hostile attitude of the two sexes facing one another as irreconcilable adversaries should cease? A severe, a painful lesson is being given to the nations. On the ruins piled up now, new constructions more beautiful and more harmonious can be erected. It is no longer the moment for frail competitions and self-interested claims; all human beings, men or women, must associate in a common effort to become conscious of the highest ideal which asks to be realised and to work ardently for its realisation. The question to be solved, the real question is then not only that of a better utilisation of their outer activities, but above all that of an inner spiritual growth. Without inner progress there is no possible outer progress.

Thus the problem of feminism, as all the problems of the world, comes back to a spiritual problem. For the spiritual reality is at the basis of all others; the divine world, the Dhammata of Buddhism, is the eternal foundation on which are built all the other worlds. In regard to this Supreme Reality all are equal, men and women, in rights and in duties; the only distinction which can exist in this domain being based on the sincerity and ardour of aspiration, on the constancy of the will. And it is in the recognition of this fundamental spiritual equality that can be found the only serious and lasting solution for this problem of the relation of the sexes. It is in this light that it must be placed, it is at this

height that must be sought the focus of action and new life, around which will be constructed the future temple of Humanity.

(CWM, Vol. 2, pp. 147-50)

Clearly the old equations between man and woman, between the 'high' and the 'low' were going to change and the Mother was setting the right notes for the change that was being worked out below the surfaces of visible existence. While the old world order was breaking down under the titan's weight, the Mother was already sowing the seeds of a New Creation in the soil of human consciousness made ready and receptive through the hammering and the battering of forces it was receiving.

The breakdown of the old world order however did lead to a period of dark confusion that would extend until the first glimmers of dawn and even after in some quarters, almost until the sixties. Like the *Kalivarjanam* predicted by the ancient Indian foresight and vision, it destroyed not only what was commonplace and ordinary but even the very best and highest. Art, Science, Literature, Philosophy all took a turn for the worse under the dark spell. All that was beautiful had as if passed away; all that was noble seemed dead. Despair, cynicism, obscurantism, superstition, oppression of the weak, oppression of women, inequality of various kinds raised their heads in a last attempt to reassert their reign. Religion turned into a means for perpetuating terror and division. The spiritual impulse was changed into narrow cults and mutually warring sects claimed superiority and domination. Even the land of the Gods, *Devabhoomi*, India, lay fallen, unconscious, prone under the yoke of tyranny of a foreign domination. A complete darkness, a total eclipse had fallen upon humanity; a darkness absolute, formidable, inane, culminating in utter chaos and the disintegration of values and the massacre of 1947 over the partition of India. Somewhere between the years 1910 and 1913, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

The Pandits are therefore right when they make a difference between the practice of the Satya & the practice of the Kali. But in their application of this knowledge, they do not seem to me to be always wise or learned. They forget or do not know that Kali is the age for a destruction & rebirth, not for a desperate clinging to the old that can no longer be saved. They entrench themselves in the system of Kalivarjya, but forget that it is not the weaknesses but the strengths of the old harmony that are being subjected to varjanam, abandonment. That which is saved is merely a temporary platform which we have erected on the banks of the sea of change awaiting a more stable habitation; and it too must one day break down under the crash of the waves, must disappear into the engulfing waters. Has the time arrived for that destruction? We think that it has. Listen to the crash of those waters, — more formidable than the noise of assault, mark that slow, sullen, remorseless sapping, — watch pile after pile of our patched

incoherent ramshackle structure corroding, creaking, shaking with the blows, breaking, sinking silently or with a splash, suddenly or little by little into the yeast of those billows. Has the time arrived for a new construction? We say it has. Mark the activity, eagerness and hurrying to and fro of mankind, the rapid prospecting, seeking, digging, founding — see the Avatars & great vibhūtis coming, arising thickly, treading each close behind the other. Are not these the signs and do they not tell us that the great Avatar of all arrives to establish the first Satya Yuga of the Kali?

(CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 56)

A New *Yuga-Dharma* for Humanity

The world was thrown into a chaos of conflicting ideas, a state of anarchy in which nations and humanity, the earth and its creatures began to lose the old stable moorings. The old social order was gone and the new was not yet in sight. Such were the times when the previous century began. Such was the moment chosen by the World Mother and the Lord to start a new chapter in earth's play and to usher in a New and greater Dawn.

In Sri Aurobindo's words:

The crisis in which the Avatar appears, though apparent to the outward eye only as a crisis of events and great material changes, is always in its source and real meaning a crisis in the consciousness of humanity when it has to undergo some grand modification and effect some new development. . . .

The outward action of the Avatar is described in the Gita as the restoration of the Dharma; when from age to age the Dharma fades, languishes, loses force and its opposite arises, strong and oppressive, then the Avatar comes and raises it again to power; and as these things in idea are always represented by things in action and by human beings who obey their impulsion, his mission is, in its most human and outward terms, to relieve the seekers of the Dharma who are oppressed by the reign of the reactionary darkness and to destroy the wrong-doers who seek to maintain the denial of the Dharma. But the language used can easily be given a poor and insufficient connotation which would deprive Avatarhood of all its spiritual depth of meaning. Dharma is a word which has an ethical and practical, a natural and philosophical and a religious and spiritual significance, and it may be used in any of these senses exclusive of the others, in a purely ethical, a purely philosophical or a purely religious sense. Ethically it means the law of righteousness, the moral rule of conduct, or in a still more outward and practical significance social and political justice, or even simply the observation of the social law. If used in this sense we shall have to understand that when unrighteousness, injustice and oppression prevail,

the Avatar descends to deliver the good and destroy the wicked, to break down injustice and oppression and restore the ethical balance of mankind.

(CWSA, Vol. 19, pp. 168-69)

What was that new dharma for man? How to arrive at it? Was the outer war an expression of an inner war that was beginning to rage within man? Was the crisis of events and conflict of groups of humanity, in its essence, a conflict of idea-forces that would eventually determine the direction of our evolutionary emergence? What was the ailment that was afflicting mankind, a disease more terrible than the horrors of the post-war plague; and what was the radical remedy? To a pointed question, in 1914, as to 'the Synthesis needed at the present time', Sri Aurobindo answered:

Undoubtedly, that of man himself. The harmony of his faculties is the condition of his peace, their mutual understanding and helpfulness the means of his perfection. At war, they distract the kingdom of his being; the victory of one at the expense of another maims his self-fulfilment.

The peculiar character of our age is the divorce that has been pronounced between reason and faith, the logical mind and the intuitive heart. At first, the declaration of war between them was attended by painful struggles, a faith disturbed or a scepticism dissatisfied. But now their divorce has created exaggerated tendencies which impoverish human life by their mutual exclusiveness, on the one side a negative and destructive critical spirit, on the other an imaginative sentiment which opposes pure instinct and a faith founded on dreams to the sterile fanaticism of the intellect.

Yet a real divorce is impossible. Science could not move a step without faith and intuition and today it is growing full of dreams. Religion could not stand for a moment if it did not support itself by the intellectual presentation, however inadequate, of profound truths. Today we see it borrowing many of its weapons from the armoury of its opponent. But a right synthesis in virtue of a higher and reconciling truth can alone dissipate their mutual misunderstandings and restore to the race its integral self-development.

The synthesis then of religious aspiration and scientific faculty, as a beginning; and in the resultant progress an integrality also of the inner existence. Love and knowledge, the delight of the Bhakta and the divine science of the knower of Brahman, have to effect their unity; and both have to recover the fullness of Life which they tend to banish from them in the austerity of their search or the rapture of their ecstasy.

The heart and the mind are one universal Deity and neither a mind without a heart nor a heart without a mind is the human ideal. Nor is any perfection sound and real unless it is also fruitful. The integral divine harmony within, but as its result a changed earth and a nobler and happier humanity.

(CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 439-40)

Even before meeting Sri Aurobindo on the physical plane, the Mother had foreseen **the need for this vast synthesis** and the work before Them. She had already laid down the larger lines through which this work was to be done. In 1912, during one of Her meetings in Paris, when asked as to ‘What is the most useful work to be done at the present moment’, She replied, revealing the grand agenda of the future Work that She and Sri Aurobindo were destined to do:

The general aim to be attained is the advent of a progressing universal harmony.

The means for attaining this aim, in regard to the earth, is the realisation of human unity through the awakening in all and the manifestation by all of the inner Divinity which is One.

In other words, — to create unity by founding the Kingdom of God which is within us all.

This, therefore, is the most useful work to be done:

(1) For each individually, to be conscious in himself of the Divine Presence and to identify himself with it.

(2) To individualise the states of being that were never till now conscious in man and, by that, to put the earth in connection with one or more of the fountains of universal force that are still sealed to it.

(3) To speak again to the world the eternal word under a new form adapted to its present mentality.

It will be the synthesis of all human knowledge.

(4) Collectively, to establish an ideal society in a propitious spot for the flowering of the new race, the race of the Sons of God.

*

* *

The terrestrial transformation and harmonisation can be brought about by two processes which, though opposite in appearance, must combine — must act upon each other and complete each other:

(1) Individual transformation, an inner development leading to the union with the Divine Presence.

(2) Social transformation, the establishment of an environment favourable to the flowering and growth of the individual.

Since the environment reacts upon the individual and, on the other hand, the value of the environment depends upon the value of the individual, the two works should proceed side by side. But this can be done only through division of labour, and that necessitates the formation of a group, hierarchised, if possible.

The action of the members of the group should be threefold:

(1) To realise in oneself the ideal to be attained: to become a perfect earthly representative of the first manifestation of the Unthinkable in all its modes, attributes and qualities.

(2) To preach this ideal by word, but, above all, by example, so as to find out all those who are ready to realise it in their turn and to become also announcers of liberation.

(3) To found a typic society or reorganise those that already exist.

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For each individual also there is a twofold labour to be done, simultaneously, each side of it helping and completing the other:

(1) An inner development, a progressive union with the Divine Light, sole condition in which man can be always in harmony with the great stream of universal life.

(2) An external action which everyone has to choose according to his capacities and personal preferences. He must find his own place, the place which he alone can occupy in the general concert, and he must give himself entirely to it, not forgetting that he is playing only one note in the terrestrial symphony and yet his note is indispensable to the harmony of the whole, and its value depends upon its justness.

(*CWM*, Vol. 2, pp. 49-50)

The work was at once individual as well as collective, an action on humanity as well as on the earth-consciousness. The new dharma was 'unity, synthesis, harmony, inclusiveness' but not through adjustment and appeasement out of mutual interest but by a conscious evolution of man to a state of Unity, to a level of Consciousness wherein God and the world, the individual and the collectivity, Knowledge, Power and Love become one. The agenda for the new millennium was being determined by the incarnate Divine nearly a hundred years before the millennium began. Unknown to the world at large that was reeling in the heat and dust of war, still asleep in the dust of the long night that had engulfed man, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were invoking the New Dawn. Unheeded by the human ear the whispers of the New World and the coming Age were stirring the mind of the race and spreading new thoughts and idea-forces upon the world. As soon as they met — the 'Two' who were already one in thought and aspiration, vision and work, will and achievement — the work of a New creation commenced.

The Yoga for the Earth and the New Idea

It was perhaps the darkest hour of the epoch. Did the Mother and Sri Aurobindo see this darkness that was threatening to engulf mankind? Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were not only aware of the darkness but also of its secret roots of sustenance, of the powers and forces that worked behind it to prolong their reign. The Mother entered this note in her diary:

August 8, 1914

. . . Monstrous forces have swooped down upon the earth like a hurricane, forces dark and violent and powerful and blind. Give us strength, O Lord, to illumine them. Thy splendour must break out everywhere in them and transfigure their action: their devastating passage must leave behind it a divine sowing. . . .

(CWM, Vol. 1, p. 219)

But they also saw behind the obvious what was far from obvious. They saw through destruction the hasty steps of a New Creation, behind the darkness they saw the unseen Ray that was waiting for its hour. In January 1910, at the request of a correspondent, Sri Aurobindo gave this early prediction for a Tamil nationalist weekly, *India*:

Since 1907, we are living in a new era which is full of hope for India. Not only India, but the whole world will see sudden upheavals and revolutionary changes. The high will become low and the low high. The oppressed and the depressed shall be elevated. The nation and humanity will be animated by a new consciousness, new thought and new efforts will be made to reach new ends. Amidst these revolutionary changes, India will become free.

(SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 390)

Reading this one would perhaps wonder if this prediction was made only yesterday. This was not mere wishful thinking. Sri Aurobindo had already foreseen the threat from Red China way back in the second decade of the twentieth century. Even as the fumes of the Second World War were yet to dissipate, Sri Aurobindo noted with a prophetic vision:

In Asia a more perilous situation has arisen, standing sharply across the way to any possibility of a continental unity of the peoples of this part of the world, in the emergence of Communist China. This creates a gigantic bloc which could easily englobe the whole of Northern Asia in a combination between two enormous Communist Powers, Russia and China, and would overshadow with a threat of absorption South-Western Asia and Tibet and might be pushed to

overrun all up to the whole frontier of India, menacing her security and that of Western Asia with the possibility of an invasion and an overrunning and subjection by penetration or even by overwhelming military force to an unwanted ideology, political and social institutions and dominance of this militant mass of Communism whose push might easily prove irresistible.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 590-91)

Similarly to a pointed question in 1935 from his close disciple, Nirodbaran, who asked:

With the coming of independence I hope such things will stop. Now I would like to ask you something. In your scheme of things do you definitely see a free India? You have stated that for the spreading of spirituality in the world India must be free. I suppose you must be working for it! You are the only one who can do something really effective by the use of your spiritual Force.

Sri Aurobindo replied:

That is all settled. It is a question of working out only. The question is what is India going to do with her independence? The above kind of affair? Bolshevism? Goonda-raj? Things look ominous.

(Nirodbaran: *Correspondence*, p. 323)

And yet there was and there still is hope. In fact they themselves were Hope incarnate bringing with them not just the message but the Light and Glory of a golden Dawn. They had not only drunk the bitter cup of poison released through the two Great Wars but also taken upon Themselves the burden of creating a New humanity purged out of the evil that lurked within its own heart and fed by its own blood. Their Yoga was not just a yoga for Their own salvation, Mukti, or the salvation of a few chosen disciples, but a yoga for the entire Earth with humanity as its focal point.

The Mother was always conscious of her Mission from the early childhood but now after the momentous meeting with Sri Aurobindo she became fully aware of the place and the means for this Work. Within six months of her coming, she noted in her diary on August 11, 1914, in a state of complete identification with the World Mother who had enveloped the whole earth in Her arms, to heal and to rebuild:

O my sweet Master, enter into all these confused thoughts, all these anguished hearts; kindle there the fire of Thy divine Presence. The shadow of the earth has fallen back upon it, it has been completely shaken by it; but this shadow was hiding Thy immutable sun, and now that it has crashed down upon this poor world, rocking its very foundations and transforming it into a formidable chaos, wilt Thou not once again move upon the chaos and speak Thy will:

“Let there be Light”?

O Thou marvellous Unknown One, Thou who hast not yet manifested Thyself, Thou who awaitest the propitious hour and hast sent us upon earth to prepare Thy ways, all the elements of this being cry to Thee, “May Thy will be done” and give themselves to Thee in a supreme, unconquerable urge. . . .

Envelop this sorrowful earth with the strong arms of Thy mercy, permeate it with the beneficent outpourings of Thy infinite love.

I am the powerful arms of Thy mercy.

I am the vast bosom of Thy boundless love. . . . My arms have enfolded the sorrowful earth and press it tenderly to my generous heart; and slowly a kiss of supreme benediction is laid upon this struggling atom: the kiss of the Mother which soothes and heals. . . .

(*CWM*, Vol. 1, p. 221)

Sri Aurobindo had surely noted this total surrender and an absolute love, this rarest of abilities to give oneself completely to the Divine, as He did mention this to a disciple later on. For is not this total self-giving with a complete trust and faith, a pre-requirement for this change that was still only a prophesy and a possibility for the Earth? The sadhana itself was not to be done for any egoistic achievement or selfish goal, even if it be one’s mukti or nirvana, but for the good of the Earth, for manifesting a divine possibility, here and now. Sri Aurobindo revealed through His letters the nature of the Yoga-aspiration He had ignited in the heart of humanity and the central place that His spiritual Collaborator, the Mother would occupy:

Mother was doing Yoga before she knew or met Sri Aurobindo; but their lines of sadhana independently followed the same course. When they met, they helped each other in perfecting the sadhana. What is known as Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga is the joint creation of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother; they are now completely identified — the sadhana in the Asram and all arrangement is done directly by the Mother, Sri Aurobindo supports her from behind. All who come here for practising Yoga have to surrender themselves to the Mother who helps them always and builds up their spiritual life.

(*CWSA*, Vol. 32, pp. 81-82)

My point about my Sadhana was that my Sadhana was not done for myself but for the earth-consciousness as a showing of the way towards the Light, so that whatever I showed in it to be possible — inner growth, transformation, manifesting of new faculties, etc. — was not of no importance to anybody, but meant as an opening of lines and ways for what had to be done. The question of degree of greatness does not come in at all.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 144)

I have no intention of achieving the supramental for myself only — I am not doing anything for myself, as I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation (Moksha) nor supramentalisation. If I am seeking after supramentalisation, it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth consciousness and if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others. My supramentalisation is only a key for opening the gates of the supramental to the earth consciousness; done for its own sake, it would be perfectly futile. But it does not follow either that if or when I become supramental, everybody will become supramental. Others can so become who are ready for it, when they are ready for it — though, of course, the achievement in myself will be to them a great help towards it. It is therefore quite legitimate to have the aspiration for it — provided (1) one does not make a too personal or egoistic affair of it turning it into a Nietzschean or other ambition to be a superman, (2) one is ready to undergo the conditions and stages needed for the achievement, (3) one is sincere and regards it as part of the seeking for the Divine and a consequent culmination of the divine Will in one and insists on no more than the fulfilment of that Will whatever it may be, psychisation, spiritualisation or supramentalisation. It should be regarded as the fulfilment of God's working in the world, not as a personal chance or achievement.

(CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 283-84)

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It is true that I want the supramental not for myself but for the earth and souls born on the earth, and certainly therefore I cannot object if anybody wants the supramental. But there are the conditions. He must want the Divine Will first and the soul's surrender and the spiritual realisation (through works, bhakti, knowledge, self-perfection) on the way.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 282-83)

Though simple in appearance, these were not at all easy conditions for a humanity that had lived and been fed on the stale milk of ego and knew nothing greater than personal mukti, a door of escape into nirvana! Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had to prepare and achieve, show the way as well as fulfil, struggle on behalf of the Earth and humanity as well as realise! They were aware of the Work they had to do and they knew the enormous difficulties and challenges on the way. They knew man's inability to sustain a godlike climb. Therefore the work began modestly, first by implanting the 'New Idea' in the mind of the race and next by gradually showing man the practical way to attain it. Towards these two ends a threefold work was started. The first was the launch of the *Arya* with its emphasis on creating a synthesis of Knowledge based on spiritual vision and experience. This

Knowledge would serve as a base to build the New Creation. It would be the foundation of the New World. Secondly, a small group-life began to emerge around the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as a little nucleus of the future humanity. It was a representative humanity with all its possibilities but also with all its difficulties. This was needed if the work was to be thorough and perfect. This little beginning would eventually grow into a worldwide movement that is recognised not by its numbers (which are very deceptive) but by the quality of the consciousness that would be brought into the human play.

They saw in the process of decadence the ‘ripening of the seed’ that must rot on the surface so that its inner possibility could break through the outer crust. To use a powerful image from the Indian legend of Krishnavatara, the upheavals were like the tilling of the soil by the mighty plough of Balarama so that Krishna’s work could begin. Indeed the work had begun with the coming of the Mother. The Idea-forces that were being released by the action of the gods needed a direction, a marshalling of their powers towards the emergent future which they had seen. At the same time the distortions of truths had to be straightened out. Sri Aurobindo began this side of the work with the launch of the *Arya*, a hundred years ago. The Mother whose role was to give a practical form to Sri Aurobindo’s revelations formed a society with the help of the few young men with “a common intellectual life and fraternity of sentiment . . . who accept the spiritual tendency and idea . . . and who aspire to realise it in their own individual and social action”. She named this group ‘The New Idea’.

Amidst the tumult and the turmoil, a New Order was being prepared behind the scenes. Amidst the rumour and alarm of the Night, a New Light was dawning for earth and men. The Ideas that were being planted at the very start of the century were being yoked to the Truth-Light as horses to the chariot. Certain new ideas (or perhaps a visitation of ancient truths) were being sown in the thoughts of the human race. But these were either incomplete truths, half-truths or even distorted truths. Sri Aurobindo gave a new understanding to these ideas that were taking birth in the human mind. To the idea of ‘Evolution’ He added the missing link of its drift, sense and purpose as well as the working of a secret Power behind the random game. Evolution was no more the blind unwinding of a watch but a conscious unfolding of a secret Consciousness embedded in Matter. This meant that evolution has a purpose and randomness and chance are merely terms that betray our ignorance of the deeper occult and spiritual forces at work in the universe. The universe itself was a multiverse with different Time-Space continuum and Substance-energy configurations stratified along many levels of the One Infinite Consciousness.

Today, the trend is that modern thought in physics and biology as well as psychology is aligning itself more and more to the Ideas that were released in the Earth at the very beginning of the previous century by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The word ‘Integral’ is being accepted increasingly in the fields of Education and

Psychology. Yoga has now become a household word and Consciousness an acceptable term in Science to include all that surpasses us or lies below our threshold of awareness, as well as all that eludes us! A New world based on Unity and Freedom and Equality and the Brotherhood of mankind is preparing to take shape. The cry of the French Revolution, the ancient vision of the great Religions, the truth of the *Sanatana Dharma* are taking a new body. The League of Nations and the UNO were merely shadow efforts while the real thing and the true means awaited their hour. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother revealed those means both through their writings and talks as well as in their life and by personal example and work.

A Bridge between the Old and the New

On June 14, 1914, the Mother entered in her personal spiritual diary:

It is a veritable work of creation we have to do: to create activities, new modes of being so that this Force, unknown to the earth till today, may manifest in its plenitude. . . .

In us must take place the union of the two wills and two currents, so that from their contact may spring forth the illuminating spark.

And since this *must* be done, *this will be done*.

(CWM, Vol. 1, p. 173)

The work was manifold and to be accomplished at several levels. They had to become the bridge. It meant that they had to renounce their personal realisation so that one foot could be in the old creation, identified with it as it were, while the other was as firmly rooted in the New Creation. Their body became the pedestal through which the old could climb and the new come down. But first and foremost was the task of removing the dust of the centuries that had covered ancient truths. Just as an archivist restores old manuscripts for their utility for the future, Sri Aurobindo once again restored the dharma enshrined in the great Indian scriptures, particularly the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita. It was equally important that India and Indians were awakened from their slumber, the state of abject slavery and a slavish mindset — the creation of centuries of Moghul and British rule. The innate strength and spirituality of India had to be restored and released for the good of the Earth just as in former times Rishi Agastya had released the forces of Light that were held captive in the dark caves of the *Panis* and the *Dasyus*. The old truths had to be restored, the new law of Truth in its eternal unfolding established, the darkness smitten away with the power of the Word, the power of Truth released into the heart of goodness and striving humanity. The old ways, blocked through ages of slow and steady decline, were opened once again. The new way that would lift us still further, beyond the scope of cults and sects, beyond religion, beyond beliefs and non-beliefs, beyond

small glimpses and a narrow practice was set out for man's mighty spirit to traverse further. This is the work of the Avatar as the Gita conjures in two significant words, *abhyuthanamadharmasya* and *dharmasansthapanarthaya* . . .

But what about the destruction of the forces of evil and the 'hands that save' the Good? Here too we see how Sri Aurobindo and the Mother worked day and night during the two Great Wars to eventually win the victory for the forces that stood for the new values of Freedom, Unity and Equality of the human race.

