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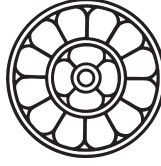
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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Vol. LXVII

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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BHAVANI

(From a Sanskrit Hymn of Shankaracharya)

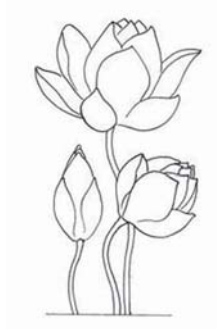
Father nor mother, daughter nor son are mine,
I obey no master, served am I by none,
Learning or means I have not, wife nor kin;
My refuge thou, Bhavani, thou alone!

Charity I have not learned, Yoga nor trance,
Mantra nor hymn nor Tantra have I known,
Worship nor dedication's covenants:
My refuge thou, Bhavani, thou alone!

Virtue is not mine nor holy pilgrimage,
Salvation or world's joy I have never won,
Devotion I have not, Mother, no vows I pledge:
My refuge thou, Bhavani, thou alone!

SRI AUROBINDO

(Translations, CWSA, Vol. 5, p. 383)



SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of May 2014)

MEETING THE MOTHER

Right Attitude during Interviews with the Mother

THE right attitude in approaching the Mother when she sees one, is to keep the being perfectly quiet and open to receive, without any activity of the mind or desire in the vital, with only the surrender and the psychic readiness to accept whatever is given.

Tomorrow, 24th, the Mother sees you — for meditation, so that she may see and do whatever is needed.

23 February 1932

*

It is a strange thing, but it seems to be absolutely clear that the Mother wants me to go to her. Everything in me says, "Yes, yes, it is true — there is no doubt about it." And I would surely go to her in spite of this fear that holds me so tight, if only I knew how and where to meet her.

This fear is an absurd and irrational feeling in the subconscious physical — there is no reason for its existence — unless it is the fear of the egoistic physical clinging to its own individuality and unwilling to be "swallowed up" in the Mother. Otherwise it can only be a sort of tamasic counterpart to the rajasic revolt and pride — for these two things often go together or alternate. Mother was and is quite ready to see you. But you must get rid of the fear, distrust and unwillingness, for there should be a trust and openness in you, when you come. If you wish she can fix a time — next Thursday at 9.30. In the meantime we can try to get this obstacle out of you.

21 April 1933

*

Is it true that having seen Mother, there may be a struggle for a few days? Should I be on guard against attack?

It is better to be on guard for the struggle is possible, though not inevitable. Something is put in you to develop — usually the hostile forces try to interfere to prevent the inner evolution. A little more vigilance is therefore advisable.

9 May 1933

*

Four months ago I begged the Mother for an interview, but up to this time she has not accepted my prayer. I have decided to cut off all my vital connections with Bengal, but if two of my friends there meet with spiritual death, I will never recover. At this critical juncture of my life, will Mother give me an interview?

When one comes to the Mother, one must not come with these things in the mind — but in quietude and light solely to receive from her what one can assimilate.

10 April 1934

*

Mother, give me an immutable and constant peace.

The Mother is always ready to give you peace. It was for that Mother called you last time, but you were very restless. Sometimes you can receive very well. Try to be like that always, — always with the door of your being open to receive the Mother in you and her peace but shut against any other influence or pressure. Then you will have the immutable peace and feel the Mother always in you and yourself in her.

21 July 1934

*

I feel very dissatisfied with myself. I wish to see the Mother and arrive at something real.

You would arrive at nothing real by seeing the Mother when she herself does not think it the right thing. It is not by seeing the Mother that one gets realisation but by doing her will and allowing her true inner working within you.

Though I do not want the Mother to act under compulsion, I feel sure that if I give an ultimatum that I am going away, she will do all I ask.

You are mistaken. Mother will do what she considers to be the right thing for each. If it is right for you to go away or for anyone to go away she would not ask to stay. She does not think it right for you to go — so she would say No. But on the same ground she would say No to your vital desire.

28 September 1935

*

The Mother does not usually speak with those who come for an interview before starting. If she had to speak, she would not give an interview at all to most, for she would have no time. Moreover it is not by speech or instruction or answering questions that Mother works on the consciousness of the sadhaks, it is by a silent influence to which they have to learn to open themselves. As for his readiness for the Asram life, it should be evident to himself from his reactions, especially about his family, that he is not ready — he would have been pulled away by these feelings and it would have been a serious fall for him. To be told the truth about themselves and get the guidance unasked — that is a grace which sadhaks should accept with gladness — to weep and feel hurt is a reaction of the vital which he must get over. Psychic weeping, a weeping from the soul deep within, tears of the soul's yearning, of sorrow for the resistance of Nature, of joy or love or bhakti does not cause a fall, it can help and open up the inner soul from its veils; but this weeping has no strain or suffering in it, it is something very deep and quiet and brings a sense of purification and release. That is not so with the weeping which comes from the vital and is born of hurt or abhiman or disappointment or shakes or disturbs the nature.

16 March 1937

*

What attitude should I take during my meditation with the Mother? Last time I could not properly receive the Mother's Force or become conscious of her working.

To be conscious of the Force or working in a meditation with the Mother, the consciousness must be still and passive to her. If one is accustomed to be active and make one's own formations, that stands in the way and must be suspended during the meditation.

I could not quite follow what the Mother said [in the last interview] about things in the exterior consciousness coming in disguise.

Mother only remembers to have said that there were many things in the exterior consciousness that obscured and veiled the inner being — this was in connection with what you said about the heart not opening. Perhaps she may have said that these things do not always show themselves in their own forms, so that one is not conscious of the obstacle.

17 July 1937

*

I intend to sweep out the lower forces before meeting the Mother tomorrow. Failing that, I do not wish to show my face to her.

That is the suggestion of the lower forces. They want to create an excuse for your remaining aloof like that.

*

The whole being feels a disturbance, a disgust, as if the sleeping lower nature has been woken up. My mind is full of bad thoughts and I feel burdened. I have become like a thing on the waves.

But why does this always happen after the Mother calls you? You must get rid of this reaction, otherwise the Mother will not feel free to call you. You must learn to use your will and not be passive to these reactions.

*

If Mother's seeing you for a minute cured your vital, she would see you, but will it? does it really help you? Generally such desires in the vital are not stopped by satisfying them. All the same at the end of the morning when the others have gone, if you are there, Mother will see you for a minute.

Impossibility of Giving Interviews to Everyone

It is not possible for the Mother to give you the five minutes a day you ask for; her time is already too much taken. There are many others who have asked the same thing; the Mother has had to refuse them all. You are mistaken if you think that any such arrangement is necessary for your sadhana. A daily meditation of the kind would help you perhaps if you kept always the right attitude; but if you keep the

right attitude, you will not need any such routine of outward means, the help the Mother is always giving you would be more than sufficient.

I think it needful at this stage of your sadhana to repeat my previous warning about not allowing any vital mixture. It is the crudity of the unregenerated vital that prevents the psychic from remaining always at the front. You have now seen clearly the two different consciousnesses, — according to what you have written in one of your letters, — the psychic and the vital. To get rid of the old vital nature is now one of the most pressing needs of your sadhana. You are trying to get rid of the vital attachments and to turn entirely to the Mother. At this juncture you must be careful not to allow the movements of the old vital nature to enter into your relations with the Mother. Take this matter of your wish for more physical nearness to her or contact with her. Take care not to allow this to gain on you or become a desire; for if you do, the vital will begin to play, to create demands and desires, to awake in you jealousy and envy of others and other undesirable movements, and that would push your psychic being into the background and spoil the whole truth of your sadhana. There are some who have suffered much trouble and difficulty in their Yoga by making this mistake, and I think it therefore better to put you on your guard.

13 July 1931

*

I am so miserable and can't find my way, and what is most discouraging is that I see others receiving so much help from the Mother and being cared for by her, while I am left to myself with my wretched life to pull on somehow. For me the Mother's doors are closed. For others the freedom, enjoyment, pleasure of her company, her constant love and help.

If you cherish this attitude and these feelings, how can you progress? they are the very opposite of the needed faith and surrender.

Who are these who have constant outward help from the Mother — you speak as if all but you had it? The Mother sees a small number of people every day because they come here for work in the rooms (X, Y, Z) or to report work to her (A, B, C, D, E). The Mother does not talk with these about Yoga, nor do they have meditations with her; they come for their work, speak about it and some general matters and go. There are some like F and G who get a meditation perhaps once a week, others come for a few minutes perhaps once a fortnight — there is no fixed period for any — or at long intervals, some see the Mother (apart from Pranam) once a year. For the constant outward help, the only way all these get it is by writing to the Mother or myself, just as you do.

If the Mother is not calling you, she has told you why; it is because each time

you get upset; why should she call you only for you to be upset? She called you at your request a few days ago and now you are in this condition — worse than you have been for a long time — it has simply revived the old desire, repining, revolt. How is it that this happens if there is not desire, demand, wrong feeling mixed up with your physical approach to the Mother? or why else should there be this feeling about others?

I have been trying to make you develop the psychic attitude, bring out the psychic being, look towards the Mother not with the old vital demand, but with the soul's need, the psychic openness, confidence, so that when you approach her physically it may be with the true openness that receives the light, the strength, the joy she tries to give to everybody. That is what is demanded now of those who approach her; the old vital way is now discouraged not only for you, but for all. Develop the psychic attitude and there will be no difficulty for your approaching her or for her calling you when it is needful. You were beginning to develop a capacity for feeling the influence. Instead of falling back to the old mood and the old way, continue to develop that. It is the only way and there is no other.

P. S. Do not allow any influences from people you mix with to upset you — I am speaking of any recent influence — e.g. from people who are dissatisfied and complaining that the Mother does not help them. It may be something of this kind has upset you without your noticing it.

31 August 1932

*

May I come to see the Mother on days when there is no pranam? I feel such peace when I pray at her feet and I long to see her on non-pranam days.

Do you think the other 120 people here have not the same wish — and what is the use of a non-pranam day if Mother has to see everyone who would like to come to her that day?

30 May 1933

*

Mother has a very limited time for seeing people — she has so much to do. So it is only when there is a strong necessity that she sees except for those who have work to do with her.

1933

*

What you propose about seeing the Mother at will is not physically practicable and wherever in a few cases it has been allowed in the past, the results have not been helpful. What you should do is to write every two days or so a few lines until the difficulty is over. You must especially let me know about the sleep and the nervous condition. In fact you ought to have let me know at once. Although correspondence was stopped and still is till farther notice, I had said that important or necessary communications could be sent.

3 March 1935

*

I feel a constant longing to ask the Mother to grant an interview to me. At times I feel utterly dissatisfied and uncertain of what I am doing and a little meeting with Mother could put right the whole thing.

It is not because Mother does not care for you that she is not calling you — when she is sure that things are ready she will do it. But it is not possible immediately or soon. First, she does not want to bring up old difficulties — secondly, nowadays there are many difficulties and she is tired and does not feel like talking with people. You must wait till things are clear on all sides — they are not now.

20 March 1935

*

X gets 144 interviews with the Mother a year, Y and Co. get 48 or more, Z gets about 24, A and others get 365 or more! Most of the rest get 1 or 2 a year. Why not add one more interview for them? At present the Mother gives about 1200 interviews a year. If she gave 3 to each sadhak in a year, it would mean 450 a year, still leaving a grand surplus for the Xs, Ys and Zs. One more interview would keep the sadhaks in good spirits and they would feel happy for months. Now it is like the high pay of the higher officials in India. The Viceroy gets a huge amount, the clerks get hardly anything. How long will these inequalities in government remain?

It is not a government and an interview is not pay. If it comes to a question of demand and supply or of interviews as a right and privilege, no sadhak would be satisfied with 3 or with 300. There would be complaints, laments and revolts just as there are now. People would soon find some other ground for accusing the Mother of partiality and injustice (the people who get the most interviews are generally those who revolt the most, though there are exceptions). It is precisely this treating of the spiritual life as if it were a “government” or a court or a school (with places

and marks and rewards and punishments) or a hostel or a mixture of all these and some other human institutions that has been the bane of this Asram. If it is to be a Government with Mother as President dealing out privileges, handshakes, pay, and what not on a principle of democratic equality or any other principle, then her only course would be to abdicate.

The number of interviews has nothing to do, by the way, with smallness or bigness of people, however the size may be reckoned. There are spiritually big people who get no interviews and spiritually small ones who get them. The same would turn out to be the fact on any principle of smallness or bigness.

The only place where a satisfactory equality of treatment is possible — satisfactory to the human mind and vital — would be I think Nirvana or the Nihil of Sunyavadins.

10 April 1935

*

I feel a vacancy in my life. If the Mother starts seeing me again for a short time, I will try to carry out some big scheme for her, such as calling a lot of people and doing something with them.

All that is quite premature. Big scale work can come only when there has been a great inner change in people and things also change.

Or if these big things are for the future, I can do some sadhana, and if the Mother begins seeing me, I can do it more consciously.

The sadhana must not depend on physically seeing the Mother. It is bound to go wrong if there is any such dependence. It is not without a reason that Mother has drawn back from seeing people.

14 June 1935

*

Yesterday I got into a condition of excitement and again I wished to ask the Mother to begin seeing me. There is a separation which makes me feel a sort of humiliation and a disappointment. It is not worth continuing this sort of life. Perhaps I should go away from here if it is not possible to see the Mother.

It is obviously a wrong movement. When you get excited like that and under the sway of a persistent desire, it is already evident that it is a wrong movement — when it leads to a suggestion to go away if the desire is not conceded, then there can be no further doubt about it.

You ought to realise that the Mother knows better than you what is best for you and your sadhana. You must leave it to her to call you or not to call you. To let a desire like this seize you and insist on its satisfaction is not at all a right attitude. Especially this strong insistence of a desire to insist on the Mother physically seeing them is a dangerous thing for any sadhak and has done harm to many. It means that some vital demand has got hold of them which wants to satisfy itself and, if indulged, would remain dissatisfied and ask for more and more and revolt and make things impossible. The very fact that you talk of going home if Mother does not yield to your demand shows that it is such a demand that has awoke in you and is returning again and again — it is not a psychic aspiration, for the psychic aspiration always respects the judgment and will of the Mother. It is after long years of experience of the disastrous result of yielding to these vital demands that Mother has drawn back from them and now no longer sees many people whom she saw before. You must not expect her to go back upon her resolution so long as the vital of the sadhaks is not changed and clear of these demands and insistences. You should throw this demand away and go on quietly with your sadhana.

The first thing a Yogi should have is a constant inner peace and quiet and no excitement, no clamour of desires which he cannot control. You must arrive at that first. Moreover as I have told you, it is the inner reality of the Mother's presence and not only of her presence but of her control that must be now the aim of the sadhana. Any insistence on the outer thing is a departure from the true line and can only lead astray. In all these matters it is the Divine Will that must rule and the will of the Guru.

Respect always the will and decision of the Mother.

16 June 1935

*

If there is a possibility of the Mother calling me "when the time comes", my going away would be wrong and I can wait and see.

What I said was that you should leave it entirely to the Mother to call you or not to call you.

The Mother's will and decision I have always respected, but I saw no reasoning in the things concerning me.

I simply meant that her decision should be accepted whatever it is. Since it is her decision not to have a private interview, that will should be accepted and you should not go on insisting on her calling you.

17 June 1935

*

But why does the Mother not see me? Do I lack the effort and persistence necessary? Am I not sufficiently sincere and constant? I will be glad if Sri Aurobindo answers me.

I have already answered often enough that you must not persist in these ideas — you must leave everything to the Mother.

These days I have an aspiration to be on the right path and do what is right and advance.

The right path is the path on which the Mother's will wants you to go, no other.

9 July 1935

*

Today too I am feeling that life is not worth living if the Mother will not see me. I used to be able to go to the rooms upstairs whenever I liked. Now I think that going away is the only thing to do.

No one is allowed freely inside the upstairs rooms except the few who work there; they can naturally come in within their working hours; but they do not take Mother's time — they do their work and go away. No one else can enter the upstairs rooms except the meditation room and the small one where she receives people. There too those only can come who are called there and only for the time assigned to them, nor can they go about freely upstairs or do what they like. Everything is according to a strict obedience and discipline.

