

# MOTHER INDIA

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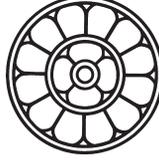
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,  
A new light breaks upon the earth,  
A new world is born.  
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXVII

No. 9

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## O LIFE, THY BREATH IS BUT A CRY

O Life, thy breath is but a cry to the Light  
Immortal, whence has come thy swift delight,  
Thy grasp.

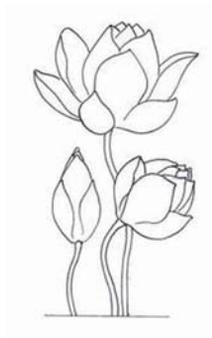
All things in vain thy hands seize;  
Earth's music fails, the notes cease  
Or rasp.

Aloud thou callst to blind Fate,  
"Remove the bar, the gold gate  
Unhasp."

But never hast thou the goal yet of thy race  
Neared, nor thrilled with the ineffable Face,  
The clasp.

SRI AUROBINDO

*(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 651)*



# SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of June 2014)

## MEETING THE MOTHER

### The Morning Pranam

No one should look upon the Pranam either as a formal routine or an obligatory ceremony or think himself under any compulsion to come there. The object of the Pranam is not that sadhaks should offer a formal or ritual daily homage to the Mother, but that the sadhaks may receive along with the Mother's blessings whatever spiritual help or influence they are in a condition to receive or assimilate. It is important to maintain a quiet and collected atmosphere for that purpose.

\*

The Mother wants you to say to X that if he feels any reluctance or any other contrary feeling in making Pranam, he must remember that there is no *obligation* to come — for him or anyone else. He must feel himself perfectly free not to come, if he does not want.

27 November 1931

\*

The Mother gives in both ways. Through the eyes it is to the psychic, through the hand to the material.

29 September 1932

\*

*This morning I was late for Pranam. On my way there, I met X, who told me, "Why hurry? One can have pranam everywhere." I said, "Yes, but Mother is there." He said, "Mother is everywhere." I could not answer him, but what I feel is that there is a special Power in the hall where Mother is. When I am conscious, I feel something special and different near Mother. Also by her blessing I often feel an action of Power working on my head. So I don't think there is no difference if Mother is there or not.*

You are quite right in that. Otherwise the Mother would not be here in a body.

*X has a developed and advanced soul and he knows things which are impossible for me to understand. I often think I have no soul, or perhaps I have a soul but it is quite immature.*

You have a soul and a beautiful one. Only it was covered up and not looking out through the instruments — now it is coming to the surface and all that will change.

18 September 1933

\*

*Does the Mother work from the overmind at the Pranam?*

Not from the ordinary overmind, but from the Power above it. Naturally the overmind has to be used as a channel.

22 November 1933

\*

*Shall we ever be able to understand the Mother's working at the Pranam? We feel only that something has been received. We do not know what she gave or how we received it or what is the inner meaning of her putting her hand on our head. We are not conscious of what she is giving us while gazing into our eyes. Are these mysteries to remain uninterpreted forever?*

You have to develop the inner intuitive response first — i.e. to think and perceive less with the mind and more with the inner consciousness. Most people do everything with the mind and how can the mind know? The mind depends on the senses for its knowledge.

10 July 1936

### **Experiences during Pranam**

*Today I was meditating in the Pranam Hall. As soon as the Mother took her seat, I saw in vision a range of mountains from which white light was coming out. What is the meaning? From what plane does it come?*

Mental. The mountain is the symbol of the ascent from the lower to the higher. The white light is the Mother's light, the light of the Divine Consciousness descending from the heights.

7 August 1933

\*

*Today, looking at the Mother at the Pranam, there was a good receptivity. She stood before me a while longer than usual, and I experienced her working. The whole of my head was filled with nothing but her light. Is this true? Did she really do that?*

She does so every time, only today you not only received but were consciously receptive.

8 May 1934

\*

*After today's Pranam I experienced an unimaginable depth in the heart and a great fire bursting out of it.*

That is of course the psychic depth and the psychic fire.