A New Act in the great Drama of the world had begun with their momentous meeting. A New Age was being quietly ushered in in the remote corner of a small town in India, once known as Vedapuri but now called Puducherry. While all other laboratories were busy exploring matter and life and mind, the 'laboratory of Sri Aurobindo' was busy exploring the frontiers of Consciousness whose practical applications would eventually change man himself. They had foreseen amidst this tumult and turmoil the coming of a new birth for humanity into the superhumanity of tomorrow. But there was a real risk to reckon with. What if the evolution took the undesirable direction of a titanic superhumanity vested with powers of material and occult science but devoid of love in the heart or illumination in the mind. Nietzsche had envisioned a titanic superman. What he did not or could not see was the godlike superman whose heart would be a sea of compassion even as he discovered new powers and opened new frontiers of unprecedented knowledge for earth and man. Even as the old world was dying, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had started their work of divine man-making. And since all is interconnected in an inseparable chain, their work included in its vast scope not just some spiritual guidance to a group of seekers for the New Light but a terrestrial work upon all the forces that would be effected by this inner tectonic shift. Many were the forces that had gone into the creation and evolution of earth; many the intermediary steps and the forthcoming rungs. All these had to be readjusted to keep the cosmic balance. Among these, their work included working not only upon seekers but humanity in general, not only upon humanity but on plants and beasts and animals; not only upon the subhuman brood but also upon titan kings and gods, on the lords of Time. Most of all, it included a detailed working upon matter itself, that strange anomalous base in which the Creatrix Consciousness has chosen to conceal itself and all its higher possibilities. To speak of all that would need a Mahabharata of Mahabharatas.

The old world or the old humanity had risen upto reason. Reason had carried it to the platform of science. But it could not carry it further. The labouring power stopped there, brooding upon the vacant void that stared into its half-open eyes. A New Light must lead further and bridge the gulf between man and the cosmos around him, a New Force must bridge the abyss between man and his fate. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had also foreseen that the age of Religions was coming to a close as much as the Age of Reason. A New Light was fast approaching mankind and a New Age of luminous faith, a psychic faith and intuition was dawning and the

high peaks of human nature were beginning to glow as the morning sun in some hidden depths of his being. The religious and the secular efforts of mankind to arrive at individual and collective perfection had arrived at their peak possibility. The West and the East were coming closer but the first response was of mutual suspicion and distrust, even an egoistic assertion of the superiority of one over the other which persisted as a relic of the old colonialism that had enslaved the Oriental mind, especially that of India. This too had to be bridged, the gulf created by two different lines of human growth and advancement, one along the lines of his physical-vital-mental self, the other along the lines of his psychic and spiritual self. The Titans and the Gods had to be brought together in a common effort at churning the great ocean of life which is also the ocean of the milk of divine Knowledge that secretly sustains this world and all its beings. Something else was now needed, a leap across the gulfs that the mind was experiencing.

A New World is Born

And yet something more had to be done. Idea and Action alone cannot change the world. A New and greater Power was needed. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother called this the Supramental Consciousness which would be the next logical evolutionary step for earth, just as man evolved out of the animal with the help of mental consciousness. They had brought down this Consciousness into their bodies by the power of their tapasya. But the big question remained, “Was man ready? Had the hour of this greater manifestation come?” They took this task upon themselves. As a first step, there began to gather around them a small sample of humanity like a ‘seed plot’ who became the willing pioneers (as well as representatives of the collective of which they were an individual mould) of this Work. Their willing and conscious opening to the New Consciousness created a stir in the earth’s subliminal depths thereby opening the passage for others. At the same time, their inner resistance to the supramental change became an occasion for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to work upon the collective resistance of humanity to the intended transformation into a diviner humanity. Speaking of this first group of humanity that gathered around them, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

It is necessary or rather inevitable that in an Asram which is a “laboratory”, as Adhar Das puts it, for a spiritual and supramental Yoga, humanity should be variously represented. For the problem of transformation has to deal with all sorts of elements favourable and unfavourable. The same man indeed carries in him a mixture of these two things. If only sattwic and cultured men come for the Yoga, men without very much of the vital difficulty in them, then because the difficulty of the vital element in terrestrial nature has not been faced and overcome, it might well be that the endeavour would fail. There might conceiv-

ably be under certain circumstances an overmental layer superimposed on the mental, vital and physical, and influencing them, but hardly anything supramental or a sovereign transmutation of the human being. Those in the Asram come from all quarters and are of all kinds; it cannot be otherwise.

(CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 600-01)

The Asram itself has been created with another object than that ordinarily common to such institutions, not for the renunciation of the world but as a centre and a field of practice for the evolution of another kind and form of life which would in the final end be moved by a higher spiritual consciousness and embody a greater life of the spirit. There is no general rule as to the stage at which one may leave the ordinary life and enter here; in each case it depends on the personal need and impulsion and the possibility or the advisability for one to take the step . . .

(*Ibid.*, pp. 592-93)

This is not an Asram like others — the members are not Sannyasis; it is not *mokṣa* that is the sole aim of the Yoga here. What is being done here is a preparation for a work — a work which will be founded on Yogic consciousness and Yoga-Shakti, and can have no other foundation. . . .

(*Ibid.*, p. 590)

Obviously the object of their life and work was not just to form an ashram, however different and world-embracing it be in its goal and methods. That was indeed the first step. As humanity responded and the work began to progress, the Supramental Consciousness began to press upon the Earth more and more. And along with it also arose the last-ditch resistances, the accumulated poison that had gone into the roots of earth and men. It is to eliminate this poison at its very roots that Sri Aurobindo gave up His body, drinking the bitter cup for humanity as a final sacrifice for hastening the collective work. He withdrew behind the earthly scene and it was left to the Mother to fulfil the great promise, or shall we say, the aspiration of the Ages for terrestrial Perfection; for the integration of the two poles, spiritual and material; for the union of God and world that has expressed itself in various ways, both religious and secular. Their grand Work culminated in the manifestation of the Supramental Consciousness upon earth, amidst the noise and indifference of humanity, on the 29th February 1956. Of course, few will be able to see or understand Their tapasya and its far-reaching impact for Earth and humanity but also few will be able to deny that our world has changed dramatically since the sixties. Though some are privy to the deeper forces that shape humanity, one can clearly see that many changes that have come and are showing up as an imminent future are very much along the lines of the Idea-Forces that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother released

at the turn of the previous century. The turn towards Holism, Integration and Unity in every sphere of human life, the liberation of women from age-old shackles, the rise of India, the keen interest in Yoga and spirituality, the end of Imperialism and Marxism, the growing interest and efforts towards an integral Psychology and an Integral Education, the rapid and tremendous churning in the field of politics and money all over the world, experiments in the fields of music, cinema and other art forms, the general acceptance of freedom, equality and brotherhood of all mankind regardless of outer differences, the recognition of the subjective side of human nature; above all, the birth of a new generation unfettered by the old decadent and dying religious, social and other institutions, seeking for a new mode of life — these are all early signs mirroring the Time-Spirit. There are no doubt pockets of resistance but the trend is obvious and the writing is clear on the wall. Therefore, the Mother boldly declared:

A new light breaks upon the earth,
 A new world is born.
 The things that were promised are fulfilled.

(CWM, Vol. 15, p. 95)

And Sri Aurobindo assures us:

All forms of life activity that cannot bear the change must disappear, all that can bear it will survive and enter into the kingdom of the spirit.

(CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 186)

Conclusion

It is against this vast background, a background of the entire Earth and the momentous changes we witnessed in the last century, that we can see and appreciate the immense work undertaken by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother — carrying humanity once again in its evolutionary march across the sea of years through a short and straight route, safeguarding it against menacing dangers from within and without. Once again mankind and earth are being led out of slavery towards a greater freedom, out of darkness and chaos towards the Light and a new and complete Synthesis, out of the clutches of Death and falsehood towards a New and diviner Life, a life of Truth, one with Harmony, and of Love instinct with Power and Strength. The kind of freedom that men and women enjoy today and the new possibilities in Science and Arts and Music and Literature and Polity and Finances, in the life of the individuals and the life of the nations, are far removed from the world of yesterday, of the twentieth and the nineteenth centuries; it is not only difficult to distinguish the two but it is impossible to know with certainty what Hand of Divine Grace or what

Intervention turned the tide of crass materialism and imperialism and Marxism and inequalities and divisions within societies and changed the course of history. No doubt much is still left to be done and the evil is yet not fully dead but its life has gone from it and its roots of sustenance have dried up. It is now only a matter of time; the New World is slipping into the old, it will take hold of the Earth entirely in all aspects of life and create for us, here and not elsewhere, the Life Divine foreseen and foretold of old by the ancient seer's vision of Truth. The foreseen Kingdom of God has arrived but stands a step behind our waking life, intervening from time to time, giving the sense of the incredible and the miraculous turn of events. The future has been decided and settled for good. It is now only left to us whether we open to it with trust and walk towards it with faith and confidence in the lead or else choose to be relegated into the past as withered leaves that have outlived their purpose. History may never be able to record what saved man and pulled him out of the morass of despondency, despair, cynicism and a path of self-destruction. Our mortal eyes may never recognise the Hands that set our feet once again on the straight and sunlit path towards the golden future. But Sri Aurobindo and the Mother never cared for any kind of recognition. All that they hoped and worked for was to bring down the Golden Age for earth and man, the Age of Truth and Light and Harmony and Peace and Unity and Love. They did it and withdrew behind the scene so that this new unfolding that their twin efforts had set into motion worked itself out with the passage of time and the play of forces involved in it. But daring and destroying the citadels of Darkness,

Slowly the light grows greater in the East,
 Slowly the world progresses on God's road.

(Savitri, CWSA, Vol. 34, p. 510)

He rises now; for God has taken birth.
 The revolutions that pervade the world
 Are faint beginnings and the discus hurled
 Of Vishnu speeds down to enring the earth.

The old shall perish; it shall pass away,
 Expunged, annihilated, blotted out;
 And all the iron bands that ring about
 Man's wide expansion shall at last give way.

Freedom, God, Immortality; the three
 Are one and shall be realised at length,
 Love, Wisdom, Justice, Joy and utter Strength
 Gather into a pure felicity.

It comes at last, the day foreseen of old,
 What John in Patmos saw, what Shelley dreamed,
 Vision and vain imagination deemed,
 The City of Delight, the Age of Gold.

The Iron Age is ended. Only now
 The last fierce spasm of the dying past
 Shall shake the nations, and when that has passed,
 Earth washed of ills shall raise a fairer brow.

(‘In the Moonlight’, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 243-44)

(*Concluded*)

ALOK PANDEY

In the deep there is a greater deep, in the heights a greater height. Sooner shall man arrive at the borders of infinity than at the fulness of his own being. For that being is infinity, is God —

I aspire to infinite force, infinite knowledge, infinite bliss. Can I attain it? Yes, but the nature of infinity is that it has no end. Say not therefore that I attain it. I become it. Only so can man attain God by becoming God.

Sri Aurobindo

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 5)

JOHANNES HOHLENBERG

THE author of this article knows of only one person who was a disciple of both Sri Aurobindo and Rudolf Steiner, and in each case had direct personal contact with them, namely Johannes Hohlenberg, a Danish artist, dedicated publisher and distinguished author, who was also the general secretary of the ‘Anthroposophical Society in Denmark’ for eight years, from its inception in 1923 up to 1931.

Johannes Hohlenberg (1881-1960) was born into the cultured family of a Copenhagen pastor. He enjoyed an early musical education at home, but as a young man he at first pursued the greater interest he felt for the arts. The study of Art led him to Paris in 1905, where he soon made the acquaintance of Mirra Alfassa — at that time Mirra Morisset — and her later husband Paul Richard. At that time Mirra Alfassa was holding a regular Salon where artists and spiritual seekers from many different backgrounds met. Reminiscing, she once mentioned that Johannes Hohlenberg “used to come and see me almost every evening”¹ during his time in Paris. The beginning of their acquaintance coincided with the time of Mirra Alfassa’s most intense collaboration with the occultist Max Théon, alias Aia Aziz, whom she had by then visited twice (in 1906 and 1907) in his home in western Algeria, in the Sufi-influenced city of Tlemcen, in order to get initiated into his methods and teachings. Hohlenberg too must have engaged with the teachings of Théon, at least in their theoretical aspects, because Mirra Alfassa had the following to say about him: “He had read all of Théon’s stuff and was well up on everything, and very earnest about it.”² After she herself had decisive experiences of consciously leaving the body, Johannes Hohlenberg, following her return to Paris, seems to have been very eager for her to introduce him to these practices too. She said: “He absolutely insisted. [. . .] So I taught him how to do it, and what’s more I was there, he did it in my presence. And [. . .] the moment he went out of his body, he was thrown into such a panic! The man was no coward — he was very courageous — but it terrified him so! Sheer panic. . . . So I said, ‘no, no, no’.”³

Johannes Hohlenberg’s close contact with the Richards then continued for about five years, until Hohlenberg travelled to Egypt to pursue his interest in the Pyramids. His biographer writes: “Hohlenberg was fascinated by the mysterious and monumental architecture of the Pyramids. For six months he pursued intensive studies in Gizeh, which soon bore fruit in literary form.”⁴ That a strong connection must have existed not only to Richard but also to Mirra is evident from a postcard of 21st September 1911 sent from Cluses, in which Mirra enquires about his whereabouts:

My dear Hohlenberg,

Here, while awaiting a letter, is something to re-awaken in your memory our fine evenings in Paris and our long philosophical conversations. . . . I hope it will also evoke your enthusiasm and your hopes. . . . Never forget that you are carrying them always within you, and that they are waiting beneath your outer awareness for you to let them come to life outwardly too.