Mother did not stop seeing you merely because she had no time — though it is true that she has no time and is outworn and overstrained by excessive work, no rest and the sadhaks' undue pressure and claims upon her. She stopped seeing you because your vital became entirely uncontrolled. She saw besides that the push to see her was associated with vital desires, impulses, suggestions, confusions and wrong movements and she decided that so long as it was so, so long as you had not freedom and complete control over your vital she could not call you. Not only with you but with others she saw that her freedom in giving interviews was having disastrous effects — for they were feeding their wrong vital movements on it and throwing these occultly upon her in such a way as to give themselves and her infinite trouble and wear her out altogether. So she had to retire more and more and limit the interviews to a minimum, ceasing to see those who had this result from the interviews and admitting only those whom she could not stop altogether, but even they were reduced to a much smaller number of visits. This is the present state of things and it will continue till there is a true freedom and vital calm and purity in the Asram atmosphere.

You must be aware yourself that the vital confusions and disturbances continue in you though in a reduced form and that you have not yet freedom and a settled control over your vital. I had hoped that you would go on increasing the inner contact until you could get the constant inner nearness or presence, for when one has that then the vital becomes quiet and there is no longer the vital pressure and clamour for seeing the Mother; the psychic being rules and is content to leave all to the Mother, claiming nothing but what she permits, asking nothing that is not freely given by her will. Unfortunately the vital claim has risen again in you and this insistent demand. That it is wrong is shown by the very fact that you put before her this alternative, either that she shall see you or you will not stay here any longer. There are others who have said that and Mother has always refused them. For she knows by experience that to yield to their demand solves nothing, — for their demands increase and grow more exacting and vehement, as it did with X, until finally they lose their balance and the end is the same, — departure.

If you did not yield to these vital suggestions and if you were content with increasing the inner contact and increasing self-control and peace, then in time you would have the fullness of the sadhana and would find life here well worth living. The push to go comes from an adverse Force that is trying to make people depart from the Asram — but none who have gone as yet have found peace or satisfaction outside.

24 July 1935

*

X gets to talk with the Mother for two hours a day — more time than we get in months! Yet when I ask for an interview with her for a few minutes, you write that Mother has taken down my name. And now she seems to have forgotten about it.

As usual when this Force seizes you, your statements against the Mother are unfounded. As regards your interview it was understood that you wanted to see her once before the 15th. Mother had fixed one day, but as you had a cold I suggested to her that you would not enjoy very much coming under such circumstances. After that her days were full, but she had not forgotten, for your name is there in her book put down for the 6th August. As regards X — X like Y is called by the Mother alone and for sadhana only once a year for a short time. They both come daily to her, not for sadhana, not for personal talk, but for work (sometimes also the explanation of a French sentence) and along with two or three others — not for 2 hours, but for one at the maximum, and that hour, even when it is an hour, is not taken up by him alone but by all those present in turn, each in turn giving his report and receiving his instructions. X might much more justly complain that he gets a word or a letter for

his sadhana hardly once a year and a single word or a letter would be of much more value to him than a hundred talks about business — and that we were giving one thousand times more help to Z [*the correspondent*] and others than is given to him. Luckily for us he does not complain nor the others either. But each is inclined to despise what he gets and demand what he thinks is denied to him and given to another.

2 August 1935

*

I wish at times to ask the Mother for some instructions for my sadhana.

Mental instructions are not of much use. The condition has to grow in peace and light and clarity till the higher consciousness can act continuously and perfectly.

12 September 1935

*

Could I have an interview with the Mother? Two or three difficulties have been troubling me since the beginning of my sadhana. I want to get a solution from the Mother's lips.

This method of asking questions and getting solutions in an interview is one of which the Mother does not approve. She finds it useless and it forces her to come down to meet a superficial mental consciousness which she has long left.

2 October 1935

*

The Mother did not say Yes [*to giving a personal interview*]. Nothing could be worse for you than your making your condition depend on your physically seeing the Mother whenever you wanted it. It would create altogether a wrong relation. It must depend on an inner nearness to the Mother, on your always being able to receive her force so as to throw away both desire and illness. That is the true basis of the union with the Mother. Otherwise, all the help you can receive you get at Pranam and the evening meditation. For the rest, for the Mother calling you for a personal interview, you must leave that to her. Her time is already filled up and she is overburdened with work day and night, — if she has to make farther time for everybody who wants to see her whenever they want it, things would become quite impossible.

Interviews with Outsiders

The Mother cannot see him; she is not seeing anyone from outside now. He can be told that he must first try to know something about Yoga before anything can be given him; he must know and be in a position to decide with knowledge whether Yoga is really the thing he wants. He can read the books and come back for darshan in February.

13 December 1931

*

About these people outside, you must make it a rule not to give them hopes of Yoga or seeing the Mother — it will only raise expectations that have to be disappointed. Even if the Mother were seeing people from outside, what would be the earthly use of her seeing these old ladies on the way to heaven or these young girls on the way to marriage? All that is not serious. But even apart from that, Mother does not see people and she has no intention of changing her rule. So you must never say anything without previously asking — and in most cases it is useless even to ask. As for Pranam, Mother has stopped giving permissions — there are too many people already. As owing to these cases you will be meeting many people, you must resist all temptation and remain deaf to requests for interviews, Pranam or Yoga.

2 January 1936

Significance of Birthday Interviews

What is the meaning of the Mother seeing us on our birthdays?

About the birthdays. There is a rhythm (one among many) in the play of the world-forces which is connected with the sun and planets. That makes the birthday a day of possible renewal when the physical being is likely more plastic. It is for this reason that Mother sees people on their birthdays.

18 May 1934

*

I don't see why people in general exalt their birthdays. Of course, you wrote once that on birthdays the physical is more open and receptive to the Mother than on other days.

It is not a question of a physical birthday or of the body — it is taken as an occasion for opening a new year of life with a growing new birth within. That is the meaning in which the Mother takes the birthday.

7 October 1936

Right Use of Birthday Interviews

Why should you decide beforehand that your birthday is spoiled? You have only to throw off all these undesirable ideas and feelings which proceed from a still imperfectly purified part of the external being and take the right attitude which you should always have when you come to the Mother. There should be no idea of what others have or have not — your relation is between the Mother and yourself and has nothing to do with others. Nothing should exist for you but yourself and the Divine — yourself receiving, her forces flowing into you.

To secure that better, do not spend the time at your disposal in speech — especially if anything of the depression remains with you, it will waste the time in discussing things which cannot help the true consciousness to predominate. Concentrate, open yourself and let the Mother bring you back to the psychic condition by what she will pour into you in meditation and silence.

16 May 1933

*

Mother, you asked me to write what I would like to ask for my birthday. Really I do not know. You know best. I would only pray that I may become utterly devoted to you and Sri Aurobindo in every part of my being, completely open to you, and that my faith may become perfect.

That is all right then. Mother will give what you want.

22 January 1934

*

Since I saw Mother on my birthday I feel I am living a new life in which there is a new intimacy with her. Is it true?

If you feel so — but it can be no more than the seed of a new birth, for it has to be realised by a greater inner opening.

10 February 1934

*

It seems I have learnt a lot about myself yesterday, my birthday, when Mother gave me an interview. It was not a theoretical knowledge, but a kind of realisation or experienced knowledge and maybe a Force that she gave. I no more feel so weak or helpless or a slave to my defects and imperfections. Rather there is a growing surety that I shall be able to get rid of my whole lower nature.

It is what we call growing conscious — a perception of which the base is the psychic though it may take place in the mind or vital or physical. No doubt the Force that woke it up came from the Mother.

9 September 1937

Group Meditation with the Mother

May I ask the significance of what I very often feel in my meditation with the Mother in the morning? So long as Mother is meditating I have quite a good meditation, but as soon as Mother comes out of her meditation my own meditation becomes lighter and I can feel that she is no longer in meditation. I would like to know if it is a good sign for sadhana.

It shows at least that your contact with the Mother's consciousness is perfectly spontaneous and genuine. The Mother puts out her Force on all in the meditation and the intensity of your meditation shows that you receive it — as soon as she ceases, the dynamic pressure lightens and your meditation lightens with it. It is certainly a good sign, a good seed of the responsiveness that is necessary.

18 April 1933

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When useless thoughts interfere with my concentration, how am I to remember the Mother and lay them before her?

Aspire at the time — they will of themselves be open to the Mother.

26 June 1933

*

When I become late to see the Mother in the evening, how am I to receive her Light which I would have received in her presence?

You can receive the Light at all times — even if less concretely than in the physical presence.

5 November 1933

*

Since the evening the working of the Force has begun. Seeing the Mother in the evening, my consciousness opened itself before her more widely than ever.

Very good. The Force usually works in that way with interruptions and returns growing each time stronger and fuller.

4 August 1934

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During the twilight meditation with the Mother, my consciousness rose upwards in an utter passivity. From the neck upwards, the head was not in a normal state. What was this?

It means the whole mind was liberated for a while from imprisonment in the body sense and became free in the passivity of the wider Self.

16 August 1934

*

When I spoke of the inner mind of the Asram, I was only using a succinct expression for the “minds of the members of the Asram” and I was not thinking of the collective mind of the group. But the action of the Mother in the meditation is at once collective and individual. She is trying to bring down the right consciousness in the atmosphere of the Asram — for the action of the minds and vital of the sadhaks does create a general atmosphere. She has taken this meditation in the evening as a brief period in which all is concentrated in the sole force of the descending Power. The sadhaks must feel that they are there only to concentrate, only to receive, only to be open to the Mother and nothing else matters.

November 1934

*

About the meditation and the seat, the Mother gives this meditation *only* for bringing down the true light and consciousness into the sadhaks. She does not want it to be turned into a formality and she does not want any personal questions to arise

there. It should be solely a meditation and concentration without personal or other desires or claims or ideas rising there and interfering with her object. That is why there can be no fixing of seats or other considerations having nothing to do with the sadhana.

2 November 1934

*

I did not come to the Meditation Hall for the evening meditation, but remained near X's room. At meditation time I fell into the same inwardness or sleepiness as in the Hall. Is it not possible to do so usually?

It is the pressure of the Force on the physical consciousness which produces that result of inwardness, though the translation of it into sleepiness can only be a transitory failing of the physical consciousness which is accustomed to associate inward-going with sleep. There is no reason why you should not do it usually if you find that suitable.

It seems as if at the time of meditation, the atmosphere of the Meditation Hall extends to all the Asram houses.

It is natural that it should be so as the Mother when she concentrates on the inner work is accustomed spontaneously to spread her consciousness over the whole Asram. So to anyone who is sensitive, it must be felt anywhere in the Asram, though perhaps more strongly in the nearer houses on an occasion like the evening meditation.

7 November 1934

*

When I try to meditate in the Mother's presence, my concentration breaks. There is a rush of thoughts, such as "what is the Mother bringing down?" and "what is the Mother's will?" Why does this happen?

It is simply a bad habit of the mind, a wrong activity. It is not in the least useful for the mind to ask or try to determine what the Mother wills or is bringing — that only interferes. It has simply to remain quiet and concentrated and leave the Power to act.

11 November 1934

*

What Mother would like you to do is to come to the Meditation and Pranam putting aside all feelings of ego, anger, quarrel with others, demand for this or that, thinking only of your sadhana and making yourself quiet to receive from her the only things that are really precious and needful.

22 September 1936

*

Today during the meditation with the Mother, I felt that I could receive her help easily and naturally, without the least effort or strain. Does this mean that something in the being naturally becomes quiet by her physical presence?

It is not by the physical presence but by the Mother's concentration at the time of Meditation which brings the quiet to those who can receive it.

6 March 1937

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It is now clear that all along during meditation and pranam I have approached the Mother with a wrong consciousness. My approach was not passive, but always fully active — I pulled from above and below as intensely as I could. The result was that the centres were active, especially the eye-brow centre and the muladhara.

All that is in place in ordinary meditation, so long as there is not the complete silence of the mind and the automatic action in the silence. But the quiet mind is entirely necessary if you meditate with the Mother. Otherwise the mind goes on with its activities on its own lines and cannot be conscious of or receptive to the Mother's movement.

18 July 1937

SRI AUROBINDO

(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 510-30)

THE DOCTRINE OF SACRIFICE

THE genius of self-sacrifice is not common to all nations and to all individuals; it is rare and precious, it is the flowering of mankind's ethical growth, the evidence of our gradual rise from the self-regarding animal to the selfless divinity. A man capable of self-sacrifice, whatever his other sins, has left the animal behind him; he has the stuff in him of a future and higher humanity. A nation capable of a national act of self-sacrifice ensures its future.

Self-sacrifice involuntary or veiled by forms of selfishness is, however, the condition of our existence. It has been a gradual growth in humanity. The first sacrifices are always selfish — they involve the sacrifice of others for one's own advancement. The first step forward is taken by the instinct of animal love in the mother who is ready to sacrifice her life for the young, by the instinct of protection in the male who is ready to sacrifice his life for his mate. The growth of this instinct is the sign of an enlargement in the conception of the self. So long as there is identification of self only with one's own body and its desires, the state of the *jiva* is unprogressive and animal. It is only when the self enlarges to include the mate and the children that advancement becomes possible. This is the first human state, but the animal lingers in it in the view of the wife and children as chattels and possessions meant for one's own pleasure, strength, dignity, comfort. The family even so viewed becomes the basis of civilisation, because it makes social life possible. But the real development of the god in man does not begin until the family becomes so much dearer than the life of the body that a man is ready to sacrifice himself for it and give up his ease or even his life for its welfare or its protection. To give up one's ease for the family, that is a state which most men have attained; to give up one's life for the honour of the wife or the safety of the home is an act of a higher nature of which man is capable in individuals, in classes, but not in the mass. Beyond the family comes the community and the next step in the enlargement of the self is when the identification with the self in the body and the self in the family gives way to the identification with the self in the community. To recognise that the community has a larger claim on a man than his family is the first condition of the advance to the social condition. It corresponds to the growth of the tribe out of the patriarchal family and to the perfection of those communal institutions of which our village community was a type. Here again, to be always prepared to sacrifice the family interest to the larger interest of the community must be the first condition of communal life and to give one's life for the safety of the community, the act of divinity which marks the consummation of the enlarging self in the communal idea. The next enlargement is to the self in the nation. The evolution of the nation is the growth which is most important now to humanity, because human selfishness, family

selfishness, class selfishness having still deep roots in the past must learn to efface themselves in the larger national self in order that the God in humanity may grow. Therefore it is that Nationalism is the *dharma* of the age, and God reveals himself to us in our common Mother. The first attempts to form a nationality were the Greek city, the Semitic or Mongolian monarchy, the Celtic clan, the Aryan *kula* or *jati*. It was the mixture of all these ideas which went to the formation of the mediaeval nation and evolved the modern peoples. Here again, it is the readiness to sacrifice self-interest, family interest, class interest to the larger national interest which is the condition of humanity's fulfilment in the nation and to die for its welfare or safety is the supreme act of self-consummation in the larger national ego. There is a yet higher fulfilment for which only a few individuals have shown themselves ready, the enlargement of the self to include all humanity. A step forward has been taken in this direction by the self-immolation of a few to humanitarian ideals, but to sacrifice the interests of the nation to the larger interest of humanity is an act of which humanity in the mass is not yet capable. God prepares, but He does not hasten the ripening of the fruit before its season. A time will come when this also will be possible, but the time is not yet. Nor would it be well for humanity if it came before the other and lesser identification were complete; for that would necessitate retrogression in order to secure the step which has been omitted. The advance of humanity is a steady progress and there is no great gain in rushing positions far ahead, while important points in the rear are uncaptured.

The national ego may easily mean nothing more than collective selfishness. I may be ready to sacrifice money and ease for the country in order to secure my wealth, fame or position and property which depend upon her security and greatness. I may be ready to sacrifice these and more for her because of the safety of the home and the hearth which her safety ensures. I may be ready to sacrifice much for her because her greatness, wealth, ease mean the greatness, wealth, ease of my community or my class. Or I may be ready to sacrifice everything to secure her greatness because of my pride in her and my desire to see my nation dominant and imperial. All these are forms of selfishness pursuing man into the wider life which is meant to assist in liberating him from selfishness. The curse of capitalism, the curse of Imperialism which afflict modern nations are due to this insistence. It is the source of that pride, insolence and injustice which affect a nation in its prosperity and by that fatal progression which the Greeks with their acute sense for these things so clearly demarcated, it leads from prosperity to insolence and outrage and from insolence and outrage to that *ate*, that blind infatuation, which is God's instrument for the destruction of men and nations. There is only one remedy for this pursuing evil and it is to regard the nation as a necessary unit but no more in a common humanity.