5 May 1936

\*

*Today when I was making pranam, I felt that this body must be crushed to pieces and laid at the Mother's feet. I also felt an emotion in my heart. What is the meaning of this emotion?*

It was some feeling of aspiration in the vital. But the form is exaggerated. The body has not to be crushed to pieces but purified and made into a body in which the Divine can dwell.

### **Right Way to Make Pranam**

If you wept this time and not on the other occasions, it was because you were more open — more ready for the psychic being to rise to the surface. The Mother has noticed in this respect a great progress in you and what you felt today was the sign of this opening.

1933

\*

*Whatever connection I have with the Mother lasts only half a minute during the Pranam; whatever I have to give or take happens during that time. The whole day's sadhana depends upon those thirty seconds.*

Quite a wrong idea. The Mother's contact is there all the day and the night also. If one keeps the right contact with her inwardly all day, the Pranam will bear its right fruit, for you will be in the right condition to receive. To make the whole day depend upon the Pranam, the whole inner attitude depend on the most outer aspect of the outer contact is to turn the whole thing topsy-turvy. It is the fundamental mistake made by the physical mind and vital which is the cause of the whole trouble.

16 March 1935

\*

*My psychic knows that whatever our condition — full of inertia, attacks and difficulties — all must disappear when one gets the Mother's touch at Pranam. Why then do so many say that they return from Pranam in the same bad state in which they came?*

Naturally, when there is not the opening they will feel nothing, for the consciousness will not respond — the Force then works behind the veil to prepare things, but gives no immediate visible result.

6 April 1935

\*

The Mother deals with each one in a different way, according to their need and their nature, not according to any fixed mental rule. It would be absurd for her to do the same thing with everybody as if all were machines which had to be touched and handled in the same way. It does not at all mean that she has more affection for one than for another or those she touches in a particular way are better sadhaks or less so. The sadhaks think in that way because they are full of ignorance and ego. Instead of thinking whether the Mother favours one more or the other less, comparing and watching what she does, they ought to be concerned at Pranam with only their own spiritual reception of her influence. Pranam is for that and not for these other things which have nothing to do with sadhana.

Jealousy and envy are things common to human nature, but these are the very things that a sadhak ought to throw out of himself. Otherwise why is he a sadhak at all? He is supposed to be here for seeking the Divine — but in the seeking for the Divine, jealousy, envy, anger, etc. have no place. They are movements of the ego and can only create obstacles to the union with the Divine.

It is much better to remember that one is seeking for the Divine and make that the whole governing idea and aim of the life. It is that which pleases the Mother more than anything else; these jealousies and envies and competitions for her favour can only displease and distress her.

31 October 1935

\*

The reason of the difference in approaching the Mother is that formerly you came to her with your external being, external mind and vital and in your vital there were things it did not want the Mother to see or change or else it felt uncomfortable under the pressure of the Mother's force at pranam, because that was a pressure on it to change. But now you are approaching the Mother with your soul and that brings with it the true feeling and true relation it has always had with the Mother. Besides, your mind and vital — even the outer mind and vital — are now open and willing and glad to share in the true psychic feeling and relation.

The heaviness in the head due to the pressure is pleasant and not harmful because it is due to the higher force pressing down and bringing into the head something of the substance of the higher consciousness.

1 November 1935

\*

If there is an obstacle at pranam, it must be something wrong in the attitude — perhaps the old error of expecting some outward sign of love, approval or favour from the Mother. The pranam is not for that, but for receiving from her inwardly through the meditation and through the pranam itself. Nothing must be demanded — the consciousness must be surrendered and quiet to receive what she thinks best to give.

24 May 1936

\*

I think it is better for you not to come to the Mother just now, until you have found the true inner poise. At the present time it is far better for all not to come to her as a routine, but only when the being is open and ready to receive.