We send you our best thoughts, in all affection.

M. P. Richard

Don't be so silent. We would be happy to have news of you. We return to Paris in a few days.⁵

We may assume from this that already in 1910 Johannes Hohlenberg must have taken an active interest in Paul Richard's reports from South India, where he had his first meeting with Sri Aurobindo. These had immediately inspired in Mirra the wish to go to Pondicherry herself as soon as possible.⁶ It is also known that the Richards could realise this plan only in 1914, which then led within a few months of their arrival to the establishment of the monthly journal *The Arya*, which continued to appear for six and half years. In 1914 Johannes Hohlenberg received an invitation from the Richards to join them in Pondicherry and collaborate in editing the journal. But, "Then came the war and therefore my departure was postponed for almost a year. I could start only in the spring of 1915."⁷

By this time the Richards had already left India. "Nevertheless I made the journey and met Aurobindo"⁸ he wrote. His stay extended to only a little over a month, since because of his regular contact with Sri Aurobindo Hohlenberg soon became politically suspect and was deported back to Europe; such were the times of war. During those few weeks in Pondicherry however, he made a famous photograph of Sri Aurobindo — standing in profile — as well as sketches for an oil-painting, which he would execute later in Denmark. In addition, Sri Aurobindo granted Hohlenberg daily evening interviews, which started with meditation followed by intensive instruction in yogic philosophy. In later years Mirra Alfassa reported Sri Aurobindo's words about that time as follows: "[. . .] there also came a Danish painter who did a sketch of me. At the end of every meditation, he used to say, 'Let us now talk of the Ineffable!'"⁹ After returning to his native country, Johannes Hohlenberg not only did the oil-portrait,¹⁰ but also wrote about his experiences of the yogic-philosophical evening talks with Sri Aurobindo. From these notes emerged his first literary work *Yoga i dens betydning for Europa*, which appeared simultaneously in Copenhagen and Christiania (Oslo) in 1916. To the third edition of this book Hohlenberg added in 1952 an informative new preface, in which he emphasised the connection of the text to Sri Aurobindo, to whom he had also dedicated it. In this

form the book was also eventually published in German translation in 1954:

The preconditions for this book were created during my stay in India in 1915, in daily talks with a man to whom it is also dedicated: Sri Aurobindo Ghose. He was then about thirty years of age and already known all over India as a thinker and mystic.^{11 12}

This book by Hohlenberg provides a revealing early insight into the contents of what Sri Aurobindo was writing during those years in the series of articles that was later published in book form under the title *The Synthesis of Yoga*. The subdivision of the Integral Yoga into Karma, Jnana, Bhakti and Purna Yoga that characterises this book also unmistakably appears in the major parts of Hohlenberg's work.

Towards the end of the First World War Johannes Hohlenberg first heard of Anthroposophy through the Copenhagen businessman Carl Vett (1871-1956), with whom he worked intensively to formulate the theory of 'Social Threefolding'.¹³ In 1920, when he visited the first Anthroposophical High School course on *Grenzen der Naturerkennntnis* (Boundaries of Natural Science)¹⁴ in Dornach (Switzerland), he met Rudolf Steiner for the first time in person and became his disciple. When the international anthroposophical work was reorganised in 1923 and a national anthroposophical society was established in Denmark, Johannes Hohlenberg was elected as its first general secretary. In this capacity he then also took part in the Christmas meeting of 1922/23 in Dornach for the establishment of the General Anthroposophical Society. As editor and publisher of the anthroposophical magazine *Vidar* (1926-1940), he revealed himself in the 1930s as a pointed critic of the lack of discrimination on the part of some officials of the Anthroposophical Society towards the growing Nazi movement, which finally led him to resign all positions in the Society. He concentrated entirely on his work as a publisher, from 1933 onwards also in the Norwegian cultural magazine *Janus*. Impelled by his social interests he became one of the first theorists in the anthroposophical sphere of universal basic income, two essays by him on this topic appearing in the magazine *Janus* in 1934 and 1937. Now less involved in anthroposophical work, Hohlenberg plunged into the existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, on whom he published a much acknowledged monograph in 1940.¹⁵ After the Second World War he published a new magazine which appeared in Copenhagen under the name *Øjeblikket* ("Glimpse") from 1947-1954.¹⁶ Just as in the last numbers of *Vidar* he published serially the whole of the *Bhagavad Gita* in Danish translation, in the last year of the *Øjeblikket* he also printed there two essays by Sri Aurobindo and a selection from his work *The Life Divine*, obviously using his own Danish translation.¹⁷ Both these actions may be interpreted as an indication of a conscious return to the beginnings of his literary career. Even though for over twenty years no hints on eastern spirituality had appeared, these later references to the *Bhagavad Gita* and the work of Sri Aurobindo, as well as the

later dedication of his book on Yoga to him, seem to show that the short but intense contact in 1915 had a stronger impact on him than had so far been supposed.

The later General Secretary of the Anthroposophical Society in Denmark, Oskar Borgman Hansen, retired incumbent of the chair of philosophy at the University of Aarhus, recalled a talk he had with Johannes Hohlenberg. In it, Hohlenberg mentioned a meeting with Rudolf Steiner during which Hohlenberg's spiritual development in the time before his contact with Anthroposophy had come up amongst other topics. Hansen reports that Hohlenberg was already undergoing a kind of occult training before he came across Anthroposophy towards the end of the First World War. In the said talk he had asked Rudolf Steiner whether, now that he had found Anthroposophy, he had to give up his earlier practices, to which Steiner replied that this was not necessary.¹⁸ From this it is clear that the founder of Anthroposophy must not only have been well aware of Hohlenberg's earlier practices and their origin, but also that in this spirituality — namely Sri Aurobindo's — he could not have seen anything that would have stood in the way of Hohlenberg's anthroposophical orientation.

A faint reflection of a mutual awareness of each other between Rudolf Steiner and Sri Aurobindo can possibly be discerned in the biography and work of the Indian spiritual teacher. In April 1920 Sri Aurobindo wrote a long letter in his native Bengali language addressed to his brother Barin, who at that time had just been released from political imprisonment. In this letter he gave an overview of his inner development since his own imprisonment in Alipore. But he also dwelt upon "India's weakness", and stressed that he saw its cause neither in subjection and poverty nor in a lack of spirituality, but rather in the fact that one could deplore a "diminution of the power of thought, the spread of ignorance" everywhere in India and this "in the birthplace of knowledge". In Europe this would be different, for there existed a great culture and discipline of thought and striving after knowledge. The revolutions and catastrophes happening in Europe he considered not as heralds of destruction but as "the first stages of a new creation".¹⁹

But there is a fatal limitation to the power and thought of Europe. When she enters the field of spirituality, her thought-power stops working. There Europe sees everything as a riddle, nebulous metaphysics, yogic hallucination — "It rubs its eyes as in smoke and can see nothing clearly."²⁰

But it need not remain so, Sri Aurobindo continued: "But now in Europe not a little effort is being made to surmount even this limitation."²¹ ²² Could Sri Aurobindo have had Rudolf Steiner in mind here? Numerous spiritual and esoteric movements were already in existence in early 20th century Europe. But only in the anthroposophical spiritual science (*Geisteswissenschaft*) of Rudolf Steiner was and is such a unique and unmistakable stress laid on thought and the striving after knowledge as

might have been in the mind of the clear-sighted letter writer in Pondicherry, when he referred to “not a little effort”. Awareness on Sri Aurobindo’s part of Rudolf Steiner’s immense achievements in knowledge seems easy to explain if we assume that Johannes Hohlenberg still remained in correspondence with the great Yogi for some time, even after the date when the Dane, approximately three years after he had left Pondicherry, discovered Anthroposophy in central Europe.

KLAUS J. BRACKER²³

Notes

1. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles. Book Three. Mirra — The Occultist*. Paris 1989. Chapter 25 “Hohlenberg”.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. Terje Christensen, “Hohlenberg, Johannes” in: Bodo von Plato (ed.), *Anthroposophie im 20. Jahrhundert. Ein Kulturimpuls in biografischen Porträts*. (Anthroposophy in the 20th Century. A cultural impulse in biographical portraits.) Dornach 2003.

5. “Two Postcards” in *Sri Aurobindo – Archives and Research*. Vol. 13, No. 1, April 1989. Pondicherry. The formulation “[...] something to call to your memory [...]” relates to a portrait of Paul Richard on the front cover of the postcard. “M. P. Richard” signifies Mirra and Paul Richard.

6. Cf. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles. Book Three*. Chapter 2, “Mirra, *The Arya* and the Ashram”.

7. Johannes Hohlenberg, “Letter to Judith Tyberg”. July 21, 1948. From the archive of Terje Christensen, the Norwegian biographer of Johannes Hohlenberg, which was kindly made available to the author.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles. Book Three*. Chapter 25 “Hohlenberg”.

10. With the assistance of Hohlenberg’s widow Eli, this oil-painting reached the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry many years later. This can be seen from her letter of 1978 to a prominent Ashram member, Jayantilal Parekh, who in 1973 had initiated the Sri Aurobindo Archives. She wrote, “I hope the portrait and the pencil sketches will reach you safely and I would be grateful to receive a few words informing me of their arrival.” The portrait, which had been purchased from Eli Hohlenberg by German friends of the Integral Yoga, was restored in Germany and then later brought to Pondicherry.

11. Johannes Hohlenberg, *Der atmende Gott. Yoga und der europäische Mensch*. [The Living God, Yoga and European Man] Hamburg 1954. “Vorwort zur dritten Auflage” [Preface to the third edition]. In fact Sri Aurobindo was then 42 years old.

12. In 1920 in Sweden Selma Lagerlöf had important yogic experiences inspired by the book of Hohlenberg, which had also soon appeared in Swedish.

13. For more information on this anthroposophical theory see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_threefolding

14. Rudolf Steiner, *Grenzen der Naturerkenntnis* (Limits of the Knowledge of Nature). Dornach 1981. Lectures, 27th September to 3rd October 1920. In addition to the specific High School course, two lectures were added on 2nd and 3rd October 1920, in which Rudolf Steiner dwelt on the one hand on the meaning of oriental mantras, and on the other, traditional yoga. Here one could justifiably wonder whether in these lectures Steiner specifically intended to refer to Hohlenberg's experiences in South India.

15. Johannes Hohlenberg, *Søren Kierkegaard. Eine philosophische Biographie* (A philosophical biography). Basel 2011.

16. Reference: Bodo von Plato (editor), *Anthroposophie im 20. Jahrhundert. Ein Kulturimpuls in biografischen Porträts*. (Anthroposophy in the 20th Century. A cultural impulse in biographical portraits.) Dornach 2003. *Op. cit.* Terje Christensen "Hohlenberg, Johannes".

17. "Naturen og Udviklingslæren" in: *Øjeblikket*, 7. aargang nr. 1, 1. January 1954; in the English original: Selection from "Man and the Evolution" in: Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine. Op. cit.*; "Overmenneskets Idé" in: *Øjeblikket*, 7. aargang nr. 2, 1. April 1954; in the English original: "The Superman"; contained in: Sri Aurobindo, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga. Op. cit.*; "Om Menneskets Frie Villie" in: *Øjeblikket*, 7. aargang nr. 3, 1. July 1954; in the English original: "All-Will and Free-Will"; contained in: Sri Aurobindo, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*.