There are two stages in the life of a nation, first, when it is forming itself or new-forming itself, secondly, when it is formed, organised and powerful. The first is the stage when Nationalism makes rightly its greatest demands on the individual, in the

second it should abate its demands and, having satisfied, should preserve itself in Cosmopolitanism somewhat as the individual preserves itself in the family, the family in the class, the class in the nation, not destroying itself needlessly but recognising a larger interest. In the struggles of a subject nation to realise its separate existence, the larger interest can only be viewed in prospect and as a higher inspiration to a broadminded and generous patriotism. No sacrifice of the nation to the larger interest is possible, for the nation must exist before it can sacrifice its interests for a higher good.

We are at present in the first or formative stage, and in this stage the demand of Nationalism is imperative. It is only by the sacrifices of the individual, the family and the class to the supreme object of building up the nation that under such adverse circumstances Nationalism can secure the first conditions for its existence. Every act of the new Nationalism has been a call for suffering and self-sacrifice. Swadeshi was such a call, arbitration was such a call, national education was such a call, above all, passive resistance was such a call. None of these things can be secured except by a general readiness to sacrifice the individual and the family to the interests of the nation. Nowadays a new call is visibly forming, the call on the higher classes to sacrifice their privileges and prejudices, as the Japanese Samurai did, for the raising up of the lower. The spread of a general spirit of ungrudging self-sacrifice is the indispensable prelude to the creation of the Indian nation. This truth is not only evident from the very nature of the movement we have initiated, but it is borne out by the tests of history and experience to which we have been recently asked to refer in each individual case before the act of sacrifice is decided. It is by the appeal to history and experience that the Nationalist party has convinced the intellect, just as by its inspiring ideals and readiness to suffer, it has carried with it the heart of the nation. The demand that we should in every individual case go into a review of the whole question is excessive and impossible. It is enough if we are generally convinced of the utility and necessity of sacrifice and feel the individual call. It must be remembered that we cannot argue from the condition of a people formed, free and prospering to that of a people subject, struggling and miserable. In the first case the individual is not called to frequent acts of self-sacrifice, but only to those regularly demanded by the nation and to a general readiness for especial sacrifice in case of necessity, but in the second the necessity is a constant quantity. Nor is it a sound principle to demand in such circumstances an adequate value for every individual act of courage and self-denial. It would indeed be singular for the individuals of a subject nation asked for the price of their liberty to say to the Dispenser of Karma, "You shall give me so much in return for every individual sacrifice and we must know your terms beforehand. We will not trust you to the extent of a single pice worth of result for our sufferings." Not by such men or such a spirit have subject nations been delivered.

Karmayogin, 24 July 1909

SRI AUROBINDO

‘THOU KNOWEST THE BEST WAY OF USING AND DEVELOPING THY INSTRUMENT . . .’

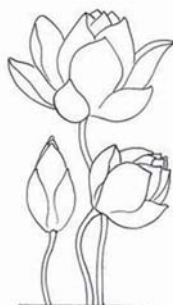
April 23, 1914

ALL rules have vanished, the regularity of the discipline is gone, all effort has ceased; not by my own will nor, I believe, through negligence, but because circumstances are working together to bring this about. It seems that this inner will, always alert, like a steersman holding the rudder, has evaporated or fallen asleep, and my being is only something peacefully surrendered which lets itself be carried along by the stream. Till now, it seems to me, the course has always been in a straight line, and I would keep the hope that it is Thou, O Lord, who guidest the stream; but surely if I have erred at times through too great a rigidity, a lack of suppleness and spontaneity, it could very well be that now I err through the opposite excess. I have come to accept peacefully the state I am in and to tell myself that Thou wilt bestow upon me the true Consciousness, the absolute Consciousness when Thou thinkest it best.

I look at all this changing world as a game unfolding itself, and I take part in this game with the same energy and conviction with which I would if I believed it real and important. All this is very new. But what is certain is that never before were my mind and heart in so complete a repose. What will come out of that, I do not know. But I trust in Thee, O Lord; Thou knowest the best way of using and developing Thy instrument. . . .

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 131)



THE FIRST EFFECT OF THE SUPERMIND

[The question which introduces this talk is based upon Sri Aurobindo's aphorism: "Sin is that which was once in its place, persisting now it is out of place; there is no other sinfulness."]

What are the very first things that the Supramental Force intends to drive out, or is trying to drive out, so that everything may be in its place, individually and cosmically?

Drive out? But will it "drive out" anything? If we accept Sri Aurobindo's idea, it will put each thing in its place, that's all.

One thing must necessarily cease, and that is the distortion, that is to say, the veil of falsehood upon Truth, because that is what is responsible for everything we see here. If this is removed, things will be completely different, completely. They will be what we feel them to be when we come out of this consciousness. When one comes out of this consciousness and enters into the Truth-consciousness, the difference is such that one wonders how there can be anything like suffering and misery and death and all that. There is a kind of astonishment in the sense that one does not understand how it can happen — when one has really tipped over to the other side. But this experience is usually associated with the experience of the unreality of the world as we know it, whereas Sri Aurobindo says that this perception of the unreality of the world is not necessary in order to live in the supramental consciousness — it is only the unreality of Falsehood, not the unreality of the world. That is to say, the world has a reality of its own, independent of Falsehood.

I suppose that is the first effect of the Supermind — the first effect in the individual, because it will begin with the individual.

It is probable that this state of new consciousness will have to become a constant state. But then a problem arises: how can one remain in contact with the world as it is in its deformation? Because I have noticed one thing: when this state is very strong in me, very strong, so strong that it is able to resist anything that comes to bombard it from outside, then when I say something, people do not understand at all, not at all; so this state inevitably does away with a useful contact.

Taking only the earth, for example, how could there be a little supramental creation, a nucleus of supramental action and radiation upon earth? Is it possible? One can conceive very well of a nucleus of superhuman creation and of supermen, that is to say, men who were men and who through evolution and transformation (in the true sense of the word) have succeeded in manifesting the supramental forces; but their origin is human and since their origin is human there is necessarily a

contact; even if everything is transformed, even if the organs are transformed into centres of force, there remains nonetheless something human, like a colouring. It is these beings, according to the traditions, who will discover the secret of direct supramental creation, without passing through the process of ordinary Nature, and it is through them that the truly supramental beings will take birth, the ones who must necessarily live in a supramental world. But then how would the contact be made between these beings and the ordinary world? How is one to conceive of the transformation of Nature, a transformation sufficient to bring about the supramental creation upon earth? I do not know.

Naturally, for such a thing to happen, a considerably long time is needed, this we know; and there will probably be stages, steps, things which will appear, things which for the moment we do not know or do not conceive, and they will change the conditions of the earth — but that means seeing some thousands of years ahead.

There remains the problem: is it possible to make use of this notion of space, I mean the space on the terrestrial globe?¹ Is it possible to find a spot where one could create the embryo or seed of the future supramental world? The plan came in all the details, but it is a plan which in its spirit and consciousness does not at all conform to what is possible on earth at present; yet in its most material manifestation, it was based on terrestrial conditions. It is the concept of an ideal town which would be the nucleus of an ideal country, a town which would have contacts, purely superficial and extremely limited in their effect, with the outside world. One would therefore already have to conceive — but this is possible — of a power sufficiently strong to be at the same time a protection against aggression or ill-will (this would not be the most difficult protection to obtain) and against infiltration and admixtures. But if necessary, one can conceive of that. From the social point of view, from the point of view of organisation, from the point of view of the inner life, these are not problems. The problem is the relation with what is not supramentalised, to prevent the infiltration, the admixture: that is to say, to prevent the nucleus from falling back into an inferior creation — it is a problem about the period of transition.

All those who have given thought to the problem have always imagined something unknown to the rest of humanity, like a gorge in the Himalayas, for example, a place unknown to the rest of the world. But this is not a solution; it is not a solution at all.

No, the only solution is an occult power, but this already implies that before anything can be done, a certain number of individuals must have reached a great perfection of realisation. But one can conceive that if this can be done, one can have a spot which is in the midst of the outside world and yet isolated (without any contacts, you see), a spot where everything would be exactly in its place — as an

1. Later, when asked about the meaning of this phrase, the Mother laughed and said: "I said that of the other side! — the side where the notion of space is not so concrete."

example. Each thing is exactly in its place, each person exactly in his place, each movement exactly in its place — and in its place in an ascending progressive movement, without any relapse, that is to say, quite the contrary to what happens in ordinary life. Naturally, this presupposes a kind of perfection, this presupposes a kind of unity, this presupposes that the different aspects of the Supreme can be manifested and, of course, an exceptional beauty, a total harmony and a power strong enough to command obedience from the forces of Nature. For example, even if this spot were surrounded by forces of destruction, they would not have the power to act; the protection would be sufficient. All this requires the utmost perfection in the individuals who would be the organisers of such a thing.

(Silence)

Indeed, nobody knows how the first men were formed, the first mental realisation. One does not know whether they were isolated individuals or groups, whether this happened in the midst of others or in isolation. I do not know. But there may be an analogy with the future case of the supramental creation. It is not difficult to conceive that in the solitude of the Himalayas or in the solitude of a virgin forest an individual would begin to create around him his little supramental world. It is easy to conceive. But the same thing would be necessary: he would have to have reached such a perfection that his power would act automatically to prevent intrusion, so that automatically his world would be protected; that is to say, all contrary or foreign elements would be prevented from approaching.

Stories of the kind have been told, of people who lived in an ideal solitude. It is not impossible at all to conceive that. When one is in contact with this Power, at the moment it is in you, you see quite well that it is child's play; it is even possible to change certain things, to exert an influence on surrounding vibrations and forms, which automatically begin to be supramentalised. All that is possible, but it is on an individual scale. Whereas, take the example of what is happening here, the individual dwelling at the very centre of all this chaos: there lies the difficulty! Does it not follow from this very fact that it is impossible to reach a kind of perfection in the realisation? But then too, the other example, that of the solitary in the forest, does not at all prove that the rest of mankind will be able to follow; whereas what is happening here is already a much more radiating action. This is what must happen at a given moment, this must happen inevitably. But the problem remains: can this happen at the same time or before the other thing is realised — at the same time or before the individual, the one individual is supramentalised?

Evidently, the realisation under the conditions of community or the group is much more complete, integral, total and probably more perfect than any individual realisation, which is always, *necessarily*, on the external, material plane, absolutely limited, because it is only one mode of being, one mode of manifestation, one

microscopic set of vibrations that is touched.

But from the point of view of the easiness of the work, I believe there is no comparison.

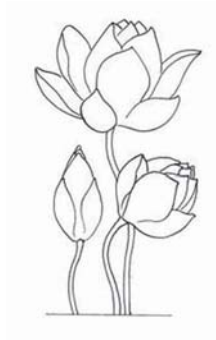
(*Silence*)

The problem remains. All people like Buddha and the others, had *first* realised and then entered into contact with the world: well, this is very simple. But with regard to what I have in view, is it not an indispensable condition, for the realisation to be total, that one remains in the world?

18 July 1961

THE MOTHER

(*Words of the Mother – III*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 383-87)



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

(A Compilation)

(Continued from the issue of May 2014)

[The next three letters written by Paul Brunton. — Ed.]

Until mid-July: The Rosery, COONOR
Nilgiris, June 4-43

My dear Sethna,

Your letters of 1-3-43 & 2-5-43 were received with pleasure and once again I have to send the usual apology for my silence. I must be the world's worst correspondent! But I did not gain the expected freedom and have had a lot of extra work to tackle, besides being lately ill from severe fever, from which I have now to recuperate in the hills. I shall not be back in Mysore until the third or fourth week of next month, as I was badly knocked.

I like the remark in your letter about 'the superb amplitude of Sri Aurobindo's realisation' and heartily agree with it. The few metaphysical and practical points on which I do not see eye to eye with his teaching do not detract from the respect and admiration which I do feel for it; and for your Master too.

It was with regret that I found myself unable to go West and North this year but I believe it will be likely next year. I shall then look forward to discuss with you personally many things which I haven't the time to write about.

About Prof. E and your book: I am sorry he never wrote. I don't know why and cannot easily ask him as the reason may be, I suspect, a religious one. I can't say more.

Yes I read your article in the symposium and congratulate you on it; it states the essence of the matter in a charming way. . . . Thank you for explaining the term 'adverse forces' as used in your teaching. I have worked out a more or less similar definition except that I have not yet been able to accept the Indian view of Avatar as a special descent of the highest Divine, but that does not matter. I take it from what you say that the time is almost ripe — or will be when peace returns — for the appearance of such an Avatar.

As I am having an enforced rest I am able to devote much time to contemplation, which is most satisfying as you know. Mystical experiences of different kinds keep

on coming daily, but the terrible contrast of external world conditions keeps on intruding into my after-thoughts. What can we do, when this holocaust ends, to relate the two?

Please accept my kind regards and peace,

Paul Brunton

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Government House Road, Mysore
December 29, 1943

My dear Sethna,

I take this opportunity of sending you my seasonal greetings and good wishes for your spiritual and physical welfare during the coming year.

It is six months since I last wrote you and the better part of a year since I last heard from you. I hope your work goes on. You may like to know that when Beverly Nichols was here I recommended your book *The Secret Splendour* to him and he told me that he had already seen it whilst in Bombay and admired it very much.

I am going to be less pressed for time during 1944 and will be free to discuss with you some of the points in Sri A's philosophy which still seem debatable to me. So I hope to hear from you.

With my peace

Paul Brunton

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21, Government House Road, Mysore
12th January, 1944

My dear Sethna,

Thank you for your welcome letter. I am sorry to hear that you do not feel your period of inner storm and stress to be over yet. However it is perhaps enough with our human limitations to be moving in the right direction and that I am sure you are doing whatever the rises and falls. The path is tremendously difficult and Gita reminds us how few succeed in finishing it successfully. It is enough therefore perhaps to have found it and to be making valiant efforts to overcome the adverse influences which surround mankind and seem so determined to keep us from the goal. It is my belief too that every sincere seeker finds a certain compensation in a beautiful and ethereal world after death for the failures, disappointments and miseries which make up so much of the stuff of the human story.

The mystical experience which you had one night last April is interesting. You

may take it as a hopeful augury of future developments. I have had very much the same experience on occasions in the past and it was usually the prelude to favourable phases of inner development.

You ask to mention the points in Sri Aurobindo's teaching which still seem to be debatable to me. Well, some of them are his rejection of idealism in the Berkleian sense, his advocacy of the Avatara doctrine and his acceptance of the mystical possibility of union with God. On these points in the first case I find it impossible to escape from the truth that mind is the only reality we have ever known and can ever know so that there is no place for matter in my scheme of things. In the second case I cannot conceive how the infinite mind can become confined in the finite flesh of no matter how divine an incarnation may be. In the third case God, as the ultimate reality, is incomprehensible, intangible, absolute and unthinkable. No human capacity however stretched out it may become can so transcend its finite limitations as to achieve direct union with it. It is my belief, therefore, what we mystics do achieve is union with our own individual divine soul which is quite another matter. If you can dissipate these difficulties in the way of my agreement with Sri Aurobindo's complete teaching I would be grateful. There are some other points of difference also but I must leave them for a later letter. As you already know I feel no disagreement with the major portions of his teaching and in addition admire him personally as being the most outstanding of contemporary Indian yogis.

In answer to your question about Beverly Nichols I am not in correspondence with him at present as he is tremendously busy and dashing about from place to place when I last heard. In any case he was due to leave India this month and for all I know may have left already. So I am sorry there is nothing that I could do with him at present on behalf of your book.

With my peace and kindest thoughts.

Sincerely yours,
Paul Brunton

[K. D. Sethna's reply reproduced from
The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo, 1992, pp. 11-40. — Ed.]

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE PHILOSOPHERS

A Letter

[This letter was addressed to the well-known English author, Paul Brunton, two of whose early books were at one time bestsellers bridging the worlds of popular interest in the occult and of profound thought aspiring to the Unknown. He twice visited the Ashram at Pondicherry and was deeply impressed by Sri Aurobindo and, for all

his doctrinal differences, remained a great admirer. He and the writer of this letter struck up a friendship which carried on a correspondence for a number of years. The letter marks a middle stage in the happy exchange of ideas.]