### The Mother's Expression at Pranam

*When one does something wrong, the Mother shows us at Pranam that she does not like it. Does she do this so that we will not make the same mistake again? When one does a right action and she gives herself fully at Pranam, does it not mean that she is happy with our right action? If she is not showing her liking or disliking at Pranam, then what is she showing us by her special expression?*

She wants to show you nothing; it has nothing to do with the doings or misdoings of the sadhaks. Pranam is not intended for watching the Mother's expression or what she does with this one or that one or in what way she smiles or with how much of her hand she blesses — the sadhaks' preoccupation with these things is childish and for the most part full of mistaken inferences, imaginations, often curiosity, desire for gossip, criticism etc. Such a state of mind is a hindrance, not a help to sadhana. The proper attitude is one of self-dedication and simple and straightforward receptivity to what the Mother wishes to give, an undisturbed and undisturbing openness to her working in the being.

\*

Many of the sadhaks are in the habit of thinking Mother is displeased, not smiling at them, angry when it is quite otherwise. This usually happens when their own consciousness is not at peace or when they are thinking or conscious of faults or wrong movements or wrong acts that they may have done. The idea that the Mother is angry is an imagination; if there is anything not as usual, it is in the sadhak himself and not in the Mother.

\*

*What came between the Mother and myself when our eyes met at Pranam? Up till the moment our eyes met, everything was all right. Then looking into them, there was this momentary repulsion and shrinking.*

I suppose the shrinking and repulsion were in yourself? for there was none and could be none in the Mother. It must be some part in yourself (physical consciousness perhaps?) that is not in the Light and may not want to be.

31 January 1932

\*

All fear ought to be cast out. This movement of fear belongs to a still unchanged part of the vital which answers to the old ideas, feelings and reactions. Its only effect is to make you misinterpret the Mother's attitude or the intention in her words or looks or expression. If the Mother becomes serious or has an ironic smile, that does not in the least mean that she is angry or has withdrawn her affection; on the contrary, it is with those with whom she is most inwardly intimate that she feels most free to become like that — even to give them severe chidings. They in their turn understand her and do not get upset or afraid, — they only turn to look inside themselves and see what it is on which she is putting her pressure. That pressure they regard as a privilege and a sign of her grace. Fear stands in the way of this complete intimacy and confidence and creates only misunderstanding; you must cast it out altogether.

22 May 1932

\*

There is no chance of the Mother giving you the “look” you fear. On your side do not imagine one when it is not there — any number of people are still doing that.

### **The Mother's Smile at Pranam**

*After coming from Pranam I felt that Mother did not smile at me, and then there was a very slight feeling of resistance to her somewhere. Is this what you meant when you wrote about the hostiles throwing inertia into the physical mind?*

At the time it so happened that the Mother gave you a smile of welcome and approval, but she felt someone saying, “He will not notice that you have smiled” — it was the hostile formation. This is how they work — by this kind of obscuration to blind the mind and senses first and on the basis of a wrong observation or failure of observation build up suggestions of a depressing or disturbing character. It happens to many sadhaks at pranam time to make this kind of mistake about the Mother's smile or expression and to worry themselves thinking she is displeased with them. This is a kind of deception against which one must be on one's guard and such suggestions must always be rejected.

12 February 1933

\*

You should certainly throw away the vital demand and the disturbance which it creates in your sadhana. Mother gives her smile to all and she does not withhold it from some and give it to others. When people think otherwise, it is because some vital disturbance, depression or demand or some movement of jealousy, envy or competition distorts their vision.

27 February 1933

\*

*Some days after Pranam I feel intensely happy and a wave of serene calm and joy passes over me. On other days, though there is calmness, there is no intensity of joy. I think it has something to do with the Mother's smile.*

Don't start having that idea. It is quite untrue and those who indulge it raise vital reactions and imaginations in themselves and provoke much unnecessary trouble.

*If her smile is hearty and beaming, there is a proportionate reaction in me. But is that the true cause of my joy or does it depend on the inner state of my psychic being, of which I know nothing?*

It is in yourself that there is the variation — not of the psychic being which is always all right, but of the rest, mind, vital or body.

4 March 1933

\*

Your idea about Mother's mysterious smile is your own imagination — Mother says that she smiled with the utmost kindness and took the most helpful attitude possible towards you. I had written to you already that you must not put these erroneous imaginations between yourself and the Mother; for they push the help given away from you. These imaginations and their effect on you are suggested by the same vital forces that are disturbing you so that you may not get free from the disturbance.