18. Communication by letter from Oskar Borgman Hansen to the author, Skagen, 15th July 2012.

19. Sri Aurobindo, *Bengali Writings – Translated Into English*. Pondicherry 1991. Chap. X, 2, "A Letter to Barin".

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. There is a strong agreement with Sri Aurobindo's stand on the importance of thought and knowledge for spiritual development, in what the Anthroposophical Waldorf-Teacher as well as founder and first head of the Max Mueller Bhavan (Goethe) Institute in Bombay, Heimo Rau, wrote on the Indian: "Thus Sri Aurobindo sees in the development of thinking consciousness the path of humanity towards the spirit and to further evolution. He agrees in this with Rudolf Steiner, who pointed out and presented the training of thought towards the knowledge of higher worlds as the path that suits the current state of human consciousness. Aurobindo has taken up the heritage of India and transmuted it for modern thinking humanity." Heimo Rau, *Indiens Erbe – Illusion und Wirklichkeit heute* (India's Heritage: Illusion and Reality Today). Stuttgart 1982.

23. Translation by Shradhdhavan on the basis of a draft by Nishtha Mueller of the 3rd appendix of Klaus J. Bracker, *Veda und lebendiger Logos. Anthroposophie und Integraler Yoga im Dialog*. ("The Veda and the Living Logos: Anthroposophy and Integral Yoga in Dialogue") Frankfurt (Main) 2014.

Klaus J. Bracker, born 1956 in Berlin, first came into contact with Auroville at the age of 15, when he read in the magazine *Planet* a report on the City of Dawn. Later he met some sadhaks of the Integral Yoga living in northern Germany. In 1976 he set off for India, but had to cut his journey short after catching a dangerous fever in Afghanistan. At that time he began reading Rudolf Steiner's *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* and decided to give Europe

another chance. In the next years he trained in Eurythmy, Curative Eurythmy and Waldorf Education and worked at three different Waldorf Schools in Germany. The year 2000 brought a very strong re-encounter with Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, which led him to attempt a broad-based comparison of Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy and Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. This was published in 2014 under the title: *Veda und lebendiger Logos. Anthroposophie und Integraler Yoga im Dialog* ("The Veda and the Living Logos: Anthroposophy and Integral Yoga in Dialogue") Frankfurt (Main) 2014. This article is a translation of the third appendix of that monograph. Since 2006, Klaus has participated in the Bremen Study Group of 'Auroville International — Germany', and he and his wife Dagmar had a happy visit to Auroville in the summer of 2009.

The Shastras use the same word for man and the one divine and universal Being — Purusha — as if to lay stress upon the oneness of humanity with God. Nara and Narayana are the eternal couple, who, though they are two, are one, eternally different, eternally the same. Narayana, say the scholiasts, is he who dwells in the waters, but I rather think it means he who is the essence and sum of all humanity. Wherever there is a man, there there is Narayana; for the two cannot be separated. I think sometimes that when Christ spoke of himself as the Son of Man, he really meant the son of the Purusha, and almost find myself imagining that anthropos is only the clumsy Greek equivalent, the literal and ignorant translation of some Syrian word which corresponded to our Purusha.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 7)

SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI: AN EPIC OF THE HIMALAYA

THE Himalaya is the most beautiful, graceful, grandiose and mysterious face of Mother Nature. It is glorious, glamorous and eternally appealing to the human and the divine world equally. It is the abode of Lord Shiva, the destroyer deity according to Hindu mythology, and his consort Devi Parvati who according to myth is the daughter of mountain god, Parvat. The Himalaya is the cradle of eternal creation and a vast canvas of cosmic creativity. It is the 'spine' of Indian culture and civilisation and mute witness of the dynamic and glorious Indian spiritual tradition. The sacred mountain chains of the Himalaya are the origin of some of our most holy rivers like the Ganges, Yamuna, Ravi, Jhelum, Sutlej and Brahmaputra. The Himalaya is also a wonderful paradise for nature lovers — mountaineers, trekkers, sightseers and tourists; but the inner face of beauty and light is unveiled only to a few who are 'prepared' to hear the song of wisdom eternally flowing through the lips of snowy streams and murmuring swards. But most significantly, the Himalaya is the cave of *tapasya* and a spiritual abode of sages, seers and *sadgurus* who transcend all barriers of time and space and dwell in the Eternal Present, secretly working for the spiritual betterment of the world. The Himalaya is an eternal attraction for the world and for those sentient beings that have the inner sight to gauge the depths of the spiritual mysticism of life. There is 'something' that effortlessly and perennially invites us towards the white radiance of the Himalaya since time immemorial. Innumerable saints, sadhaks, *kavis* and artists have received the call of some eternal music and magic from the Himalaya. Revealing the religio-spiritual significance of the Himalaya Swami Vivekananda says,

This is the land of dreams of our forefathers, in which was born Parvati, the Mother of India. . . . On the tops of the mountains of this blessed land, in the depths of its caves, on the banks of its rushing torrents have been thought out the most wonderful thoughts. . . . These mountains are associated with the best memories of our race; if these Himalayas are taken away from the history of religious [and of course spiritual] India, there will be very little left behind.

(The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol. 3, pp. 352-4)

Apart from the gross and visible 'outer' Himalaya, there is also an 'inner Himalaya' that is open only to a few, to those who are *adhipkaris* like yogis and mystics.

The Himalaya is also the most conducive seat to acquire direct knowledge and true wisdom. This is one of the reasons which explains why our ancient rishis and

sages had their ashrams and *gurukuls* either in the Himalaya or at the foothills of the mountain chain. The great classical poet Kalidasa has justifiably venerated the Himalaya by calling it *Devatma* or the ‘soul of God’. It is the dwelling of saints, seers and saviours which make the Himalaya a veritable *devabhumi* or habitation of gods. Swami Rama, the author of *Living with the Himalayan Masters*, one of the best books based on the mystic spiritual tradition of sages in the Himalaya, says —

. . . the Himalayas are not merely the home of snow, but that they have also been a stronghold of yogic wisdom and spirituality for millions of people, regardless of their religious beliefs. This ancient and rich tradition still exists there today as these unique mountains continue to whisper their spiritual glory to all who have an ear to hear. (p. 1)

Swami Rama who gratefully acknowledges in his book (by devoting a separate chapter to his life in Pondicherry) the Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual guidance and help during his three weeks’ stay in the Ashram in 1949, underscores the need of ‘preparation’ for those who long to explore the Himalaya —

The Himalayas remain replete with mysteries for poets, artists, musicians, and travellers, but they reveal their most important message only to those who are prepared. Mystics alone can unveil the real secrets of these wondrous mountains.
(*Living with the Himalayan Masters*, p. 11)

Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* is fully inundated in the light, sight and delight of the Himalaya. So vivid and minute is the description of the Himalayan grandeurs in *Savitri* that the present writer does not hesitate to call it essentially an ‘Epic of Himalaya’. The lives of all principal characters in the poem viz., Savitri, Satyavan, Aswapati, Narad, Dyumatsena and even Death are inextricably linked with the Himalaya. The kingdom of Madra is located in the Himalaya and so is the kingdom of Shalwa. It is in the Himalaya that king Aswapati performs his eighteen-year-long tapasya and finally wins a boon from mother Gayatri. Dyumatsena, “A regal pillar of fallen mightiness” (*Savitri*, p. 467), the human father of Satyavan is a blind and banished king of Shalwa and is leading a life of devotion, meditation and sadhana in his forest hermitage in the Himalaya mid the company of many enlightened sages. Again it is somewhere nearby, in the emerald forest of Shalwa in Himalaya, that we witness the unprecedented rendezvous of Savitri and Satyavan. Also, Narad, the celestial sage, communicates all his messages in the court of Aswapati, located at the foothills of the Himalaya. After a brief interlude of Savitri’s marital bliss, the epic journey proceeds further and in the ‘Book of Yoga’ Savitri meets various deities in her inner worlds and finally gets the ‘Truth that saves’. It is also somewhere in the Himalaya that Satyavan faints and dies on that fateful day of his predestined death,

leaving his consort alone in the deep forest. Finally the valiant and victorious Savitri returns home by winning Satyavan back, after a fierce philosophical, occult and spiritual battle of ideas and ideals with Death. The Presence of Himalaya is ever present in the epic — all songs of grief or glory, labour and dolour, pain and perfection are sung mid snowy crags and roaring waters of the Ganges, whose echo equally resonates on highlands of embalmed steppes and slippery clefts of the Himalaya.

We begin the discussion and investigation from the beautiful moment of the beginning of Savitri's life. She is the child of Nature and takes birth in the lap of the Himalaya. For the material and spiritual perfection and sublimation of Savitri, the Himalaya is present in the ambience with all its beauty and beatitude:

Around her were the austere sky-pointing hills,
And the green murmurous broad deep-thoughted woods
Muttered incessantly their muffled spell.
A dense magnificent coloured self-wrapped life
Draped in the leaves' vivid emerald monotone
And set with chequered sunbeams and blithe flowers
Immured her destiny's secluded scene.

(*Savitri*, p. 13)

Shraddhavan, a noted *Savitri* scholar and presently co-coordinator of Savitri Bhavan, beautifully elaborates these lines —

Savitri is living in the foothills of the Himalayas. All around her are the high, 'sky-pointing' hills. They are austere because on the peaks there are no trees, just bare rock. All around are the green murmurous forests. . . . It is as if the forests are in some deep state of thought, as if they are deeply indrawn — 'deep-thoughted woods'. . . . In just a few words, Sir Aurobindo evokes the beauty of the Himalayan forests.

(*Invocation Study notes No. 37*, p. 61)

Savitri learns all the lessons of life and superlife from the majestic and meaningful atmosphere of the Himalaya. In fact, the Himalaya becomes the laboratory of Savitri's yogic, mystic and spiritual experiments and experiences —

The mountains in their anchorite solitude,
The forests with their multitudinous chant
Disclosed to her the masked divinity's doors. (p. 385)

The Himalaya is the primordial originator of light, love, delight, serenity and self-realisation. Aswapati, human father of Savitri and the Traveller of unending

worlds, scales great inner heights in the Himalaya during his assiduous *tapasya* for the boon of a son from goddess Gayatri. It is in the Himalaya that he learnt how beautiful, musical and blissful life on earth could be if seen from a greater elevation of consciousness. There are visions which could not be seen elsewhere but in the Himalaya. There are songs which are unknown, unsung and undreamt elsewhere but eternally at play everywhere in the paradisaical peaks of the Himalaya. 'Around', 'above', 'below' and 'within' — everywhere there is ineffable bliss and the indescribable dance of the Divine in the Himalaya:

Around him was a light of conscious suns
 And a brooding gladness of great symbol things;
 To meet him crowded plains of brilliant calm,
 Mountains and violet valleys of the Blest,
 Deep glens of joy and crooning waterfalls
 And woods of quivering purple solitude;
 Below him lay like gleaming jewelled thoughts
 Rapt dreaming cities of Gandharva kings.
 Across the vibrant secrecies of Space
 A dim and happy music sweetly stole,
 Smitten by unseen hands he heard heart-close
 The harps' cry of the heavenly minstrels pass,
 And voices of unearthly melody
 Chanted the glory of eternal love
 In the white-blue-moonbeam air of Paradise.

But wait, there is more magic to be realised —

A summit and core of all that marvellous world,
 Apart stood high Elysian nameless hills,
 Burning like sunsets in a trance of eve. (p. 234)

In the evening when the last rays of the setting sun embrace the Himalayan peaks, as if bidding them goodbye for the next twelve chill and dark hours of night, the entire Himalayan expanse becomes a glimmering ocean of gold. And this spectacular phenomenon is described by Sri Aurobindo in the last line — 'Burning like sunsets in a trance of eve'.

In his book on the Himalayan beauties and divine beatitudes, Swami Rama too has described the grandeur of evenings on the Himalaya:

In the evening when the weather clears and the sun breaks through the clouds,
 it seems as though the mighty Painter were pouring out millions of colours on

the snowy peaks, creating paintings which could never be duplicated by the brushes and colours of the tiny fingers of artists. Any art that exists in Tibet, China, India, and Persia has some influence of the Himalayan beauty on it. . . . When one becomes aware of the higher level of beauty which projects itself through nature, he becomes a true artist. When an artist becomes aware of that fountain from which arises all beauty, then instead of painting, he starts composing poems. (p. 10)

The Incarnate Flame, Savitri, is nurtured completely mid the delights and mysteries of the Himalaya. In the opening lines of Book Four, canto two, 'The Growth of the Flame', Sri Aurobindo defines the character, purpose and very meaning of the Himalaya and calls it 'A field of creation':

A land of mountains and wide sun-beat plains
 And giant rivers pacing to vast seas,
 A field of creation and spiritual hush,
 Silence swallowing life's acts into the deeps,
 Of thought's transcendent climb and heavenward leap,
 A brooding world of reverie and trance,
 Filled with the mightiest works of God and man,
 Where Nature seemed a dream of the Divine
 And beauty and grace and grandeur had their home,
 Harboured the childhood of the incarnate Flame. (p. 359)

Such is the atmosphere in which Savitri dreamed, was nurtured and finally transformed into the cosmic Flame and face of the Divine Mother. The pristine surroundings of the Himalaya made her pure and radiant to the extent that 'None could stand up her equal and her mate' (p. 365).