The difficulties you have mentioned in the way of your seeing eye-to-eye with Sri Aurobindo in the realm of philosophy can very well be insuperable. All difficulties in that realm can be insuperable: if this were not so, there would be a universal consensus of philosophers instead of Aristotle at loggerheads with Plato, Kant going hammer-and-tongs at the Schoolmen as well as the Empiricists, Bertrand Russell spitting fire at Bergson. The spectacle, though extremely fascinating, is a trifle ludicrous too. Seeing that all these men possessing first-class minds cannot agree, one is inclined to think that the heat of utter self-certainty with which they fight is rather a defect. The history of thought shows that there is endless argumentation possible: the mind can take up any standpoint and plead plausibly for it. To philosophise is one of our instincts, but no philosophising can arrive at indisputable truth. Certain aspects of the ultimate reality appeal to certain types of mind or chime with certain types of experience — and these we erect into a system by means of logical reasoning which seems cogent to us but which others with equal cogency for themselves put aside as erroneous. The only system which is likely to be accepted in the long run is one which satisfies all the sides of our nature. The acceptance will not be merely by intellectual argument: it will be by a deep instinct which wants harmony and integration rather than the apotheosis of one side at the expense of the others.

You declare with Berkeley that we can know only our own minds and that what we call matter is really a form of mind. I shall not for the present try to argue against Berkeley. Any history of philosophy will provide you with the traditional counter-attack and the work of the neo-realists in our own day will show the modern technique. I shall not try, because it is pretty futile until your *penchant* for Berkeley is weakened: you will be able to argue back and the neo-idealists of our own day will help you to return the blitz of neo-realism. What I want to say is simply this: there is no sense of rest in the Berkeleyan philosophy for that in us which strives for harmony. It leaves something in us unconvinced, for, opposed to Berkeley, we have the very strong feeling that, instead of matter being a form of mind, mind seems often to be a form of matter. Most of our practical life is based on what appears to be the independent existence of matter. And when we ask ourselves: wouldn't matter be more amenable to mind if it were just an idea? — the answer makes us seriously doubt Berkeley's position. Matter does impress us as a power in itself which we contact by means of mind. Mind does not bring us perfect harmony and fulfilment: it struggles and gropes, it is not the master-magician of life. Nor does matter as known in practical experience hold the secret we are vaguely aware of. There must be something else. Matter and mind seem to be two forms of some other reality which contains the archetypes of them both, archetypes from which

they have derived and deflected.

Only when the mind is stilled, there dawns a deeper and higher consciousness which bears golden within it the harmony we are hungering for. Yes, it bears it within itself, but for us to get that harmony we need profound progress in the supramental domain. The limitation of the whole superb school of *ātman*-knowers is that they stop with the pure infinite Self beyond our narrow human selves and make no attempt to realise a divine dynamic to replace the dynamic that is human and discordant. At most there is some light reflected in the ordinary workings of the mind — a degree of intuition comes into play — but where is the divinisation of which we dream? The mind must be completely divinised after being stilled and a new faultless activity initiated and substituted for the old stumbling one. Mind must begin to function according to the archetype of it which must exist in the ultimate reality and without which we would never feel in ourselves that urge for perfection which is the mainspring of all our mental life. But can mind realise wholly its archetype without the other parts of our being doing the same? No: if, as experience teaches us, we cannot rest finally in mind and, for the sake of a harmonious sense of life, grant matter a separate status, we must strive after an archetype of matter too. Here also the perfection we are seeking cannot be got out of matter itself. Not by material progress — though that is useful in its own way just as mental progress is — can we attain the perfection our bodily being desires. Again we must tax the Beyond, the supramental which is at the same time the supramaterial. In that Beyond are powers that transcend Nature. Many Yogis catch snippets, so to speak, of these powers, but the real and final miracle to work on Nature is what Sri Aurobindo calls transformation — the utter divinisation of the physical body so that it becomes a form of the Consciousness that is luminous and immortal.

Remember that Sri Aurobindo's teaching is Integral Yoga. The word "integral" denotes the Aurobindonian search. Sri Aurobindo says it is no use denying that man is in quest of an all-round harmony of perfection. If that quest is a fact, there must be in the unknown depths of the Divine the secret of an all-round fulfilment. Once you feel this, you will not stress intellectually your differences with his teaching. He is not primarily arguing out a system. With his instinct towards harmony he has pressed on in spiritual experience. His is not an integral philosophy for the sake of philosophy, his is an Integral Yoga, and all his philosophising is a statement in mental terms of what he has realised. *The Life Divine* expresses nothing except his experience, his realisation. Having attained in constant waking life and not merely in a sealed samadhi the reality which he terms Gnosis, he has but laid out in intellectual exposition what the gnostic consciousness is and what yogic possibilities it holds and what the results of its full descent into our earth-existence will be. Sri Aurobindo does not proclaim to the world: "Read my book and I shall argue you into my beliefs." His call is: "Read this book in which I have clothed in philosophical language my actual experience and if you feel in your heart the urge towards the

integral realisation I have pictured and propounded, come to me and I will give you every living and glowing bit of it.”

The best way in which I can dissipate your difficulties is to ask you to feel in your heart that the essence of all our human endeavour is the thirst for perfection and that there can be no true perfection unless it is integral, all-round, top-to-toe. It is not very easy to have this feeling. In a weak form it can never be escaped. What I am asking for is not such a form; I want you to have it like a fire — keen and clear. In the path of it there is the whole debris of failure cumbering human history. “Man is finite, man is mortal” — this has been the cry through the ages. “Something indeed is infinite and immortal,” the religions say, “but there is a residue of finitude and mortality which is irreducible” — and this contention is not based only on argument: it has behind it a lack of realisation. The great prophets have all striven to their utmost and come short. It is the concrete coming short in actual spiritual experience that has created the tremendous obstacle to a keen and clear recognition of the *élan* towards harmony. Yet the *élan* is there. “Thou art That”, “Brahmaloka is here and now”, “The Kingdom of God is within you”, “I and my Father are one” — all these words are trying to let that *élan* find voice. The Vedic search for the Sun lost in the cave of Earth, the Vaishnava worship of the Incarnate Divine, the Word become Flesh of neo-platonic Christianity, the belief in the resurrection of the body — these too are the same *élan* seeking an outlet. And an outlet is sought in all our straining towards perfect beauty in art, perfect truth in philosophy, perfect law in science, perfect conduct in ethics, perfect health in day-to-day living. The mind yearns to immortalise its products and find means to transcend the limits of space and time, the body longs for blissful perpetuation, seeks it vicariously through the process of child-birth, ransacks the entire realm of Nature and of chemistry for the conquest of disease and for the *elixir vitae*. We are labouring to deliver some perfect all-embracing Godhead. Alas, we have laboured and failed, even Sri Krishna came and went without delivering the hidden Divine in a complete invulnerable form. Is it any wonder that we do not see keenly and clearly the hunger for perfection? It is natural that we should envisage it vaguely: veil on veil of disappointment and defeat has covered it. These veils have to be pierced and struck aside, so that the true secret may shine out.

If you hold naked before you this secret and contemplate Sri Aurobindo’s teaching in its light, you will perceive how sublimely, how exquisitely, how accurately that teaching answers to every little nuance of the world’s aspiration. If like a flame you enshrine it in your mind you will put yourself in the right receptive mood to follow Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy to its ultimates. The Berkeleyan *penchant*, the scepticism about avatarhood, the shying away from the doctrine of absolute union will slowly dissolve and the intellect, inclined to move along new tracks, will fall into line with the Aurobindonian teaching. Does not perfection imply the human ascending to absolute union with its own concealed origin, the Divine? Can there

be perfection unless the Divine descends into the human mould — and what in general is the Avatar except the most centrally creative of the descending splendours? Is perfection possible if the mind's idea and experience be the last word on matter and no evaluation be made of the material in terms of a supreme spiritual Consciousness? My impression of you is of a man of great mental plasticity and breadth, a man capable of meeting the challenge of many unknown directions: there is no blind rigidity in you to check any movement towards new horizons. I am afraid, however, that you have slipped into an overstress on philosophical pursuit and not kept the living relation advised by all Indian wisdom between philosophy and Yoga. You have thus not seen, for what it is, the philosophical process of *The Life Divine* and other writings of Sri Aurobindo. There is a mighty intellect in *The Life Divine* which we at once feel to be no whit less than Plato's or Spinoza's or Hegel's, but none of these giants was a full-fledged Yogi. Sri Aurobindo's intellect is an instrument used by a spiritual realisation: not one sentence anywhere is inspired by the intellect alone.

If the philosopher's realisation is poor and fragmentary, the philosophy will seem narrow in spite of the intellect being gigantic. In some respects Plato, Spinoza and Hegel seem very narrow, they do not cover our full sense of things: the cause is that each of them elaborated in terms of the intellect a one-sided intuition of a limited set of intuitions. The elaboration was stupendous, the root-sense of the real did not feed on wide intuitive experience. Even where, added to intuition, there is in philosophy actual spiritual contact with the unknown, we often get the impression of a narrow emphasis. Buddha and Shankara and Plotinus are powerful spiritualised intellects, yet their single-track extremism is apparent. Nirvana, the featureless Brahman, the absolute Alone are indeed grand and no Yoga can be complete without them, but as known and presented by the three arch-transcendentalists they cast on much of our life a blank of unfulfilment. Though they are grander than anything in ordinary human life, something in Nature weeps and weeps, the clinging clay of us feels torn, Mother Earth stands defeated and balked. The hidden instinct of integral harmony is not satisfied, even as it is not satisfied by the mere vicissitudes of Time, however colourful and varied. Does Sri Aurobindo's philosophy strike us as narrow in any such sense? The trouble here is quite the opposite: Sri Aurobindo is too broad for most minds, he is too comprehensive, he posits things which seem too good to be true, too far-reaching to be believable, too gloriously integral to be realised by human capacity. We are led to say, "Yes, yes, all this is exactly as it should be, it is precisely what the age-old hunger for perfection and harmony wants, but can we really have the moon?" Sri Aurobindo's reply is: "That hunger in you exists because the moon is just what you are made for: in fact, you have the moon, you *are* the moon — only you don't know it. Do the Yoga which I have done and you shall know."

So, there is a twofold solution I offer to your difficulties. First, bring forward

into the utmost brightness and with all its facets before you the fiery gem of our secret *élan* towards perfect harmony, so that you may move with ease along thoughts put forth by one who plunged into the Unknown with that occult diamond for his guide. Then across those thoughts reach out for the concrete spiritual experience, the actual harmonious realisation which the Integral Yoga of that master-explorer is bringing to the world's view.

Perhaps you will be disappointed by my letter, since I have not argued out in explicit detail Sri Aurobindo's position *vis-à-vis* the points you have raised. I am hoping that what I have written will attune you to the Aurobindonian note and automatically suggest the arguments. Even if the arguments do not arise of themselves and only some attuning is achieved, I shall be rewarded, for then my future arguing will go home more swiftly.

(To be continued)

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

Sri Aurobindo: *Many people have experiences of subtle realities. Paul Brunton told us he was always aware of some Presence accompanying him but could not identify it. When he saw my photo it did not at all resemble his vision, but when he saw me at Darshan time he at once recognised me as the Presence.*

Dr. Manilal: *Why didn't he remain here if he had an opening to you and also admiration for you?*

Sri Aurobindo: *We did not advise him to remain. The Mother, after a meditation with him, told him about some of his difficulties and he admitted she was right.*

11 December 1938

(Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, p. 13)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of May 2014)

Chapter XXXIII

Amidst the Storm

(From The Slaying of Congress. A Tragedy in Three Acts)

Act One, Scene I

Calcutta:

Dadabhai, Mehta, Gokhale, Surendra, Tilak and others;
Democracy, Congress

DADABHAI

Much have I laboured, toiled for many years
To see this glorious day. Our lady Congress
Grown to a fair and perfect womanhood,
Who at Benares came of age, is now
With pomp and noble ceremony arrived
In this Calcutta to assume the charge
Of her own life into her proper hands. . . .

CONGRESS:

I thank you all, and swear to win Swaraj
Back from the hands that keep me from my own.

MEHTA:

I like this not. If once this girl escapes
From my supreme control, I fear that she
Will run quite wild. Look with what covert eyes
She gazes at this young Democracy,
This roistering, robustious young Democracy. . . .
.....

Act Two, Scene III

Surat.

Tilak.

TILAK

The plot is perfect. To prepare the way
Congress is brought here where proud Mehta's lord.
When she will stand among her friends and his,
We shall be quite a handful, so he does
His will upon her; binds her in the chains
Of this strange constitution; so that she
Is utterly made helpless, bound and gagged.

Bande Mataram, 16 February, 1908¹

The Reception Committee for the Surat Congress was composed largely of followers of the “proud Mehta” — Pherozeshah Mehta — and as the historian R. C. Majumdar observes, the Nationalists knew

... which way the wind blew, and their suspicions were further confirmed by the fact that the list of subjects likely to be taken up for discussion by the Surat Congress did not include Self-Government, Boycott and National Education.²

The Reception Committee created an unpardonable — and no doubt deliberate — delay in publishing the draft of the resolutions. It was not released till the 25th December noon though the conference was to begin on the 26th. However, Tilak managed to get hold of a copy. To his great disappointment he found it to be unambiguously and embarrassingly different in its outlook from the progressive stand taken at Calcutta. One of the offending passages ran:

The Indian National Congress has for its ultimate goal the attainment by India of self-government similar to that enjoyed by the other members of the British Empire and a participation by her in the privileges and responsibilities of the Empire on equal terms with the other members; and it seeks to advance towards this goal by strictly constitutional means, by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration, and by promoting national unity, fostering public spirit and improving the condition of the mass of the people.³

Excitement and anxiety ruled the air. Biographies of all the leaders involved in the event show that the Nationalists were not at all keen to disrupt the conference, but it would be unfortunate if there was a reversal of its ideological evolution that

was achieved at the Calcutta Congress. It could be tolerated if the Congress did not take a step forward, but how could it be allowed to go back?

The Reception Committee had decided upon Rash Behari Ghose, an eminent lawyer, for presiding over the session. Ghose was a noted philanthropist and patron of education, but the Nationalists were sure that he was not the one to preside over the passage of any radical resolution. (He was conferred knighthood in 1915.) The Nationalists wished Lala Lajpat Rai, who had been deported to Mandalay (Burma, present day Myanmar) without trial in May 1907, but had come back in November as no evidence was found to implicate him in any seditious activity, to be elected to the Chair. He was highly respected and his popularity was at a great height at the moment and the Nationalists were hopeful that the Moderates would find it awkward to bypass him if he was willing to accept the position.

An appropriate request had been sent to Lala Lajpat Rai days before the Congress. But he conveyed his unwillingness to accede to it. Commenting on this exchange Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Bande Mataram* shortly before his departure for Surat:

The refusal of Lala Lajpat Rai to accept nomination to the Presidentship of the Congress against Dr. Rash Behari Ghose has given great cause for rejoicing to the Moderates and to Anglo-Indian journals like the *Empire*. The refusal is natural enough, for when a man who has not been nominated is under such circumstances pressed for a reply to a question whether he will accept nomination or not, he is put into a delicate position in which he must either appear to be wanting in modesty or give away his supporters. This was the dilemma in which the Loyalists have put Lala Lajpat Rai.⁴

However, the Nationalists had not given up all hope of persuading Lala-ji to comply with their request. He arrived on the 25th morning and Tilak and Sri Aurobindo, along with a few others, received him at the Railway station. But they could not persuade him to change his decision. However, he was keen to play the role of a peace-maker and proposed setting up a committee with five representatives from both the sides to chalk out a way for harmony. The Nationalists welcomed the idea. Tilak, Sri Aurobindo and Khaparde were among those who would represent them. But Gopal Krishna Gokhale, on behalf of the Moderates, rejected the proposal outright. There is no doubt that Tilak was not in favour of the Nationalists breaking away from the Congress. As Sri Aurobindo recollected much later:

Meanwhile, Lajpat Rai came to Tilak and informed him that the Government had decided, if the Congress split, to crush the Extremists by the most ruthless repression. Tilak thought, and the events proved that he was right, that the country was not yet ready to face successfully such a repression and he pro-

posed to circumvent both the Moderate plan and the Government plan by the Nationalists joining the Congress and signing the statement of adhesion to the new constitution by the Moderates. Sri Aurobindo and some other leaders were opposed to the submission; they did not believe the Moderates would admit any Nationalists to their conference (and this proved to be the case) and they wanted the country to be asked to face the repression.⁵

To return to the Surat of the day; the city was agog with excitement, different sections of people were restless for different reasons. The curious common man enjoyed the new look of the city and the spectacle of people, each group colourfully different from the others, arriving from various regions of India. The educated public was quite aware of the undercurrent of conflict between the two camps now about to face each other; the serious ones among them were apprehensive of the result of the confrontation. While the external atmosphere of the city was festive, many a citizen felt restive.