The constant help and guidance of the saints and sages eternally dwelling in the cosmic wideness of the Himalaya is there to be felt by those who aspire. Just as children long for the lap of their mothers, similarly sages and seekers long for the uplifting proximity and caressing divinity of the Himalaya. Most of them try to reach and dwell there physically. Sri Aurobindo spent only one month in the foothills of the Himalaya, in Nainital, way back in 1901 along with Mrinalini Devi. Besides, he paid a short visit to Kashmir and was deeply inspired by the 'seat of Shankaracharya'.

Interestingly, the Himalaya is the place where the sages brood over the problems and possibilities of human destiny on earth and whenever needed, intervene. Sri Aurobindo elaborates further the life and purpose of sages in the Himalaya —

These sages breathed for God's delight in things.
 Assisting the slow entries of the gods,
 Sowing in young minds immortal thoughts they lived,
 Taught the great Truth to which man's race must rise
 Or opened the gates of freedom to a few.
 Imparting to our struggling world the Light
 They breathed like spirits from Time's dull yoke released,
 Comrades and vessels of the cosmic Force,
 Using a natural mastery like the sun's:
 Their speech, their silence was a help to earth. (p. 383)

The sages of the Himalaya have always helped mankind through their 'speech' as well as their 'silence'. In fact they are most eloquent in their silence and gracefully silent when they reveal the cosmic mysteries through speech!

With such a divine setting for the 'Destined Meeting Place', it is not surprising at all that 'Love in the wilderness met Savitri' (p. 391). Satyavan, 'A foster-child of beauty and solitude' (p. 393) and a 'pupil of solitude' (p. 403) introduces himself to Savitri by recounting all the graces of Mother Nature in the Himalaya. He thinks very highly of the 'rich secrecy and hush' (p. 402) of the mystic Himalaya and believes that that alone is the perfect abode for Savitri. The meeting of Satyavan and Savitri when she was on her way to search for a suitable soul-mate takes place very close to the Himalayan hermitage of King Dyumatsena. A cheerful Satyavan speaks to Savitri:

Close is my father's creepered hermitage
 Screened by the tall ranks of these silent kings,
 Sung to by voices of the hue-robed choirs
 Whose chants repeat transcribed in music's notes
 The passionate coloured lettering of the boughs
 And fill the hours with their melodious cry.
 Amid the welcome-hum of many bees
 Invade our honied kingdom of the woods;
 There let me lead thee into an opulent life.
 Bare, simple is the sylvan hermit-life;
 Yet is it clad with the jewelry of earth. (p. 402)

Satyavan is inviting Savitri to lead a truly 'opulent life' of the woods and enjoy all emerald delights and dreams of peerless solitude. In the quoted lines he uses one great metaphor — 'jewelry of earth'. Many poets prior to Sri Aurobindo have used beautiful metaphors for the Himalaya, according to their perception of the mysterious mountain chain. Kalidasa, the classical poet much adored by Sri Aurobindo, describes

it as '*ithitha prithavya iva mandanda*' ('located as measuring rod of the world'). But to my mind, Sri Aurobindo far outshines him when he delineates the Himalaya as 'jewelry of earth'. Just look at the map of the world and imagine the Himalaya adorning the body of the world as a necklace!

Satyavan continues to enumerate the beauties and other merits of Himalaya to Savitri to make her feel his deep relationship with the divine face of Nature —

I reigned in a kingdom of a nobler kind
 Than men can build upon dull Matter's soil;
 I met the frankness of the primal earth,
 I enjoyed the intimacy of infant God.
 In the great tapestried chambers of her state,
 Free in her boundless palace I have dwelt
 Indulged by the warm mother of us all,
 Reared with my natural brothers in her house.
 I lay in the wide bare embrace of heaven,
 The sunlight's radiant blessing clasped my brow,
 The moonbeams' silver ecstasy at night
 Kissed my dim lids to sleep. Earth's morns were mine;
 Lured by faint murmurings with the green-robed hours
 I wandered lost in woods, prone to the voice
 Of winds and waters, partner of the sun's joy . . . (pp. 403-04)

Satyavan has established a spectacular harmony and unity with Mother Nature. He has become pure and perfect amid the beneficent company of the Himalaya in Shalwa. 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God', says Jesus Christ in the Bible. And Satyavan has achieved, or rather 'earned', that blessedness of Nature by purifying himself completely. The sublime and sacred solitude of Nature immediately purifies the person who interacts with her with deep devotion and firm faith. God too is most intimate with earth on the Himalaya which is full of pristine purity and every manifestation of Nature there is a kind and delicate gesture of the Maker. Only those open in heart and pure in mind like Satyavan could realise this fortunate intimacy with God. A strong wall of ego and ignorance caused by impurities stands between man and Nature, thereby making man unable to see 'the frankness of the primal earth' and enjoy 'intimacy of infant God'. A second interpretation for Sri Aurobindo's use of the phrases 'primal earth' and 'infant God' could be traced in the theory of Indian religio-spiritual belief about the origin of universe. According to the Indian concept of the origin of earth, life began in the Himalaya. It was somewhere in the Himalaya where the first man, Manu, the king performing his tapasya in the region, met Shradhdha, the first woman who also was meditating in the Himalaya at the time of the apocalypse. The Hindi poet, Jayashanker Prasad, has

penned an epic, *Kamayani*, the first epic in Hindi poetry, on this theme of the earth's evolution; the first meeting and subsequent marriage of Manu and Shradha is believed to be the starting point of mankind's evolution on earth. The Himalaya, thus, is referred to by Sri Aurobindo as 'primal earth'. In fact, the Master has penned a beautiful poem 'The Rishi'; in it he shows that it is by the guidance and knowledge of the Rishi that the King Manu saw new lights for life. The Rishi re-established the king's firm faith in the world and revealed to him the treasure trove of inner bliss, selfless karma and universal love —

Shrink not from life, O Aryan, but with mirth
 And joy receive
 His good and evil, sin and virtue, till
 He bids thee leave. . . . conceive
 Earth as thy stage, thyself the actor strong,
 The drama His.
 Work, but the fruits to God alone belong,
 Who only is.
 Work, love and know, — so shall thy spirit win
 Immortal bliss.
 Love men, love God. . . .

(*Collected Poems*, SABCL, p. 311)

Satyavan further elaborates on the camaraderie in the woods and how he has realised the ultimate reality of life in the spiritual company of forest sages:

I caught for some eternal eye the sudden
 King-fisher flashing to a darkling pool;
 A slow swan silvering the azure lake,
 A shape of magic whiteness, sailed through dream;
 Leaves trembling with the passion of the wind,
 Pranked butterflies, the conscious flowers of air,
 And wandering wings in blue infinity
 Lived on the tablets of my inner sight;
 Mountains and trees stood there like thoughts from God. . . .
 I sat with the forest sages in their trance:
 There poured awakening streams of diamond light,
 I glimpsed the presence of the One in all. (p. 405)

With this touching introduction from Satyavan, Savitri too feels that she has come to the threshold of her destiny and reached her destination. She assures Satyavan:

My heart will stay here on this forest verge
 And close to this thatched roof while I am far . . . (pp. 411-12)

Now is the eventful time of Narad's arrival at Madra, the kingdom of Aswapati, the sage and sagacious human father of celestial Savitri. Narad, the Rishi of Devloka and the prescient announcer of cosmic and supracosmic events, is God's harbinger to King Aswapati. The distance between Devaloka and Madra, which is located on the bank of the Alakananda in Badrikashram Himalaya, is sizeable and the Rishi takes this period to sing songs of life, light, love and delight. The joy of a beautiful tomorrow is swelling the bosom of ' . . . the singer of the ultimate ecstasy' and, losing himself in blissful singing —

He sang of the glory and marvel still to be born,
 Of Godhead throwing off at last its veil,
 Of bodies made divine and life made bliss,
 Immortal sweetness clasping immortal might,
 Heart sensing heart, thought looking straight at thought,
 And the delight when every barrier falls,
 And the transfiguration and the ecstasy.

And lo and behold! Narad's song creates magic in the atmosphere and compels the asuric forces to weep and shout with delight —

. . . as he sang the demons wept with joy
 Foreseeing the end of their long dreadful task
 And the defeat for which they hoped in vain,
 And glad release from their self-chosen doom
 And return into the One from whom they came. (pp. 416-17)

Why did the demons, the pioneers of pain and terror and cruelty, weep with joy? R.Y. Deshpande in his painstakingly documented book, *Narad's Arrival at Madra*, deciphers the mystery behind the demons' joyful weeping:

When the demons live under the thick obscure shroud of Ignorance they act as spooky dubious agents of the uncompromising Night. But the moment they come under the spell of the song they forget their hostility. Nay, they even feel contented to have been the happy participants in the mysterious process being worked out by the faultless Force in the field of this immense Inconscience. They now concede that their task which is at once dreadful and is a dread, must be abandoned. But by themselves they are unable to do it and hence they wait for their own defeat at that mighty Force. Through Narad's song they become aware of the power that is working behind the Inconscience . . . (p. 259)

Narad blissfully departs after heralding the ‘Word of Fate’ before Aswapati and others. While talking to Narad, Aswapati talks of ‘Alakananda’s murmuring waves’ (p. 422) where waters run by ‘Lisping and babbling to the splendour of morn’ (p. 423). The present scholar is fortunate enough to listen to the murmuring waves of Alakananda almost every moment of the day, as his abode is quite close to the sacred river near Vishnuprayag in Badrikashram! The beauty and authenticity with which Sri Aurobindo describes the morning splendours of Alakananda and the surrounding Himalayan peaks convinces me to uphold the belief that the great seer-poet may have definitely visited Badrinath Himalaya, perhaps in a subtle or causal body.

It is also possible that, being a rishi-seer, Sri Aurobindo would have used the poetic powers of Vision and Inspiration — two highest qualities of a revelatory *kavi* — to map the beauty and life of the Himalaya. Nothing is impossible, imperceptible and impenetrable to the prescient gaze of a Rishi, the greatest singer of Truth and Bliss. Defining the nature and powers and unfathomable potentials of the Rishi A. B. Purani comments,

On the highest level, the poet becomes the seer, who is the creator, *Kavi* or *Ṛṣi*. . . . *Ṛṣi* is one who has the vision of the Reality beyond the range of mind and in whom the Vision finds a spontaneous expression in the body of rhythm and word.

(*Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri*, p. 83)

The whole of *Savitri* is the result of constant *mantra-sadhana* of the highest dedication to the Word-Brahma. It is by the powers of Vision and Inspiration that Sri Aurobindo established a supreme harmony with the cosmic Presence and super-cosmic worlds. All the worlds’ mysteries were open and intelligible to him. The way he describes the Himalayan grandeurs in the epic affirms the truth that as a seer-poet he is always able to witness the play of gods and demigods in the Himalaya and, as a Rishi he is an active ‘participant’ in that play. Everything that is ‘recorded’ in *Savitri* is, therefore, a reflection of Reality seen and savoured by the poet’s Eye, in moments of soul’s rendezvous with the cosmic soul’s delight. Amal Kiran convincingly comments —

The Eternal Eye is at the back of all poetic perfection, and what this Eye visions is the Divine Presence taking flawless shape in a super-cosmos. To that shape the poet, in one way or another, converts the objects or events he depicts.

(*On Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri*, p. 165)

We return to our explorations of the Himalaya as mentioned in the epic. Informed and awakened by Narad, Savitri, conscious of her mission, marries Satyavan

and leaving behind 'Madra's spacious halls' (p. 466), comes to Dyumatsena's Himalayan hermitage in the woods of Shalwa. Entire Nature in the Shalwa hermitage is delighted by the radiant presence of Savitri, the eternal bride of the eternal bridegroom. All the joys and beauties of Nature open themselves before this conscious Incarnate Flame of divinity so that she could steal some moments of bliss mid her constant contemplation of the dwindling days of Satyavan's life. In fact Savitri is dazzled by the graces and faces of the manifold delights of the Shalwa woods —

At first to her beneath the sapphire heavens
 The sylvan solitude was a gorgeous dream,
 An altar of the summer's splendour and fire,
 A sky-topped flower-hung palace of the gods
 And all its scenes a smile on rapture's lips
 And all its voices bards of happiness.
 There was a chanting in the casual wind,
 There was a glory in the least sunbeam;
 Night was a chrysoprase on velvet cloth,
 A nestling darkness or a moonlit deep;
 Day was a purple pageant and a hymn,
 A wave of the laughter of light from morn to eve.
 His absence was a dream of memory,
 His presence was the empire of a god. (p. 468)

'The Book of Yoga' which is completely dedicated to Savitri's inner realisations and acquisition of cosmic and supracosmic Powers, also takes place in the Himalaya. The mysterious woods of Shalwa turn into a spiritual laboratory for Savitri where 'In the little hermitage in the forest's heart' (p. 551) she meets, talks, discusses, and humbly denies the offerings of Powers and Emanations and bravely marches forward on the path of Perfection — of course with the promise of return. In the same hermitage she attains the highest Yogic oneness and becomes 'a circle without circumference' (p. 554).

The Himalaya is all-pervasive in the final hours of Satyavan's mortal life. For the first time Satyavan is wandering in Shalwa woods in the company of his divine wife Savitri. His inner joy and buoyancy is beyond control. Ignorant and unaware of the impending stroke of Fate, he introduces Savitri to his 'kingdom' — the forests and the Himalaya. 'With linked hands' (p. 562) they march towards the world of life's true opulence,

Where beauty and grandeur and unspoken dream,
 Where Nature's mystic silence could be felt
 Communing with the secrecy of God. (p. 562)

An elated Satyavan has innumerable things to tell Savitri about the inner lives and meanings of the forest:

He spoke of all the things he loved: they were
 His boyhood's comrades and his playfellows,
 Coevals and companions of his life
 Here in this world whose every mood he knew:
 Their thoughts which to the common mind are blank,
 He shared, to every wild emotion felt
 An answer. (p. 563)

Just before the 'inevitable moment' of Death, Satyavan sings, shares and shows the joys of life, perennial life!

Savitri's encounter and interaction with Death after the fateful fainting of Satyavan in the woods happens on the Himalaya. There are some insurmountable superworlds in the Himalaya which could not be scaled by ordinary human beings. But partly by virtue of her innate purity and mostly by the power of Shakti Yagnya, Savitri effortlessly surmounts those worlds and peaks and compels Death to start a meaningful 'debate' on the problems and possibilities of man and earth. One of her greatest perfections is the self-earned boon of total fearlessness, attained mid the company of Himalayan sages. Only an utterly fearless person could dare stand and speak before Death — 'I trample on thy law with living feet' (p. 652). She is griefless and fearless even at the moment of Satyavan's fainting — 'Griefless and strong she waited like the gods' (p. 565). There is not a single moment in her long debate with Death when Savitri is under the spell of fear, illusion and grief. Instead, she reveals that she is the source of all strength and the executive power of divine will —

World-spirit, I was thy equal spirit born.
 My will too is a law, my strength a god.
 I am immortal in my mortality. (p. 589)

Savitri further reveals that even God acts and executes his will through her —

. . . my humanity is a mask of God:
 He dwells in me, the mover of my acts,
 Turning the great wheel of his cosmic work.
 I am the living body of his light,
 I am the thinking instrument of his power,
 I incarnate Wisdom in an earthy breast,
 I am his conquering and unslayable will. (p. 634)

Finally she outwits and overcomes Death on all counts and regains the bonded soul of Satyavan from his grip — thereby ensuring endless efflorescence of love, light and delight for earth.

After entering into the reign of 'The Eternal Day', Savitri sees everywhere '... Wonder's dream-vasts cloudless skies . . .' (p. 671) and '... scenes of a sweetness that can never fade' (p. 671). She also casts a glance on the beauties of the hypnotising Himalaya and listens to their eternal chant:

Eternal mountains ridge on gleaming ridge
 Whose lines were graved as on a sapphire plate
 And etched the borders of heaven's lustrous noon
 Climbed like piled temple stairs and from their heads
 Of topless meditation heard below
 The approach of a blue pilgrim multitude . . .
 A chanting crowd from mountain bosoms slipped
 Past branches fragrant with a sigh of flowers
 Hurrying through sweetnesses with revel leaps;
 The murmurous rivers of felicity
 Divinely rippled honey-voiced desires,
 Mingling their sister eddies of delight . . . (p. 673)

Then Savitri treads the land of celestial delight 'Where finite and the infinite are one' (p. 676) and witnesses the never-ending dance of Himalayan gods and demigods: the Apsaras, Nagas, Siddhas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Kinnaras, Munis and Yogis. Even a fleeting note of this mellifluous symphony of delightful movement is enough to transport one into trance! This dance is the result of the innate self-born ecstasy, an initial glimpse of the prism of Perfection —

Impeccable artists of unerring forms,
 Magician builders of sound and rhythmic words,
 Wind-haired Gandharvas chanted to the ear
 The odes that shape the universal thought,
 The lines that tear the veil from Deity's face,
 The rhythms that bring the sounds of wisdom's sea.
 Immortal figures and illumined brows,
 Our great forefathers in those splendours moved;
 Termless in power and satisfied of light,
 They enjoyed the sense of all for which we strive.
 High seers, moved poets saw the eternal thoughts
 That, travellers from on high, arrive to us
 Deformed by our search, tricked by costuming mind,

Like gods disfigured by the pangs of birth,
 Seized the great words which now are frail sounds caught
 By difficult rapture on a mortal tongue. (p. 677)

Theirs is the dance of ultimate delight, the pure creative *ananda* generated by inner and outer fulfilment. Their forms, their faces and their arts are the summit reflections of Reality and, that is the reason the poet calls them ‘impeccable artists’. When every mystery pertaining to life, light and love is demystified, nothing remains to be realised. And the spontaneous expression of joy is naturally manifested through dancing and chanting. These are the heights reached when a poet becomes a ‘seer’ and witnesses the supportive creative atmosphere around, without any involvement of mind.

And the beauty is that this Himalayan magic never ends; the Gandharvas never stop their steps nor the Apsaras their songs. The Himalaya is the perennial and perhaps the most perfect cradle of creation. The dance of Divine Delight is still going on! The seers are still revealing cosmic and supracosmic secrets through their burning eyes and churning words. Narad is still singing delightfully the songs and names of his eternal love, Lord Vishnu. We listen to these songs and delight in ‘frail sounds’ because the noise around is disturbing and distracting and the thirst within is impure and the sincerity imperfect. But why should we worry? *Savitri* is with us. Through this poem we are always close to the intuitive vision and revelatory inspirations of the poet. Open the poem and feel the gentle touch of the Himalayan snowflakes, and listen to the resonance of that rapturous dance, the mellifluous murmur of ‘Flowering Alakananda’ . . .

This author is privileged to listen to this music almost every moment, here in the Himalaya, gazing at the smiling portraits of our great and gracious gurus — Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

CHARAN SINGH

Notes on Himalaya-related places mentioned in the article

1. Himalaya – literal meaning ‘The abode of snow’. The Himalaya holds great significance in the Indian spiritual tradition and is venerated as a living and growing mountain. The classical poet Kalidasa has called it ‘*devatma*’ or soul of gods.

2. Veda Vyasa’s cave of creation – Vyasa created all the Puranas, including the Mahabharata where the tale of Satyavan and Savitri is narrated in the Vanaparva episode, in Badrikashram Himalaya. His cave of creation is still in existence in Mana village near the famous Hindu shrine at Badrinath in Uttarakhand.

3. Alakananda – Alakananda is a major tributary of the Ganges. It flows from Satopanth lake in Badrinath Himalaya in Uttarakhand. At Devprayag (also in Uttarakhand) Alakananda

merges into Bhagirathi and assumes its most popular name Ganges.

4. Gandhamadan Parvat – The holy mountain is still very much visible and traceable in the Uttarakhand Himalaya. All four holy shrines of the Hindus viz. Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamnotri are located in and around Gandhamadan Parvat. This is one of the most mystic and spiritually significant mountains of the Himalaya.

5. Madra – Kingdom of King Aswapati in the Mahabharata. Now the location of Madra could be traced in three Himalayan states: Uttarakhand, Himachal and Punjab (particularly Jalandhar region).

6. Shalwa – The kingdom of sage-king Dyumatsena in the Mahabharata. At present its location could be traced in and around mount Sumeru or Meru in the Uttarakhand Himalaya.

7. The Apsaras, Nagas, Yakshas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras and Siddhas are demigods who eternally dwell in the Himalaya and sing and dance for god's delight in his creation.

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AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

(Continued from the issue of October 2014)

12. Enter the Sonnet

“It was by the sonnet that lyricism again entered English poetry,” say Legouis and Cazamian.¹ After a century of drought, there was now the early breeze of a coming spring. French and Italian literatures have always stepped in to give English literature a creative nudge forward. For the sonnet form, Italy would be the inspiration. The earliest sonnets in English are but translations, but translations with a difference. Here was new creation by the English genius which agreed to be guided by the constraint of size and subject that made the sonnet such a unique genre. This poetic form is of particular interest to Aurobindonians as Sri Aurobindo found it convenient to record his mystic experiences in it, because the sonnet could hold in leash the vibgyor experiences by its syllabic and line commitment.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* sees its possible origin in the 13th century among the Sicilian School of court poets, spreading to Tuscany where it reached its full bloom in the 14th century in the hands of Petrarch. His 317 sonnets in Italian addressed to Laura perfected the 14-line poetic form. The sonnet deals with the theme in two moods. The octave (first eight lines) states the problem, the sestet (last six lines) offers the resolution. The rhyme scheme for the octave would be abba, abba; for the sestet either cde cde or edccde. This Petrarchan sonnet which became a major influence in European poetry settled down in France with the 12-syllable iambic line, the Alexandrine.

The sonnet was introduced in England by Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) who happened to be travelling in France and Italy and picked up an abiding admiration for the lyrical poetry he found there. The sonnet attracted his attention in particular as it was a bit of ivory on which one could spend his artistic labour with care, like a miniature artist. He preferred to translate Petrarch rather than recreate him. Here is an example which was published in Tottel’s Miscellany:²

The long love that in my thought I harbour,
And in my heart doth keep his residence,
Into my face presseth with bold pretence,
And there campeth displaying his banner.

1. *History of English Literature*, p. 222.

2. The name usually used for the first anthology of English poetry, *Songs and Sonnets* (1557), after the publisher, Richard Tottel.

She that me learns to love and to suffer,
 And wills that my trust, and lust's negligence
 Be reined by reason, shame, and reverence,
 With his hardiness takes displeasure.
 Wherewith love to the heart's forest he fleeth,
 Leaving his enterprise with pain and cry
 And there him hideth, and not appeareth.
 What may I do, when my master feareth,
 But in the field with him to live and die?
 For good is the life, ending faithfully.³

The next sonneteer who caught the imagination of the English reader was Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey (1517-47) who was sent to the scaffold by Henry VIII. He too translated Petrarch and wrote sonnets in the Petrarchan style as well. Here is a romantic sonnet which marks the beginnings of the English Renaissance in poetry:

Set me whereas the sun doth parch the green
 Or where his beams do not dissolve the ice,
 In temperate heat where he is felt and seen;
 In presence prest of people, mad or wise;
 Set me in high or yet in low degree,
 In longest night or in the shortest day,
 In clearest sky or where clouds thickest be,
 In lusty youth or when my hairs are gray.
 Set me in heaven, in earth, or else in hell;
 In hill, or dale, or in the foaming flood;
 Thrall or at large, alive whereso I dwell,
 Sick or in health, in evil fame or good:
 Hers will I be, and only with this thought
 Content myself although my chance be nought.

As Legouis and Cazamian point out, lyricism flowed into English poetry after a century's hibernation.