The train carrying the President-elect, Dr. Rash Behari Ghose, reached Surat on the 25th December morning. Henry Nevinston who travelled by the same train, records:

The crowd round the station was so tightly jammed that it was a long time before anyone could leave the train. By reasoning and entreaty the youthful band of "Volunteers" in khaki and forage caps at last cleared a space. A procession of carriages was formed and began to advance step by step through the shouting throngs of orange, crimson and white-clad people. All the windows and tottering balconies of the beautiful but decrepit city that starves upon its past — even the galleries of Islam's crumbling minarets and the roofs of Hindu temples — were crammed with faces. Women peeped through shutters or stood shamelessly beside their children and brothers. Boys and girls thrust their heads through holes in the ruinous walls. At every few yards more garlands were offered, more bunches of flowers and sweet-smelling seeds. Thick fell the showers of rose-water sprayed from silver bottles. On every side rose the great cheer of "Bande Mataram"! From end to end streets were hung with strings of pink and yellow paper flags, and here and there a triumphal arch uttered the universal welcome in Indian or English words. The great Pandal, or Pavilion, for the Congress, and the camp of tents pitched around it for the delegates from all India stood by the river side beyond the town itself. The distance was not much over two miles, and yet the journey took more than two hours to accomplish, so high ran the enthusiasm of joy.⁶

Time was ticking away. Disappointed at the Moderates' rejection of the proposed step for reconciliation, the Nationalists met again under the Chairmanship of

Sri Aurobindo and several views were discussed. It was decided that if the Moderates promised not to go back on the Calcutta resolutions, the Nationalists would never hinder the smooth passage of the proceedings, nor object to Dr. Ghose's election to the Chair. Of course a non-offensive reference should be made to the fact that there was a popular wish in favour of Lala-ji being offered that position.

Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, Khaparde and Motilal Ghose called on Surendranath Banerjea at his camp and appealed to him to honour their suggestion. It is difficult to believe that the seasoned politician that Banerjea was, could have failed to realise the simple truth that toning down and distortion of the resolutions already passed would be a clear instance of cowardice and history would record it as such. In any case he promised to come back after consultation with his compatriots. But that he never did. Desperate and repeated efforts by the Nationalists to have a brief pre-conference discussion with the other camp seems to have been deliberately thwarted. The Chairman of the Reception Committee, Tribhovandas Malvi, a minor figure in the Congress hierarchy, considered himself, by virtue of his transitory position, too important to grant even a minute's audience to leaders like Tilak, Sri Aurobindo and Khaparde. He was engaged in prayer — that was the pretext.⁷

While the Nationalists ran about hapless, the conference commenced at 2.30 p.m. on the 26th of December, not at 1 p.m. as scheduled. The delay was caused by the sudden death of a delegate and the preparations for his cremation.

The Moderates had collected 1300 delegates including the local emergency recruits while the Nationalists had mustered 1100. The numbers vary in different accounts of the event. But the total strength of the audience was ten thousand, despite the fact that they had to pay for the seats.

Sri Aurobindo, Tilak and the other leading Nationalists quietly took their seat in the forefront of the area marked for the delegates.

The whole interior, constructed on different levels so that all might see, rose and fell in waves of brilliant turbans, orange, crimson, gold and white, according to the provinces from which they came, and in a black and solid square sat the bare-headed delegates from Bengal. Under the burning sun that pierced the roof the whole of that vast crowd remained for hours, disputing, arguing, exhorting each other in groups and districts, a dubious exercise of patience.⁸

At last it was time for the celebrated custodians of the Indian National Congress, for some of whom it would be difficult to imagine that the Congress could one day be something different from the ideas and ideals with which they had nurtured it, to breeze into the tense locale that would by that time be suffocating but for the gracious winter.

An enthusiastic ovation greeted Lajpat Rai who had recently returned from a six-month deportation to Burma and Dr. Rutherford, a British Liberal, who had specially come from England to attend the session as a friendly observer. Then came the Presidential procession, including Rash Behari Ghose, the President-elect, Pherozeshah Mehta, Wacha, Gokhale and other leaders. Tribhovan-das N. Malvi, Chairman of the Reception Committee, read his welcome address, and then Ambalal Sakerlal Desai, formally proposed that Rash Behari Ghose should take the Presidential Chair . . . but it evoked cries of protest from a section of the audience. Surendranath Banerjea, whose appearance on the Congress platform was usually a signal for hushed silence, rose to second the proposal, but was shouted down.⁹

This is from an authentic biography of Gokhale. The precise C.I.D. report says:

Dewan Bahadur Ambalal Sakerlal Desai, late Chief Justice of the Baroda High Court, proposed that the Honourable Dr. Rash Behari Ghose should take the Chair. (He was interrupted by the cries of 'No, No') He, nevertheless, continued as follows: — We should ask him to preside on this occasion. (Cries of 'No, No'). He is a Member of the Viceregal Legislative Council and has done yeoman service. (Cries of 'No, No'). His abilities as a lawyer are superior to those of any living lawyer in India today. He has rendered patriotic services to Bengal especially and to the whole of India ('No', 'No') There is no better choice that could be made than that of selecting him to the Chair by asking him to accept the Chair (Cheers.)¹⁰

The report proceeds to record the unusual protests that met Surendranath Banerjea when he rose to second the proposal. But let us read the same facts presented by the veteran journalist Nevinson in his inimitable style:

Waving their arms, their scarves, their sticks, and umbrellas, a solid mass of delegates and spectators on the right of the Chair, sprang to their feet and shouted without a moment's pause. Over their heads was the label, "Central Provinces" — Central Provinces where Nagpore stands and the Congress was to have been. "Remember Nagpore!" they cried; "Remember Midnapore!" where, during the Bengal Provincial Conference a week or two before, Surendra Nath had attempted to keep the peace against the Extremists, and had actually sat on the same platform with a District Superintendent of Police! White turbans from Madras joined them. The whole ten thousand were on their feet, shouting for order, shouting for tumult. Mr. Malvi, still half in the Chair, rang his brass Benares bell, and rang in vain. Surendra Nath sprang upon the very table itself. Even a voice like his was not a whisper in the din. Again and again

he shouted, unheard as silence. He sat down, and for a moment the storm was lulled. The voices of the leaders were audible, consulting in agitated tones — Dr. Ghose shrill, impatient, and perturbed with anger; Mr. Gokhale distressed, anxious, harassed with vain negotiation and sleepless nights. Already one caught the word “Suspension.” “If they will not hear Surendra Nath, whom will they hear?” said one. “It is an insult to the Congress,” said another. “An insult to Bengal!” cried a third. Again Surendra Nath sprang on the table, and again the assembly roared with clamour. Again the Chairman rang his Benares bell, and rang in vain. In an inaudible voice like a sob, he declared the sitting suspended. The platform rose, Surendra Nath descended, the Indian ladies, who had beguiled the long waiting by chanting the hymn of “Bande Mataram” with quavering voice, filed out through a door at the back and the leaders of the Congress movement disappeared into tents prepared for them.¹¹

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

Notes and References

1. *Bande Mataram*; SABCL, Vol. 1, pp. 673, 687. Authorship uncertain.
2. R. C. Majumdar: *Struggle for Freedom*; Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, p. 89.
3. Ram Gopal: *Lokamanya Tilak*; Asia Publishing House, Mumbai, p. 268.
4. Sri Aurobindo: *Bande Mataram*; SABCL, Vol. 1, pp. 649-50.
5. Sri Aurobindo: *Ibid.*, p. 48.
6. Henry W. Nevins: *The New Spirit in India*; Indian Reprint 1975; Metropolitan Book Co., Delhi.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. B. R. Nanda: *Gokhale: The Indian Moderates and the British Raj*; Oxford University Press, p. 286.
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11. Henry W. Nevins: *The New Spirit in India*.

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE SECOND GREAT WAR

Introduction

SRI AUROBINDO has written that an Avatar

. . . is never in fact merely a prophet, he is a realiser, an establisher . . . of something essential and radical needed for the terrestrial evolution which is the evolution of the embodied spirit through successive stages towards the Divine.¹

And in the *Essays on the Gita*, Sri Aurobindo states:

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. For this action of change a divine force is needed . . .²

Thus it is evident that the Avatar is not merely a prophet, he is a doer, a realiser, an establisher, who comes for a certain purpose and who comes during a crisis of consciousness of humanity, when it has to take a leap, a move forward in the evolution of Consciousness. This crisis of Consciousness is the real inner meaning of his coming and in the physical plane this is generally expressed as a time of great material changes and of crisis of events, which we call war, revolution, upheavals, break-down of all existing norms etc. The greater the outer crisis of events, the greater the power for change that descends. It may be said that an Avatar is generally accompanied by his war. As Nolini Kant Gupta, a disciple of Sri Aurobindo writes:

. . . There is no insurmountable disparity between spirituality and worldliness, between meditation and the most terrible work — *ghore karmani*: The Gita has definitively proved the truth of the fact millenniums ago. War has not been the monopoly of warriors alone: it will not be much of an exaggeration to say that Avatars, the incarnations of the Divine, have done little besides that. And what of the Divine Mother herself? The main work of an Avatar is often to subdue the evil doers, those that follow and pull others to follow the Wrong Path. And the Divine Mother, She who harbours in her bosom the supreme

1. *Letters on Yoga I*, CWSA, Vol. 28, p. 491.

2. *Essays on the Gita*, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 168.

Truth and Consciousness and Bliss, is in one of her essential aspects the slayer of the Demon, of the Asura.³

Thus along with Sri Rama was the great Lankan war, with Sri Krishna came the great Mahabharata war and Sri Aurobindo was faced with the great world war. Always the bringer of light, truth and love, has to face the full might and fury of the forces of darkness, falsehood and ignorance, who have held sway on this earth since time immemorial and have no intention to give up their hold without a fight to the finish, a total war with no quarters given, for the dark forces are well aware that the establishment of the Avatar's reign will mean their end, their extinction. Thus, always the greater the power which descends to save, the greater is the opposition and greater the magnitude of the war.

The Nature and Characteristic of the Avataric Wars

The war which the Avatar faces is always a war between the conscient and the inconscient, between light and darkness, between truth and falsehood, between knowledge and ignorance. Sri Rama had to face and overcome the great Rakhshic forces represented by Ravana and Kumbhakarna, Sri Krishna was opposed by the formidable forces of darkness represented by the Kauravas and their allies, so what was the nature of forces ranged against Sri Aurobindo and the Mother? What have they said about the opposing forces? What have they characterised the Great War as? Who were the forces, behind the scenes, manipulating the human actors?

Before we examine and answer these questions, a short recap about the Second Great War, more commonly known as World War II, would be in order. On the human level the opposing camps were the Allied forces consisting of Great Britain and its commonwealth constituents, and France and America, while opposed to them were the Axis forces consisting of Germany, Italy and Japan. Russia at the beginning was leaning towards the Axis camp but subsequently, after it was attacked by Germany, made common cause with the Allies. The Allied leaders were Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Great Britain, Franklin Roosevelt, President of America and Charles de Gaulle, leading the French government in exile. The Axis were led by Hitler of Germany, Mussolini of Italy and Tojo of Japan. Russia was led by Stalin. It is generally agreed that the war began in 1939, with the invasion of Poland by Germany and ended in 1945, with the surrender of Japan. This war was the bloodiest conflict in human history with estimated casualties in excess of 50 million.

Moving on now to examine the questions we have raised earlier about the nature and characteristic of this war, Sri Aurobindo, in an action which surprised

3. Narayan Prasad, *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, 1st Ed., p. 238.

many of his countrymen and also many of his disciples, made a contribution to the war fund and in an accompanying open letter dated 19.09.1940, addressed to the Governor of Madras, wrote:

. . . We feel that not only is this a battle waged in just self-defence and in defence of the nations threatened with the world-domination of Germany and the Nazi system of life, but that it is a defence of civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and of the whole future of humanity. To this cause our support and sympathy will be unswerving whatever may happen; we look forward to the victory of Britain and, as the eventual result, an era of peace and union among the nations and a better and more secure world-order.⁴

In another letter dated 29.07.1942 to a disciple Sri Aurobindo unequivocally declares the war to be the Mother's War and gives a clear picture of the forces behind the scenes. He wrote:

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 will 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

4. *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 453.

itself on the earth. Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the threatened reign of the Asura.⁵

In yet another letter dated 03.09.1943, extracts from which were revised by Sri Aurobindo and published in the Ashram journal *Advent* and also published separately by the Ashram in a booklet form, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

What we say is not that the Allies have not 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.

. . . 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; only then can present troubles and contradictions have a chance to be solved and eliminated. . . .⁶

* * *

. . . 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). . . .⁷

* * *

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 463-64.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 464-65.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 465-66.

... 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.⁸

Thus Sri Aurobindo in most clear terms has declared that behind the Axis powers were the Asuric forces, the forces of darkness, falsehood and destruction. It was to oppose these forces that Sri Aurobindo put his force behind the Allies, for the victory of the Axis forces would have meant the destruction of all human values, all that is beautiful and noble and truthful in humanity. It would have meant putting back the evolution by centuries, specially the spiritual evolution and destruction of all that had been built over millennia.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Action in War

In a note on his political life, written in November 1946, Sri Aurobindo, talking about himself in the third person, has given a rare insight into his force, its nature and character and action, while writing thus:

... In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action; for it is part of the experience of those who have advanced far in Yoga that besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body in Matter, there are other forces and powers that can act and do act from behind and from above; there is also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in the spiritual consciousness, though all do not care to possess or, possessing, to use it, and this power is greater than any other and more effective. It was this force which, as soon as he had attained to it, he used, at first only in a limited field of personal work, but afterwards in a constant action upon the world

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 467-68.

forces. He had no reason to be dissatisfied with the results or to feel the necessity of any other kind of action. Twice however he found it advisable to take in addition other action of a public kind. The first was in relation to the second World War. At the beginning he did not actively concern himself with it, but when it appeared as if Hitler would crush all the forces opposed to him and Nazism dominate the world, he began to intervene. He declared himself publicly on the side of the Allies, made some financial contributions in answer to the appeal for funds and encouraged those who sought his advice to enter the army or share in the war effort. Inwardly, he put his spiritual force behind the Allies from the moment of Dunkirk when everybody was expecting the immediate fall of England and the definite triumph of Hitler, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction. This he did, because he saw that behind Hitler and Nazism were dark Asuric forces and that their success would mean the enslavement of mankind to the tyranny of evil, and a set-back to the course of evolution and especially to the spiritual evolution of mankind: it would lead also to the enslavement not only of Europe but of Asia, and in it India, an enslavement far more terrible than any this country had ever endured, and the undoing of all the work that had been done for her liberation. It was this reason also that induced him to support publicly the Cripps' offer and to press the Congress leaders to accept it. He had not, for various reasons, intervened with his spiritual force against the Japanese aggression until it became evident that Japan intended to attack and even invade and conquer India. He allowed certain letters he had written in support of the war affirming his views of the Asuric nature and inevitable outcome of Hitlerism to become public. He supported the Cripps' offer because by its acceptance India and Britain could stand united against the Asuric forces and the solution of Cripps could be used as a step towards independence. When negotiations failed, Sri Aurobindo returned to his reliance on the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressor and had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory, which had till then swept everything before it, changed immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat. . . .⁹

From the above, we see how grave was the situation and how seriously Sri Aurobindo viewed it. All his force and time was concentrated on the war, so much so, that it led to disruption of the Yoga. As Sri Aurobindo writes in a letter dated 13.03.1944:

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

. . . As you know it [*his force*] is being largely used for helping the right development of the war and of change in the human world.¹⁰

Similarly, the Mother said in a conversation dated November 5, 1961:

For instance, during the last war I spent all my nights hovering above Paris (not integrally, but a part of myself) so that nothing would happen to the city. Later it came out that several people had seen what seemed to be a great white Force with an indistinct form hovering above Paris so that it wouldn't be destroyed.¹¹

In the same conversation of November 5, 1961, the Mother has further said:

Throughout the war Sri Aurobindo and I were in such a CONSTANT tension that it completely interrupted the yoga. And that is why the war started in the first place — to stop the Work. At that time there was an extraordinary descent of the Supermind; it was coming like that (*massive gesture*), a descent! Exactly in '39. Then the war broke out and stopped everything cold. For had we personally continued [the work of transformation] we were not sure of having enough time to finish it before 'the other one' crushed the earth to a pulp, setting the whole Affair back . . . centuries. The FIRST thing to be done was stop the action of the Lord of Nations.¹²

Even amongst the disciples there were some who did not realise the real nature of the war and the gravity of the situation and were bent on supporting the Nazis. To show them the folly of their actions, the Mother declared on 6.5.1941:

It has become necessary to state emphatically and clearly that all who by their thoughts and wishes are supporting and calling for the victory of the Nazis are by that very fact collaborating with the Asura against the Divine and helping to bring about the victory of the Asura.¹³

Due to the misguided support to the Nazis by these disciples there was the real threat of the police taking action against the Ashram and Sri Aurobindo himself had to state rather severely:

10. *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 496.

11. The Mother's conversation with Satprem on 5 November 1961.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Narayan Prasad, *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, 1st Ed., p. 227.

If these people want that the Ashram should be dissolved, they can come and tell me and I will dissolve it instead of the police doing it . . . Hitlerism is the greatest menace that the world has ever met.¹⁴

And in a letter dated 10.06.1944, to a disciple who wanted to know if idle intellectual talk and speculation about Allied defeat was harmful and improper, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

. . . 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). . . .¹⁵

Nirodbaran, one of the earliest disciples and a doctor by qualification, had the privilege of attending upon Sri Aurobindo after his accident and during the war period. In his books *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* and *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, he has given a close view of Sri Aurobindo's total involvement with the war, especially after the fall of Dunkirk. Also given are glimpses and hints of Sri Aurobindo's occult actions and grasp of the complex war strategies.

Nirodbaran writes:

For all the war-news we had to depend on the daily newspapers, since members of the Ashram were not supposed to have radios. Somebody in the town began to supply us with short bulletins; when the War had taken a full-fledged turn, the radio news was transmitted to Sri Aurobindo's room so he might follow the war-movements from hour to hour.¹⁶

Initially the radio was put in a building adjacent to the Ashram and one of the disciples would listen to the news and prepare a report which would be sent to Sri Aurobindo. Subsequently as the need for news grew more urgent, the radio was put inside the Ashram in Pavitra's room and as earlier, reports would be sent to Sri Aurobindo. Still later, as the situation grew graver, a direct loudspeaker connection

14. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2005, p. 159.

15. *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, CWSA, Vol. 35, pp. 220-21.

16. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2005, p. 124.

was put in Sri Aurobindo's room, so that the news could be heard by him directly without delay.

At still another place Nirodbaran writes:

Sri Aurobindo, who was once a mortal opponent of British rule in India, came to support the Allies against the threat of world-domination by Hitler. "Not merely a non-co-operator but an enemy of British Imperialism", he now listened carefully to the health bulletins about Churchill when he had pneumonia, and, we believe, even helped him with his Force to recover. . . . I still remember Sri Aurobindo breaking the news of Hitler's march and England's declaration of war. For a time the world hung in suspense wondering whether Hitler would flout Holland's neutrality and then penetrate into Belgium. We had very little doubt of his intention. It was evening; Sri Aurobindo was alone in his room. As soon as I entered, he looked at me and said, "Hitler has invaded Holland. Well, we shall see." That was all. Two or three such laconic but pregnant remarks regarding the War still ring in my ears. At another crucial period when Stalin held a threatening pistol at England and was almost joining hands with Hitler, we were dismayed and felt that there would be no chance for the Divine, were such a formidable alliance to take place. Sri Aurobindo at once retorted. "Is the Divine going to be cowed by Stalin?" When, seeing Hitler sweeping like a meteor over Europe, a sadhak cried in despair to the Guru, "Where is the Divine? Where is your word of hope?" Sri Aurobindo replied calmly, "Hitler is not immortal." Then the famous battle of Dunkirk and the perilous retreat, the whole Allied army exposed to enemy attack from land and air and the bright summer sun shining above. All of a sudden a fog gathered from nowhere and gave unexpected protection to the retreating army. We said, "It seems the fog helped the evacuation." To which Sri Aurobindo remarked, "Yes, the fog is rather unusual at this time." We, of course, understood what he meant. It was after the fall of Dunkirk and the capitulation of France that Sri Aurobindo began to apply his Force more vigorously in favour of the Allies, and he had "the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction."¹⁷

At still another place Nirodbaran writes:

When Dr. Rao, one of the consultant physicians attending on Sri Aurobindo, said that a lot of people in Madras were wondering how Sri Aurobindo, who had been so anti-British, could contribute to the War Fund, the Master ex-

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-26.

plained to him at great length why he had taken that step. His intention was that Dr. Rao should speak about it to others when the occasion arose. Among the points already known, Sri Aurobindo disclosed his own occult action in the War. He said, "Do you know that Hitler is trying to get a foothold in South America and doing extensive propaganda there? It can lead to an attack against the U.S.A. He is now practically master of Europe. If he had invaded England after the collapse of France, he could have been in Asia by this time. . . . Now another force has been set up against his. Still the danger has not passed. He has a 50% chance of success. Up to the time when France collapsed, he was remarkably successful because he had behind him an Asuric Power which guided him; from that Power he received remarkably correct messages.

. . . It is for two reasons that I support the British, for India's own interest and for humanity; and the reasons I have given are external ones, there are spiritual reasons too."¹⁸

Sri Aurobindo's statements and answers given to questions of disciples gathered around him, in the evening, in the years after his accident, give valuable insights and information about the occult forces behind the scenes involved in the war and their action upon the human instruments.

Thus on May 20, 1940, Hitler's declaration that before August 15 the war would be finished, was the topic of discussion between Sri Aurobindo and the disciples gathered around him. This is Nirodbaran's recollection of it:

Q: Hitler's declaration that before August 15 the War is to be finished and peace agreed upon seems significant.

Sri Aurobindo: That is the sign that he is the enemy of our work. And from the values involved in the conflict, it should be quite clear that what is behind him is the Asuric, the Titanic power. . . .

Q: It is strange how he takes his decisions.

Sri Aurobindo: It is not he who takes the decisions. The Being behind him decided. . . . This Being comes here from time to time and sees what kind of work is going on.

Q: It knows that the work here is against its own interests?

Sri Aurobindo (*laughing*): Of course! . . . It is a very powerful Being. Paul Richard was in communion with this Being and the plans and methods he has written of in his book *Lord of the Nations*, are the same as carried out now. He has said there that the present civilisation is to be destroyed but really it is the destruction of the human values of civilisation that is aimed at and already in Germany Hitler had done it. . . . And he has destroyed these values wherever he has gone. Human

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.

beings by themselves are no match for the Asuras. . . . In Hitler's case it is not an influence but a possession, even perhaps an incarnation. The case of Stalin is similar. The vital world has descended upon the physical. That is why the intellectuals are getting perplexed at the destruction of their civilisation, of all the values they had cherished and stood for. They deny the existence of the world beyond the physical and so they are bound to be perplexed.¹⁹

Similarly on 29.05.40, Nirodbaran writes:

. . . the Mother gave us a message that the Asuras can't be victorious eternally against the Divine. The end of Hitler must come. Sri Aurobindo remarked: "That doesn't mean by the Allies. . . . If England goes down, there won't be any country left independent except Russia, Germany, Japan and Italy. I am talking of the old world. I think the next conflict will be between Russia and Germany. If Russia finds that England is in a difficult position, then Stalin will put pressure on Turkey and Rumania for the control of the Black Sea as he has done with the Baltic States. Hitler is not likely to keep quiet about the trouble in the Balkans. With Italy's help he may settle the Asia Minor and Balkan problem or he may allow Stalin a free hand now, knowing that he can settle with him afterwards."

We can see here that Sri Aurobindo envisaged a war between Russia and Germany, when there was hardly any possibility of it.²⁰

Again on August 15, 1940, Nirodbaran writes:

"On this day — Sri Aurobindo's birthday — the radio news at noon said that 144 German planes had been brought down over England in half a day, the biggest number so far. We commented that it was the result of the Darshan. Sri Aurobindo laughed and said, "The day of Hitler's triumphal entry into England!"

A month later, on the same date, 15.9.40, Sri Aurobindo said smiling, "England has destroyed 175 German planes, a very big number. Now invasion would be difficult. Hitler lost his chance after the fall of France. He has really missed the bus! If after the French collapse he had invaded England, by now he would have been in Asia. Now another force has been set up against him. Still the danger has not passed."

Apropos of this battle and its date, the editor of *Mother India* wrote, ". . . Hitler fixed in 1940 the 15th of August as the day on which he would

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-37.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

complete his conquest of Western Europe by broadcasting from Buckingham Palace the collapse of Britain . . . and on that day the largest toll so far was taken of the Luftwaffe . . . we will designate it as the turning point in the Battle of Britain.”²¹

And we have this piece of information from Nirodbaran in which Sri Aurobindo gives a deep insight into the personality of Hitler:

Looking at a photograph in *L'Illustration*, he described Hitler, Goebbels and Goering, the trio, in unmistakeable terms: “Hitler gives the impression of the face of a street-criminal. In his case it is successful ruffianism with a diabolical cunning and behind it the psychic of a London cabman, — crude and undeveloped. That is to say, the psychic character in the man consists of some futile and silly sentimentalism which finds expression in his paintings and weeps at his mother’s grave. He is possessed by some Supernatural Power and it is from this Power that the voice, as he calls it, comes. Have you noted that people who at one time were inimical to him come into contact with him and leave as his admirers? It is a sign of that Power. It is from this Power that he has constantly received suggestions and the constant repetition of the suggestions has taken hold of the German people. You will also mark that in his speeches he goes on stressing the same ideas — this is evidently a sign of that vital possession.”²²

And talking about Hitler with the disciples gathered around him, Sri Aurobindo added the following:

. . . I have not seen any other person who has followed, with such extraordinary fidelity, the Asura. Three things of the Asura he adopts strictly: 1) If you go on telling lies long enough with assurance, people will believe you. 2) You must adopt treachery and appeal to the basest passions of the people. 3) Care only for the success without regard for truth. There have been men who have done that with some pretence to truth. But Hitler speaks openly of his method of falsehood and yet people believe him.”²³

On the Divine side, in Winston Churchill, Sri Aurobindo found an able and strong instrument, through whom he could act directly on the war situation. Maggi Lidchi-Grassi, a long time inmate of the Ashram, writing about her conversations

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 137-38.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

23. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 1st Ed., Vol. 4, pp. 143-44.

with the Mother about the war in her book *The Light that Shone into the Dark Abyss*, says:

The Mother told the author of how Sri Aurobindo used to tell her of the words that he would put into the mouth of Churchill before the famous broadcasts, and certain passages were spoken by Churchill word for word. I have not found any written references to this in the texts written on Sri Aurobindo but his secretary Nirodbaran had heard of this, and Dyumanbhai, [then] Managing Trustee of the Ashram, has confirmed it. He told me that certain passages in Churchill's speeches often were repetitions of words already spoken in Pondicherry. Anubhen Purani tells me that her father A.B. Purani, one of the few people who saw Sri Aurobindo every day, told her the same thing.²⁴

When on 17 July 1940 a disciple reported that Churchill had made a very fine speech, Sri Aurobindo said: "Yes, he was inspired."²⁵

And in response to a sadhak's rather loose reaction to Sri Aurobindo's contribution to the war fund, the Mother berated him severely. Here is the sadhak's report which shows how magnificently Churchill's soul was responding to the Divine guidance, confirmed by the Mother herself:

"There are things that were settled long before you were even born. We have been working on them for a long time. Now you with your infinitesimally small mind believe that all that is nothing, that Sri Aurobindo and I are wrong, and that you are right in your judgment!" I was taken aback; it flashed before me, "What could be the reason?" Being nonplussed, I expressed my surprise, "Is it something about the War that I spoke to P?" The Mother made the sign of Yes. I felt relieved and said, "Oh, it was nothing. I just spoke to him casually; it was not at all serious." But the Mother's face was stern and She said, "Not serious? It was almost unbelievable that you of all persons could speak like that about Sri Aurobindo! Haven't you read all that He has given out to the Press?" I said, "Yes, Mother, I have. But have not the British done anything wrong to India?" The Mother replied, "We never said that they had not, nor do we say that in the future they will not do so any more. But today the question is not that; don't you understand it? When you see your neighbour's house on fire, and yet you do not go to help to put it out because he has done wrong to you, you risk the burning of your own house and the loss of your own life. Do you not see the difference between the forces that are fighting for the Divine and those for the Asuras?" I said, "Yes, Mother, I do see; only what baffles me

24. Maggi Lidchi-Grassi, *The Light that Shone into the Dark Abyss*, 1st Ed., pp. 77-78.

25. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 1st Ed., Vol. 4, p. 135.

is that Churchill, whom you and Sri Aurobindo have chosen as your direct instrument, wants today India's help for his own country's existence; and yet says that His Majesty's government has no intention of liquidating its Empire!" The Mother said, "But leave all that to the Divine. Churchill is a human being. He is not a yogi aspiring to transform his nature. Today he represents the Soul of the Nation that is fighting against the Asuras. He is being guided by the Divine directly and his soul is responding magnificently. All concentration must be now to help the Allies for the victory that is ultimately assured, but there must be no looseness, not the slightest opening to the Asuras. After the battle is won, if Churchill's soul can remain still in front and he continues to be guided by the Divine, he will go very fast in the line of evolution. But generally on earth it doesn't happen like that. His human mind and vital will take the lead after the crisis is over, and then he will come down to the level of the ordinary human being, though of a higher order."²⁶

On a lighter note, Sri Aurobindo maintained his delicious sense of humour, in spite of the grim situation. When France had capitulated and Hitler seemed invincible, Sri Aurobindo envisaged Asia and India coming under the influence of Germany or Russia. When it was reported to Sri Aurobindo that people in Pondy believed that Hitler didn't want the British Empire but only hegemony among his colonies, Sri Aurobindo responded:

Are they so idiotic as to believe that he will be satisfied with that? He has said plainly in *Mein Kampf* that his aim is to destroy France and Russia. Now he is speaking of colonies which means that England also must be destroyed. These people know nothing about war. It is better for us to learn German now or both German and Russian — as a precaution! (*Laughter*)²⁷

Hitler's Asura

We have seen what Sri Aurobindo thought about Hitler and his associates, but what about the being who was behind Hitler, who led and guided him, the asuric force that possessed him? We have seen Sri Aurobindo say that this being visited the Ashram from time to time, to see what work was being done there. What else have they said about the identity of this being, about his working? Why did Hitler attack Russia and open another front, a decision which many consider as one of the biggest, if not the biggest, blunder of the war. We have already seen Sri Aurobindo

26. Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, 2005, pp. 127-29.

27. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 4, p. 56.

mention this possibility in May 1940, when there was hardly any possibility of it, so did he and the Mother have anything to do with this blunder of Hitler?

The Mother in a conversation dated November 5, 1961, has said the following:

The being who used to appear to Hitler was the Lord of Nations. An incredible story! . . . And I knew when they were going to meet (because after all, he's my son! That was the funniest part of it); and on one occasion I substituted myself for him, became Hitler's god and advised him to attack Russia. Two days later he attacked Russia. But upon leaving the 'meeting' I encountered the other one [the real Asura] just as he was arriving! He was furious and asked me why I had done that. "It's none of your business," I said, "it's what had to be done." "You will see," he replied, "I KNOW, I know you will destroy me, but before being destroyed I will wreak just as much havoc as I can, you can be sure of that."²⁸

And in another conversation on 8 March 1951, She has said:

Hitler was in contact with a being whom he considered to be the Supreme: that being would come and give him advice and tell him all that he had to do. Hitler would withdraw into solitude and wait long enough to come into contact with his 'guide' and receive inspirations from him which he would afterwards carry out very faithfully. That being whom Hitler took for the Supreme was quite simply an Asura, the one called in occultism 'the Lord of Falsehood', and he proclaimed himself to be 'the Lord of Nations'. He had a resplendent appearance and could pull the wool over anyone's eyes, except one who truly had occult knowledge and could thus see what was there, behind the appearance. He could have deluded anyone, he was so splendid. He generally appeared to Hitler wearing a breast-plate and a silver helmet (with a sort of flame coming out of his head), and there was around him an atmosphere of dazzling light, so dazzling that Hitler could hardly look at him. He would tell him all that he had to do — he would play with him as with a monkey or a mouse. He had set his mind on making Hitler do all possible kinds of folly . . . until the day when he would come a cropper, which is what happened. But there are many cases like that one, on a smaller scale, naturally. Hitler was a very good medium, he had great mediumistic capacities, but he lacked intelligence and discernment. That being could tell him anything and he would swallow it all. That's what produced him on little by little. And that being would do that as a pastime, he didn't take life seriously. For those beings, people are very small things with which

28. The Mother's conversation with Satprem on 5 November 1961.

they play as a cat plays with a mouse, until the day when they eat them up.