Whether it were translated or imitated mattered little. It rendered the music of feeling or passion. It called forth the rare word, the metaphor, subtlety and condensation. Its very brevity necessitated artistic labour.⁴

3. Petrarch's Sonnet 109.

4. *History of English Literature*, p. 222.

The typical English (Elizabethan, Shakespearian) sonnet was born in the hands of Sir Philip Sydney whose *Astrophel and Stella* (1591) is the first memorable sequence in this genre. Metaphors and allegorical statements give his sonnets a rare richness flashing forth through brilliantly-conceived phrases.

Let dainty wits cry on the Sisters nine,
 That bravely mask'd, their fancies may be told:
 Or, Pindar's apes, flaunt they in phrases fine,
 Enam'ling with pied flowers their thoughts of gold.
 Or else let them in statelier glory shine,
 Ennobling new found tropes with problems old,
 Or with strange similes enrich each line,
 Of herbs or beasts which Inde or Afric' hold.
 For me in sooth, no Muse but one I know:
 Phrases and problems from my reach do grow,
 And strange things cost too dear for my poor sprites.
 How then? Even thus: in Stella's face I read
 What love and beauty be, then all my deed
 But copying is, what in her Nature writes.

In one breath we have references to the nine Muses, the imitators of Pindar, the poets who seek exotic colour from unknown quantities, places like India and Africa and the poet's total love for his beloved. Such was the romantic mood that gushed forth from the sonneteers that the 16th century saw some notable sonnet-sequences: Spenser's *Amoretti*, Samuel Daniel's *Della*, Giles Fletcher's *Licia*, and Michael Drayton's *Idea's Mirror*. Though by now we are able to read the received text of these sonnets (having come a long distance from Old English and Middle English literature) because the grammar is closer to us, the spelling remains a hurdle. However, there are some editions which helpfully give us the text in modern spelling and here is the fourth sonnet from Spenser's *Amoretti*, which juxtaposes opposites like old and new, death and life, winter and spring. Even when writing romantic poetry, the English poets can hardly distance themselves from the relentless passage of Time:

New year forth looking out of Ianus gate,
 Doth seem to promise hope of new delight:
 and bidding th' old Adieu, his passed date
 bids all old thoughts to die in dumpish spright.
 And calling forth out of sad Winter's night,
 fresh love, that long hath slept in cheerless bower:
 wills him awake, and soon about him dight
 his wanton wings and darts of deadly power.

For lusty spring now in his timely hour,
 is ready to come forth him to receive:
 and warns the Earth with divers coloured flower,
 to deck her self, and her fair mantle weave.
 Then you fair flower, in whom fresh youth doth reign,
 prepare your self new love to entertain.

Spenser loved embroidering words and the sonnet offered opportunities for complicated webbing. His sonnets generally take the rhyme scheme of abab bcba cddc ee. Surely, he was rich in language!

And of course, Shakespeare's sonnets. Shakespeare interests us in particular, for he was a great inspiration for Sri Aurobindo not only in writing his plays but also using the sonnets to record his own spiritual journeys. Shakespeare's sonnets, composed in the last decade of the 16th century are understandably famous. They record the poet's intense feelings and some of them are addressed to the Dark Lady. This Dark Lady has raised a million eyebrows. Who was she? Did Shakespeare really write these sonnets? Or was it Elizabeth Vernon? Vain be such questions. Perhaps Shakespeare was simply wrestling with his own feelings and different sonnets posit different stages in this inner drama. The sequence has stood the test of time very well.

Totalling 154 in number, the poems deal with a variety of moods, including the intensity of love and the anxiety of being spurned by the beloved. The opening itself comes straight to the point. Beauty should not be miserly but should rather help beauty increase in this world. Why would the lady then deny the poet?

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
 That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
 But as the ripper should by time decease,
 His tender heir might bear his memory:
 But thou contracted to thine own bright eyes,
 Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,
 Making a famine where abundance lies,
 Thy self thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel:
 Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament,
 And only herald to the gaudy spring,
 Within thine own bud buriest thy content,
 And tender churl mak'st waste in niggarding:
 Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
 To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

So now the modified rhyme scheme, end-rhymed, has become popular: abab, cdcd, efef, gg. Almost always Shakespeare uses the iambic pentameter. One of the reasons why these sonnets have transcended time is their philosophical statements on the passage of time itself. Why, oh why, are pure beauty and love so rare? Even if found, why are they so fleeting?

Those hours, that with gentle work did frame
 The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell,
 Will play the tyrants to the very same
 And that unfair which fairly doth excel;
 For never-resting time leads summer on
 To hideous winter, and confounds him there;
 Sap checked with frost, and lusty leaves quite gone,
 Beauty o'er-snowed and bareness everywhere:
 Then were not summer's distillation left,
 A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,
 Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,
 Nor it, nor no remembrance what it was:
 But flowers distill'd, though they with winter meet,
 Leese but their show; their substance still lives sweet.

So Time becomes an important persona in these sonnets, leading to philosophising which in turn results in some of the most memorable quotes in English literature.

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
 And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field . . .

For never-resting time leads summer on
 To hideous winter, and confounds him there . . .

Where wasteful Time debateth with decay . . .

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
 And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;
 Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,
 And burn the long-liv'd phoenix, in her blood;
 Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleets,
 And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time . . .

However, there are sonnets which have lived with us for decades and lighted up our experiences with beauty and delight. Here is an immortal creation of Shakespeare:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove:
 O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wandering bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error and upon me prov'd,
 I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

Of these early writings of Shakespeare, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes in *Shakespeare — His Work and his Art*:

All this wrestling with his own heart, his own emotions and passions certainly stood Shakespeare in good stead when he came to write his plays of light and his plays of darkness — and the final plays in which he beyonded darkness to greet another Dawn. (p. 309)

As yet, the sonnet was but a rainbow-rich poetic medium to convey romantic themes. In Shakespeare there is more than love poetry, of course. A definite change in the subject matter begins with the metaphysical poets like John Donne. Coming after Shakespeare, John Donne's *Holy Sonnets* (also known as *Divine Sonnets*) deal with religious themes. In fact, one may call them spiritual themes, for they are an individual's attempt to place himself in the immensity of creation. What is life? What is death? His sonnets were prescribed in my undergraduate days, and one of them has remained in my memory down the decades:

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
 Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so,
 For those whom thou thinkst thou dost overthrow,
 Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
 From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
 Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
 And soonest our best men with thee do go,
 Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
 Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,

And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
 And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,
 And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
 One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
 And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

I have remembered it well because I took up Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* as my doctoral subject. Well, Death became an epic presence thanks to the Master's sublime accents. Was Sri Aurobindo influenced by this sonnet? How arrogant is Death in *Savitri*!

Death only lasts and the inconscient Void.
 I only am eternal and endure.
 I am the shapeless formidable Vast,
 I am the emptiness that men call Space,
 I am a timeless Nothingness carrying all,
 I am the Illimitable, the mute Alone.
 I, Death, am He; there is no other God.
 All from my depths are born, they live by death;
 All to my depths return and are no more.
 I have made a world by my inconscient Force.
 My Force is Nature that creates and slays
 The hearts that hope, the limbs that long to live.
 I have made man her instrument and slave,
 His body I made my banquet, his life my food.
 Man has no other help but only Death;
 He comes to me at his end for rest and peace.⁵

What is indicated by Donne — “death, thou shalt die” — is shown as happening in the symbol realms by Sri Aurobindo.

Having got the cue from Donne, English poets began to use the sonnet form for themes other than mere romance. Some sonnets have attained immortality by recording sorrow or joy welling from the depths of the heart, and achieving thereby a kind of cathartic effect. John Milton's sonnet, 'On His Blindness' is justly famous:

When I consider how my light is spent
 Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
 And that one talent which is death to hide
 Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent

5. CWSA, Vol. 34, pp. 592-93.

To serve therewith my Maker, and present
 My true account, lest he returning chide,
 “Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?”
 I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
 That murmur, soon replies: “God doth not need
 Either man’s work or his own gifts: who best
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
 Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed
 And post o’er land and ocean without rest:
 They also serve who only stand and wait.”

This calm of mind would lead the poet to dictate the epic documents: *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*.

English poetry has innumerable sonnets that reverberate in the book-lover’s memory all the time and John Keats has given several of them like ‘On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer’ and ‘Bright Star’. Why, he has even a sonnet on the sonnet!

If by dull rhymes our English must be chained,
 And, like Andromeda, the Sonnet sweet
 Fettered, in spite of painèd loveliness;
 Let us find out, if we must be constrained,
 Sandals more interwoven and complete
 To fit the naked foot of poesy;
 Let us inspect the lyre, and weigh the stress
 Of every chord, and see what may be gained
 By ear industrious, and attention meet;
 Misers of sound and syllable, no less
 Than Midas of his coinage, let us be
 Jealous of dead leaves in the bay-wreath crown;
 So, if we may not let the Muse be free,
 She will be bound with garlands of her own.

In proper hands, the Muse gets bound by golden fetters. Which brings us to Sri Aurobindo. Indian writers in English took to the sonnet form early, but it was Sri Aurobindo who recognised its immense potentiality as a capsule to express yogic experiences in a sustained manner. In the course of his adventure, he used a special diction which can be termed as Vedantic. The rigid control over the form may seem to lead to opaqueness for some, especially when the subject matter is an individual’s spiritual anabasis. But, this only means that we have to read his sonnets again and again carefully to draw close to replicate the experience within ourselves. Repeated readings never fail to bring in the needed clarity. And what inspirational images,

waves of thought, ladders towards self-questings and soulful inner experiences!

The *Collected Poems* contains seventy-seven sonnets. We learn that Sri Aurobindo began writing them early, even when in England. After he returned to India, there was quite a gap in his taking up this poetic form again. Perhaps he set down an occasional sonnet. Fortunately, he dated most of his sonnets and some of them appear to be experiences recollected in yogic tranquillity. 'The Stone Goddess', for instance, takes us back to his experience when he stood before the niche of a Kali temple at Karnali on the banks of Narmada. Whenever I go to a temple, this sonnet sets me in search of an answer to my own question: When will the godhead look at me?

In a town of gods, housed in a little shrine,
 From sculptured limbs the Godhead looked at me, —
 A living Presence deathless and divine,
 A Form that harboured all infinity.

The great World-Mother and her mighty will
 Inhabited the earth's abysmal sleep,
 Voiceless, omnipotent, inscrutable,
 Mute in the desert and the sky and deep.

Now veiled with mind she dwells and speaks no word,
 Voiceless, inscrutable, omniscient,
 Hiding until our soul has seen, has heard
 The secret of her strange embodiment,

One in the worshipper and the immobile shape,
 A beauty and mystery flesh or stone can drape.⁶

In fact, this is true of all the sonnets of Sri Aurobindo. They may carry content that is usually termed 'heavy', not about things we see and experience in the ordinary course of our lives. Yet they are not sombre. There is a lightness of touch throughout illumined with poetic phrases that draw us closer to the thought-currents suggested in the lines. The next future gets conveyed to us in the last two lines of 'The Dumb Inconscient':

Man is a narrow bridge, a call that grows,
 His soul the dim bud of God's flaming rose.⁷

And the humour? 'Despair on the Staircase'!

6. CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 608.

7. SABCL, Vol. 5, p. 163.

Mute stands she, lonely on the topmost stair,
 An image of magnificent despair;
 The grandeur of a sorrowful surmise
 Wakes in the largeness of her glorious eyes.
 In her beauty's dumb significant pose I find
 The tragedy of her mysterious mind.
 Yet is she stately, grandiose, full of grace.
 A musing mask is her immobile face.
 Her tail is up like an unconquered flag;
 Its dignity knows not the right to wag.
 An animal creature wonderfully human,
 A charm and miracle of fur-footed Brahman,
 Whether she is spirit, woman or a cat,
 Is now the problem I am wondering at.⁸

And in 'A Dream of Surreal Science' the dire warning to man not to meddle with Prakriti also comes as a haunting spray of pleasantry, a dream on man's scientific-technological megalomania:

One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink
 At the Mermaid, capture immortality;
 A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink
 Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.

A thyroid, meditating almost nude
 Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal Light
 And, rising from its mighty solitude,
 Spoke of the Wheel and eightfold Path all right.

A brain by a disordered stomach driven
 Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled and fell,
 From St. Helena went, perhaps, to Heaven.
 Thus wagged on the surreal world, until

A scientist played with atoms and blew out
 The universe before God had time to shout.⁹

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

8. CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 639.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 614.



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