Referring to that conversation, the Mother remarked on 12 January, 1965:

I knew that being very well (for other reasons . . . the story would be too long to tell), and once, I knew he was going to visit Hitler — I went before he did: I took his appearance, it was very easy. Then I said to Hitler, “Go and attack Russia.” I don’t exactly remember the words or the details, but the fact was that I told him, “Go . . . In order to have the supreme victory, go and attack Russia.” That was the end of Hitler. He believed it and did it — two days later, we got the news of the attack. And then, the next day, that is, when I came back from Hitler, I met that being and told him, “I’ve done your job!” Naturally enough, he was furious!

But all the same, in that consciousness, there is with that being (the Lord of Falsehood, one of the first four Emanations), there is despite everything a very deep relationship, of course. He said to me, “I know, I know I will be defeated eventually, but before my end comes I will wreak as much destruction on earth as I can.”

Then, as I told you, the next day, the news of the attack came, and that was really the end of Hitler.

As for Sri Aurobindo . . . (you know that there is a place in Russia where they were defeated), Sri Aurobindo had foreseen the defeat and had worked the night before, and that’s how it happened — we knew ALL THE DETAILS.

We never told this, of course, but it was perfectly precise.

But I knew that being, I had already seen him in Japan — he called himself “the Lord of Nations”. And he really was a form of the Asura of Falsehood, that is, of Truth which became Falsehood: the first Emanation of Truth, who became Falsehood.

And he hasn’t been destroyed yet.²⁹

And on August 2, 1967, this is what the Mother said about the personality of the Asura, of those who are conscious of their ego and their power:

The contact with the great Asuras, the first Asuras, is like that: the full consciousness of their formidable power, their marvellous capacities — they forget one thing, it’s that they deserve no credit for it, it’s not their exclusive property! So they cut the connection and become instruments of disorder and confusion.

This one, the Lord of Falsehood . . .

29. The Mother’s conversations with Satprem on 8 March 1951 and 12 January, 1965.

To the human consciousness, those things are terrible, but seen from up above, they make you smile. I remember, when I met him during the war (I had ruined his work with Hitler, then I met him), I told him, “You know quite well that your time is over.” He said, “I know it, but until I disappear I will wreak as much havoc as I can.”

Childishness.³⁰

Sri Aurobindo told the group of disciples gathered around him for the evening talks:

The Asura is more concerned with us than anything else. He is inventing new situations so that we may fall into difficulty. Nazis, Fascists and Communists are all against us and we are safe under none of these.³¹

From the above we see what a formidable foe Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had to face during the war and how perilously close the world had come to devastation. All their force and concentration during the war years was engaged in countering the Asuras’ actions and at one time the adverse forces had 50% chance of achieving their aim. It was the tireless efforts of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which saved the world with the victory of the Allied forces. The war officially ended on 15th August 1945 (on Sri Aurobindo’s birthday) with the surrender of Japan, after it had ended in Europe a couple of months earlier. The total loss of human life was in excess of 50 million. An estimated 6 million Jews, including 1 million children and 2 million women, were killed in the notorious Nazi concentration camps. About 80,000 men, women and children were instantly vaporised in a few seconds when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. As the Mother has mentioned above, the Asura cares little about human life. In his poem on Hitler ‘The Dwarf Napoleon’, written in 1939, here is what Sri Aurobindo had written and predicted:

But if its tenebrous empire were allowed,
That mastery would prepare the dismal hour
When the Inconscient shall regain its right,
And man who emerged as Nature’s conscious power,
Shall sink into the deep original night
Sharing like all her forms that went before
The doom of the mammoth and the dinosaur.
It is the shadow of the Titan’s robe
That looms across the panic-stricken globe.

30. The Mother’s conversation with Satprem on 2 August, 1967.

31. Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, 1st Ed., Vol. 4, p. 121.

In his high villa on the fatal hill
 Alone he listens to that sovereign Voice,
 Dictator of his action's sudden choice,
 The tiger leap of a demoniac skill.
 An energy his body cannot invest, —
 Too small and human for that dreadful guest,
 A tortured channel, not a happy vessel, —
 Drives him to think and act and cry and wrestle.
 Thus driven he must stride on conquering all,
 Threatening and clamouring, brutal, invincible,
 Until he meets upon his storm-swept road
 A greater devil — or thunderstroke of God.³²

End of War?

Now we come to the last question, has humanity learned anything from the greatest conflict it has faced? Has it spelt the end of war and war-mongering? Will war ever be eliminated from the world?

Sri Aurobindo wrote in *War and Self-Determination* sometime in 1918-1920:

So long as war does not become psychologically impossible, it will remain or, if banished for a while, return. War itself, it is hoped, will end war; the expense, the horror, the butchery, the disturbance of tranquil life, the whole confused sanguinary madness of the thing has reached or will reach such colossal proportions that the human race will fling the monstrosity behind it in weariness and disgust. But weariness and disgust, horror and pity, even the opening of the eyes to reason by the practical fact of the waste of human life and energy and the harm and extravagance are not permanent factors; they last only while the lesson is fresh. Afterwards, there is forgetfulness; human nature recuperates itself and recovers the instincts that were temporarily dominated. A long peace, even a certain organisation of peace may conceivably result, but so long as the heart of man remains what it is, the peace will come to an end, the organisation will break down under the stress of human passions. War is no longer, perhaps, a biological necessity, but it is still a psychological necessity; what is within us, must manifest itself outside.³³

Unless the conflict within us is overcome, is banished, is eliminated — the war outside will not cease to exist. Only when there is peace inside, will there be everlasting peace outside.

ANIL PURI

32. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 640-41.

33. *The Human Cycle — The Ideal of Human Unity — War and Self-Determination*, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 610-11.

TWO UNFORGETTABLE INCIDENTS

1. The Independence of India

AUGUST 15, 1947, was a great day for the people of India. but for the Ashramites it turned out to be a black day. Mother India got her freedom after centuries of foreign rule, a moment to rejoice and celebrate. But unfortunately on that momentous day a devotee had become the target of a senseless mob. He was stabbed to death.

I was a child then, staying in 'Dortoir', the first boarding that came into existence in 1945. Anticipating that some miscreants who were anti-Ashram were up to some mischief, the Ashram authorities advised all Ashramites and children to remain in the main building of the Ashram for their safety.

The sun had set and gradually it was getting dark. Suddenly we heard some commotion outside on the road, and the pelting of stones began. We were scared, and huddled together for safety.

When the miscreants dispersed after completing their heinous work, we were asked to return to the boarding. While coming out of the Ashram building we saw blood stains on the ground just in front of the Ashram main gate. Someone remarked that Mulshankar had been murdered. I knew him; he was jovial and loving.

My childish imagination began to run riot. A fear psychosis gripped me; perhaps they may target me next.

The window facing the road was kept closed, and tables and chairs were piled one upon the other as close to the windows as possible so that the rogues may not break it open. The only opening, a bull's eye, was way above the window. My cot was placed at the far end of the dormitory, near the wall opposite to the window opening onto the road. Imagining that the dreaded dagger would fly through the bull's eye, all the way across the hall, over all the cots, and pierce my chest, I used to hide below the cot and lie down on the floor. And my heart pounded with fear. I prayed fervently to the Mother, "Oh sweet Mother! Kindly see to it that the dagger does not target me. Help me out of this nightmarish situation. I will be a good boy and will study hard," and things of that sort.

Thanks to the Lord! The Mother heard my intense and sincere prayer, and I came out of the ordeal unscathed. Gradually, normalcy returned. All the tables and chairs were put back in their proper places. Light and air began to enter the hall, and the dark shadow of agonising fear vanished in course of time.

2. The Passing of Sri Aurobindo

December 5, 1950. A wailing sound woke me up. I looked in the direction of the sound and saw Narendra Jauhar (Tara and Kake's elder brother) crying uncontrollably. He was sitting on a table, surrounded by 'Dortoir' boys, who were cajoling him to tell us why he was crying. For quite some time Narendra did not respond to our earnest request. Finally, after a lot of entreaties he answered, sobbing, and with a choked voice, "Sri . . . Aurobindo . . . has left . . . us . . . and gone away." We were stunned. How can God die? Tears began to roll from our eyes, for our Lord had abandoned us.

Our guardian, Chellamma, asked us to get ready quickly, and we headed towards the Ashram. It was still dark, perhaps a few moments before the break of dawn. On our way we saw a steady flow of people going towards the same destination, some rushing, others moving at a slow pace, still others greatly disturbed and sobbing. Children seemed to be lost in their own imagination. We were too young to grasp the gravity of this momentous event, but we felt that something which should not have happened had unfortunately taken place.

We followed the line that was slowly moving towards Sri Aurobindo's room via the Meditation Hall. The faces of elders were glum, and many were shedding tears. Caught up in this gloomy atmosphere, I felt rather uneasy, a kind of nervous restlessness, as though all energy was draining out of me. I had difficulty in climbing the stairs that lead to the Master's room. Peace reigned all around. Who says our Lord is dead? He seemed deep in trance, his body glowing with a golden hue.

We returned to 'Dortoir', got ready and assembled at the Playground. We were engrossed in childish discussions about what would happen after Sri Aurobindo's passing, when one of our boarding friends came running and told us with a lot of excitement, "I just heard that Sri Aurobindo is in deep trance. There is no trace of any discolouration which takes place when the body gets decomposed. His body is shining with a golden light."

A ray of hope flickered in our sagging hearts. We felt that all was not lost. But this wishful hope was momentary and on the fourth day the body started losing its golden sheen, and on December 9, 1950 the Lord entered the Samadhi.

In those days when construction work was going on in the Ashram premises, two water tanks were made for dipping bricks at the very spot where stands the Samadhi. After the construction work was over, these tanks were closed and a raised concrete platform was made. On it were kept neatly arranged pots with decorative plants, mostly ferns. We children used to play around it games like Hide and Seek, Catching Game etc. The elders used to get annoyed and scolded us. From 5th December 1950 all playing around that area stopped. Thenceforth devotees, elders and children, went there in a solemn silence to pray to the Lord.

RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of May 2014)

X

OUR writer, elsewhere, makes masterly use of Hyperbaton in eloquent prose. Many examples may be found in *The Hour of God*:

Aloof, slow to arrive, far-off and few and brief in their visits are the Bright Ones who are willing or permitted to succour.¹

Here the common grammatical word order would be:

The Bright Ones who are willing or permitted to succour are aloof . . . visits.

Put this way, we see how it becomes a rather clumsy sentence; but with the inversion the author has used, it becomes inspired prose in the high, eloquent style. Longinus has a very revealing remark on Hyperbaton:

For art is perfect only when it looks like nature, and again, nature hits the mark only when she conceals the art that is within her.²

As to whether the sentence quoted from our author is art or nature, it is difficult, nay, impossible to determine, so well have the two blended. But that is usual with him. There is never the least sign of artificiality in him.

Syllepsis is a figure of speech in which a verb is applied to two different nouns, with different meanings to each, but in a grammatically correct manner. Sounds rather bewildering? Well, examples will clarify it adequately: "The attorney tried the case and the judge's temper." Here "tried" is applied to the case and to the judge's temper but the meaning is different in the two instances. It is usually used for comic effect. Not so in our writer:

In order to get a firm clue which we can follow fruitfully in the retrospect and prospect we have proposed to ourselves . . .³

1. *The Hour of God* (1959 ed.), p. 6.

2. T. S. Dorch transl., *Classical Literary Criticism*, Penguin, 1965, p. 131.

3. *The Future Poetry* (1953 ed.), p. 12.

Here the same verb “follow fruitfully” is applied to both “retrospect” and “prospect”. But this was a very simple one. There are far more complex examples. In the following the author gives us three syllepses in one sentence:

But we do stand in need of some guiding intuitions, some helpful descriptions which will serve to enlighten our search; and to fix in that way, not by definition, but by description, the essential thing in poetry is neither an impossible, nor an unprofitable endeavour.⁴

To disentangle the syllepses: the verb “do stand” is applied to “guiding intuitions” and “helpful descriptions”. Then the verb “to fix” is applied first to “definitions” and “descriptions” and then to “impossible [endeavours]” and “unprofitable endeavour”. Both of these examples are of serious syllepses, not of comical ones as have been used, for instance, by writers like Dickens and others.

The alert reader might say that the term zeugma could have been equally well applied to this figure. But in zeugma the same verb is applied, once correctly and then incorrectly, to two different nouns. Most of the time this is done for the sake of rhythm in poetry. Thus Milton says:

To whose bright image, nightly by the moon
Sidonian virgins paid their vows and songs.

Here “paid” is applied correctly to “vows” and incorrectly to “songs”. But to say “sang their songs” would have made the line too long. This is zeugma, not syllepsis. This clumsy figure, as far as I’ve looked, is not there in his prose.

The next figure in our list is isocolon: clauses or phrases of equal length are used. It is used very often in antithesis where the contrasted clauses are usually of the same length: united we stand, divided we fall. This does not mean that the contrasted or balanced clauses have to be mutually contradictory ones. Yet the widespread use of this figure in antithesis has got it associated with the meaning of words, not just the length of clauses or phrases. Accordingly, some rhetoricians class it with figures of words and some with those of thought and some take in both and add the category of figures of construction. It is this last group in which I have put it as that includes both figures of words and those of meaning.

Examples of isocolon are many and quite frequent. After giving an example from our writer I shall quote a wonderful one from a favourite writer, K. D. Sethna. The one given below comes quite early in the book. He is talking about Mr Cousins:

But some of the essays, admirable in themselves, are too slight for our need.⁵

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

The reader will notice that this is a true isocolon — not an antithesis nor a climax. Indeed it is difficult to find a true isocolon that does not involve any other figure of speech. The example from KDS is a very fine and pure isocolon. He is writing about Coleridge, not about his poetry or prose, but about his mind.

The mind of Coleridge, at once soaring and systematic, quicksilver and mountainous, sensitive and poised, was a great help. . . .⁶

This is a true isocolon, spread over no less than five cola, truly used as a figure of construction, not as one of thought or of words. Coupling the sentence as an example with one of Sri Aurobindo's is the best homage I can pay to the writer. It is, incidentally, also an example of polysyndeton. Indeed I had forgotten over the years that it is by him and not by our writer and somewhere I have quoted it as such. I take this opportunity to apologise.

The next figure, parison, is very like isocolon. Yet there are so many examples of it in our writer that one would be failing in one's duty if no examples are given. It is nothing but parallelism in a different guise. This is a grammatical and syntactical parallelism used very frequently in the Bible: "A time to love and a time to die" etc. There is one in the very first page of *The Future Poetry*.

. . . the book on every page attracts and satisfies by its living force of style, its almost perfect measures, its delicacy of touch, its fineness and depth of observation and insight, its just sympathy and appreciation.⁷

The full sentence has not been quoted, it is not necessary. There are three clauses paralleling each other. We shall see this in the next instalment.

(To be continued)

RATRI RAY

6. Sethna, K. D., *Talks on Poetry*, Pondicherry, 1989, p. 67.

7. *The Future Poetry*, p. 1.

AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

(Continued from the issue of May 2014)

9. A Greek Legend

NOT all tales the pilgrims to Canterbury tell capture our fancy, but a few stand out. ‘The Knight’s Tale’ is one such and makes a good beginning to the array of stories that follow. Sri Aurobindo would surely have been drawn to it as here is a Greek legend that connects us with the very founding of Athens. Long ago, Frederick Spiegelberg commenting upon Sri Aurobindo’s poetry exclaimed: “Isn’t it entirely Greek?” However, no such vehemence will be in place when we see the Aurobindonian poetic oeuvre as a whole. All the same, his earlier work was strongly influenced by the Greek world while the drama *Perseus the Deliverer* and the (unfinished) epic *Ilion* can certainly be described as “entirely Greek”. The subject, the mood, the diction, the stately hexameter:

Out of the formless vision of Night with its look on things hidden
Given to the gaze of the azure she lay in her garment of greenness,
Wearing light on her brow. In the dawn-ray lofty and voiceless
Ida climbed with her god-haunted peaks into diamond lustres,
Ida first of the hills with the ranges silent beyond her
Watching the dawn in their giant companies, as since the ages
First began they had watched her, upbearing Time on their summits.
Troas cold on her plain awaited the boon of the sunshine.
There, like a hope through an emerald dream sole-pacing for ever,
Stealing to wideness beyond, crept Simois lame in his currents,
Guiding his argent thread mid the green of the reeds and the grasses.
Headlong, impatient of Space and its boundaries, Time and its slowness,
Xanthus clamoured aloud as he ran to the far-surfing waters,
Joining his call to the many-voiced roar of the mighty Aegean,
Answering Ocean’s limitless cry like a whelp to its parent.¹

‘The Knight’s Tale’ is a straightforward narration with no frills attached. Chaucer’s inspiration was Boccaccio’s *The Theseid*, which is an epic full of details and descriptions. However, our Knight is a no-nonsense personality, a great traveller who has taken part in fifteen battles. He chooses to tell the company an ancient tale,

1. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 335.

the legend of Palamon and Arcite. Theseus, the duke of Athens, had fought and killed the King of Thebes. His soldiers unleashed terrible devastation on the conquered territory and it was a mass of corpses everywhere. As the soldiers of Theseus went around stripping the dead of their harness and garments, they found two young men, very badly mauled. The two had arms of the same style. One was Palamon and the other, Arcite.

Theseus had them imprisoned and would not take any ransom. They were prized trophies and were kept in a tower in the castle of Theseus. Theseus's queen was Hippolyta and she had a sister, Emily. The Knight tells his fellow-pilgrims as they trot towards Canterbury:

Emily, I say, as was her custom, had arisen and was already dressed, for May will have no sluggishness at night. The season pricks every gentle heart and arouses it out of sleep and says, "Arise, and make your observance." Thus Emily remembered to rise and do honour to May. She was freshly clothed and her yellow hair was braided in a tress behind her back, a yard long, I believe; and in the garden at sunrise she walked up and down gathering the red and white flowers at will, to make a delicate garland for her head; and she sang heavenly, like an angel.²

Palamon happened to look out into the courtyard below, saw Emily and fell in love with her. He was followed by Arcite who wished to know the girl who had bewitched Palamon in a trice. Unfortunately, such was Emily's beauty, that he also fell in love with her. The cousins who had been enviable friends now became rivals in love. They flung harsh words against each other. Arcite said that Palamon only loved an ideal whereas his love was a passionate one for the real human being, Emily. Whoever heard of reason when people are carried away by love or anger? Arcite lashes out: "Yours is affection for holiness, and mine is love for a living creature." They knew their case was hopeless. They could not get out of this well-fortified castle. Theseus would not free them and no amount of ransom would get them freedom, for their captor was adamant.

The Knight moves the story forward with firm steps. Arcite continued:

A man must love in spite of all he could do! He cannot flee it, even if he should die, whether she is a maiden, married, or widow. And you are not likely as well to stand in her grace all your life, and no more shall I; for you know full well that you and I are doomed to prison perpetually, and no ransom shall help us. We strive like the hounds that fought all day for the bone and won nothing; amid all their rage a kite came and bore away the bone from between them.

2. Translations from 'The Knight's Tale' used in this essay are by Gerard NeCastro.

Therefore at the king's court each man for himself is the only rule, my brother. Love if you will, for I love and ever shall, dear brother, and truly this is all.

It looked like a no-win situation. However, Arcite gets his release through the good offices of his friend Perotheus who was also a bosom-friend of Theseus. Only Arcite should never be seen in Athens again. Love was one thing and a pledge was another. Palamon and Arcite had pledged to each other that one would always stand by the other if there was a situation that needed help. True to his pledge, Arcite returned to Athens in disguise. When they were prisoners in the tower they had come to hate each other because of Emily. Now Arcite's sorrow is very deep. How can he enjoy his freedom when his cousin is still imprisoned in the tower? In fact his freedom is now his imprisonment! He muses on the irony of his situation.

The Knight is quite eloquent here, no doubt watching the tear-stained eyes of the female pilgrims in the convoy: was there ever a man capable of such passion!

Surely, so we get along in this world. We seek diligently after felicity, but in truth often go wrong. Thus may we all say, and chiefly I, that supposed and had a great notion that if I could escape from prison I would in well-being and perfect joy, where now I am exiled from my happiness. Since I cannot see you, Emily, I am but dead; nothing can cure me.

Palamon is equally forlorn. In friendship or enmity, the cousins were together and that was some comfort. Now Palamon is all alone and thinks of Arcite in freedom. Perhaps he has been able to marry Emily. As for Palamon, he is doomed to die in this tower. It is now that he gives vent to his anger against the gods who are in charge of human destinies. The Greek Man-God relationship was studied thoroughly by Sri Aurobindo in its facets of love and hate. Classical Greek literature projecting this love-hate relationship gets reflected accurately in many passages in *Ilion* and in *Perseus the Deliverer*. One has to have a closeness to Greek literature as much as English literature when studying Sri Aurobindo for he drew from the two in great measures. Milton's famous poem 'L'Allegro' invokes the goddess Euphrosyne effusively and Sri Aurobindo writes a sonnet on her. There is a lilt in Sri Aurobindo's sonnet on the Greek goddess whom he likens to an understanding wife, for is not Euphrosyne the epitome of godly grace?

Child of the infant years, Euphrosyne,
Bird of my boyhood, youth's blithe deity!
If I have hymned thee not with lyric phrase,
Preferring Eros or Aglaia's praise,
Frown not, thou lovely spirit, leave me not.
Man worships the ungrasped. His vagrant thought

Still busy with the illimitable void
 Lives all the time by little things upbuoyed
 Which he contemns; the wife unsung remains
 Sharing his pleasures, taking half his pains,
 While to dream faces mounts the poet's song.
 Yet she makes not their lyric right her wrong,
 Knowing her homely eyes his sorrow's star
 Smiles at the eclipsing brow untouched by care.
 Content with human love lightly she yields
 The immortal fancy its Elysian fields.³

Hence Chaucer's 'The Knight's Tale', like Milton's poem, would have interested Sri Aurobindo deeply. Here were his friends from Greek literature, Palamon and Arcite, trying to battle with the unseen demons in their mind. Gods are so real in such critical situations! Of course, here is a grim scenario as Palamon rants against gods who play with the lives of humans:

O cruel gods, that govern this world with the bond of your eternal word, and write your laws and eternal decrees upon tables of adamant, how is mankind more bound unto you than the sheep that cowers in the fold? Man is slain like any beast, and dwells in prison and constraint, and is sick and in adversity, and often guiltless, in faith. What just governance is in this Providence that so torments the innocent? . . . Alas! I see a serpent or a thief, one that has done mischief to many faithful men, go at large and where he wishes. But I must be in prison on account of Saturn and the jealous rage of Juno, who has destroyed nearly all the blood of Thebes and laid waste its wide walls. And on the other hand, Venus slays me for jealousy and fear of Arcite.

As Shakespeare's Gloucester says in *King Lear*:

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,
 They kill us for their sport.

Actually, the gods appear to be kind to Arcite. Mercury, the Roman god who patronises people ready for daredevil acts comes to him. The god helps him change his image into an ugly one, not unlike the change that comes over King Nala, thanks to the grateful sting of Karkotaka. Arcite becomes a servant of Emily's chamberlain and calls himself Philostrate. Soon he rises in the estimation of the courtiers and before long becomes the squire in the royal chamber. Leaving him

3. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 187.

there, Chaucer takes us to Palamon who has been languishing in the tower. With due ‘humility’ for using the English language to tell so sublime a tale, the prime poet of England exclaims:

But Palamon, that love destreyneth so
That wood out of his wit he goth for wo?
And eek therto he is a prisoner
Perpetuelly, noght oonly for a yer.
Who koude ryme in englyssh proprely
His martirdom? for sothe it am nat I;
Therfore I passe as lightly as I may.⁴

Sri Aurobindo must have been charmed by such humility as well as the in-depth critical acumen of the English poet. Such a tale of courtly love would sound surely more poetic in French or Italian. What brings happiness to a lover of English poetry is that “Chaucer had captured the secret of ease, grace and lucidity from French romance poetry and had learned from the great Italians more force and compactness of expression than French verse had yet attained, a force diluted and a compactness lightened for his purpose”⁵ but preferred to write his work in English. He uses the tales of Greece or Rome or medieval Romances, but Chaucer’s style is for the common reader. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Whether the colour he gives happens to be realistic or romantic, it falls within the same formula. It is the clear and vivid reflection of external life, with sometimes just a first tinge of romantic illumination, in an observing mind that makes itself a shining poetic mirror.⁶

The whole world loves a lover and Chaucer’s sympathy is obviously with Palamon. Palamon drugs his jailor and escapes into the woods where he hears Arcite sing about his love for Emily. Palamon reveals himself and Arcite challenges him to a duel. As his cousin is unarmed, he would bring arms for both so that they could fight it out and gain Emily as the prize. Interestingly enough, there is no hatred deep in their hearts. They are cousins still and Arcite promises to bring food and bedding to Palamon for a comfortable night in the woods! “Truly is it said that neither love nor lordship will have a partner!”

4. But Palamon, whom love so torments that he goes out of his wit for woe! And he is a prisoner also, not just for a year but perpetually. Who could properly in English set to rhyme his martyrdom? Not I, in truth. Therefore I pass it over as lightly as I can.

5. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 67.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

As the two cousins meet on the next day and begin their duel without as much as a good morning, our story-teller Knight has plenty of drama for his pilgrims. The young men looked fierce like hunters of animals, says the Knight and gifts an epic simile:

Just as the hunter in the realm of Thrace stands at a gap in the forest with a spear, when bear or lion is hunted, and hears him come rushing through the branches, breaking boughs and leaves, and thinks, "Here comes my mortal foe; without fail, either he or I must die, for I must slay him at this moment, or he me, if ill comes to me;" so were they, and so their hue altered, as far off as each could know the other.

Of course, as a poet, Chaucer introduces some elegant variation. They are both in love, and equal in battle. But Palamon is likened to a lion, Arcite to a tiger. As they fight fiercely, the Knight takes the pilgrims to Theseus who has decided to go on a hunt that very day. His wife Hippolyta and her sister Emily, dressed in gorgeous green, also go with him. Theseus finds the cousins battling furiously and stops them and chides them for fighting a duel without a judge. Palamon tells him that it would be best if he were to kill him and Arcite and adds that his opponent is Arcite who has deceived the king as Philostrate. Theseus is taken aback and orders the death of Palamon.

So far the tale has had only men as active characters. Actually the pilgrims to Canterbury include women too. Chaucer gets the ladies in his tale into the act. The Queen gives the lead by beginning to weep and is followed by Emily. Then all the ladies who were accompanying the Queen also began to weep. They all kneel at the King's feet for mercy and begging him to spare the contenders. There is a dramatic change in the King and he looks up with a smile. His speech on the vagaries of the God of Love is a precursor to Shakespeare's immortal sonnets which will soon take the English language to noontime glory.

Ah, the God of Love! God bless! How mighty and great a lord he is! Against his might no obstacles can help; well may he be called a god by reason of his miracles, for of every heart he can make what he will. Lo, here are this Palamon and this Arcite, who have freely left my prison, and might have lived royally in Thebes, and know that I am their mortal foe and that their death lies in my power; yet love, in spite of their two eyes, has brought them here both to die! Look now, is not that a high folly? Who can be a fool unless he is in love? Behold how they bleed, for God's sake in heaven! Are they not well arrayed? Thus has their lord, the god of love, paid their wages and their reward for serving him! And yet they who serve love deem themselves wise, for anything that may happen!

Indeed, what fools these mortals be! Yet, he had himself been a lover once and he would pardon them this time. All he wanted now was that the cousins should go free for fifty weeks, come back with their chosen knights and contend in his presence to win the hand of Emily. The cousins were delighted for both were heroes and both were lovers and were bound to honour in the romance tradition. Meanwhile Theseus built a grand theatre to hold the combat between Palamon and Arcite a year hence. In this circular theatre innumerable people could sit and watch without their sight being blocked.

Images of gods, a variety of ornaments, carvings and paintings. It was all a riot of plenty and Theseus spent lavishly in setting up this building with appropriate ancillaries. For instance the shrine of Venus had images of "Pleasure and Hope, Desire and Foolhardiness, Beauty and Youth, Mirth, Riches, Love-charms and Violence, Deceits, Flattery, Extravagance, Anxiety and Jealousy"! To put it succinctly, the entire classical mythos was there, a kind of Universal Exhibition. Chaucer is down to earth and even notes the presence of Julius Caesar and Antony as images in the shrine of Mars and explains the anachronism too!

And above, in a tower, was depicted Conquest sitting in great state, with the sharp sword hanging above him by a subtle thread of twine. The slaughter of Julius Caesar was painted there, and of great Nero and Antony. Albeit they were unborn at that time, yet so long before were their deaths through the menacing of Mars depicted in clear heraldry. So was it shown in those portrayals even as it is drawn at large in the stars of heaven, who shall be slain and who die for love.

The awaited day came. Palamon and Arcite returned, each with one hundred knights in tow. We get details of the dress codes of those days of chivalry and valour. If Palamon was accompanied by the King of Thrace, Arcite was companioned by Emetreus, King of India. King of India? He seems to have been Chaucer's invention, though with tongue in cheek he says that we can read in histories about this "kyng of Inde" who came riding a steed that was covered by a cloth of gold. Anyway, we get to have a colourful description, in tune with the fabled riches of Inde.

A short mantle hung upon his shoulders, stiff with red rubies sparkling as fire. His crisp hair ran in rings, yellow, glittering as the sun. His nose was high, his lips full, his eyes bright citron, and his colour sanguine, with a few freckles between yellow and black sprinkled in his face; and as a lion he cast his looking about. His age I estimate at five-and-twenty; his beard was well begun to spring, and his voice as a thunderous trumpet. Upon his head he wore a garland of green laurel, fresh and lively to see; and upon his hand he bore for his pleasure a tame eagle, white as any lily.

On the morning of the combat Palamon, Emily and Arcite pray separately to their gods and get indications of help. Naturally this leads to strife between Venus (standing for Palamon) and Mars (committed to Arcite). Jupiter tries vainly for peace. The aged Saturn solves the problem with his ingenious plan. “One can outrun the old, but not outwit them.” The final movement in ‘The Knight’s Tale’ is how this plan gets worked out in the end.

The battle is on and the heroes showcase their exceptional valour. A sword thrust at Palamon by a follower of Arcite brings him down on earth. But before Arcite can claim his victory’s prize, his own horse throws him down. Mortally wounded, Arcite requests Emily to marry Palamon who is a noble person. Gods and men have no more complaint and all is well that ends well.

King Theseus comes off with flying colours. Generous to a fault, he shows courtesy to all those who had come with the cousins. After all no one had been ‘defeated’ and death by a fall could happen in any friendly tournament. The King proclaims that both the sides had emerged victorious equally, gives them rich gifts and a warm send-off.

As death stares him in the face, Arcite becomes the friendly cousin of olden days. He sends for Palamon and Emily, and tells the girl words of wisdom, affection and love. He has wasted too long a time in hatred and jealousy.

And may Jupiter, so wise, guide my soul, to speak kindly of a lover and faithfully on all points, that is to say, of fidelity, honour and knighthood, prudence, humility, station and noble lineage, nobility and all such virtues — so may Jupiter have concern for my heart, as I know of none now in this world so worthy of love as Palamon, who serves you and will his entire life. And if you shall ever wed, forget not the noble Palamon.

Everyone was enveloped by deep sorrow. Theseus was comforted by his father Aegeus. The funeral of Arcite is held amidst great solemnity, with Emily lighting the pyre. The Knight brings the tale to an end with a philosophical discourse on the transience of earthly life and the need for acceptance of the inevitable. He then celebrates the marriage of Palamon and Emily.

Now Palamon is living in complete happiness, in bliss, in wealth, and in health. And Emily loves him so tenderly, and he serves her so gently, that never was there a word between them of jealousy or any other displeasure. Thus ends Emily and Palamon. And may God save all this lovely company! Amen.

An auspicious ending to a tale of love, battle, hate and bravery. The ladies travelling with the Knight must have been relieved at the ending, a good augury for the plentiful story-telling on the cards. To choose from this variety is difficult. Having had a heavy dosage of love and chivalry, we would now do well to take up a tale which is all meaningful laughter.

(To be continued)



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