My help and the Mother's help are there — you have only to keep yourself open to it to recover.

27 March 1933

\*

*Today my lower vital rose up and disturbed me because the Mother did not smile at me. For years and years I have suffered so much from unquietness at the thought that Mother is displeased with me.*

These things ought to be entirely rejected. When they rise they often twist the consciousness so much as to falsify sometimes the vision itself and always the feeling. The Mother has observed constantly that the people on whom she has smiled tell her she has been glowering and severe or that she has been displeased, when there was no displeasure in her and then on the strength of that they go wrong altogether.

10 April 1933

\*

Your mistake is to find a “censorious touch” in the smile where there is none. When the Mother extended her forgiveness — which meant there was something to forgive, her judgment was founded on your own letters. You seem to think that the Mother in some way condemned you and was partial to the others. Her view was that all were in the wrong and each had need of forgiveness — and each asked for and had it.

How is it that your mind still returns on these things instead of going forward to the difficult spiritual change? The Mother had put them behind her, for a thing repented is a thing abolished. Be assured that there was no remembrance of them in her smile or her attitude towards you.

27 May 1933

\*

*The Mother did not smile at me today at Pranam. Did she see something very untoward in me?*

It is a mistake to think that the Mother’s not smiling means either displeasure or disapproval of something wrong in the sadhak. It is very often merely a sign of absorption or inner concentration. On this occasion Mother was putting a question to your soul.

31 July 1933

\*

*The physical being feels the need of the Mother’s smile when it meets her look. Is it a kind of desire?*

Yes. There has to be no disturbance when it does not come (knowing that its absence is not a sign of displeasure or anything of the kind) — then the Ananda of receiving it will be purer.

11 December 1933

\*

*Yesterday when I did pranam, the Mother did not smile at me. Not seeing her smile, I spent the whole day miserably.*

On that day Mother did not smile at anybody. It was not personal to you. A particular Power was acting in her which did not act in the ordinary way.

10 April 1934

\*

*I felt at Pranam as if Mother withdrew her smile, but later I realised that she did smile — and even if she did not smile I received peace and became more inward at that time. Besides, after so many disturbances and wrongs on my part, I do not always deserve a smile. So either way I do not worry.*

It is usually imagination or impression, at least that has been seen in most cases. When the Mother does not smile, it is not from displeasure but in almost every case from some reason not connected with any action of the sadhak, but either from absorption or concentration on something that is being done. As you say, it does not matter — what is important is to receive what has to be received.

4 November 1934

\*

*Why do I rejoice only when Mother smiles at me or gives me a special opportunity? I ought to rejoice in all situations. If after living so many years near you and her I still feel like this, I am not worthy of being here.*

It is a very strange logic. Even among those who have made the most progress or been always the closest to the Mother, this or similar feelings still recur. It is not that they have not to be overcome, but to argue from their persistence that one is unfit to stay here is to make a large conclusion on a very small basis. This is again the kind of suggestion that comes in from the surrounding physical Ignorance. Things like these last so obstinately because they have become habits or recurrent feelings in

the external physical being; they will disappear when the external being becomes filled with the Mother's light.

30 May 1935

\*

The Mother has been always specially careful in your case not to show displeasure or censure of any kind to you. To the others also she smiles always in the same way, for she knows the consequences to herself if she does not. But in spite of that, even when she smiles most kindly, they write to her that she has shown displeasure, withheld her smile, smiled in an ironical or blasting way, that they will commit suicide, go away etc. etc. The whole thing has become most intolerable and if the Pranam is to be nothing but an occasion for this kind of thing, it is better the Pranam should cease.

December 1936

\*

*What sort of things can come under the category of "demand and desire"?  
What is the exact form of "demand and desire"?*

There are no special sort of things — demand and desire can cover all things whatsoever — they are subjective, not objective and have no special form. Demand is when you claim something to get or possess, desire is a general term. If one expects that the Mother shall smile at him at the Pranam and feels wronged if one does not get it, that is a demand. If one wants it and grieves at not getting it, but without revolt or sense of an unjust deprivation that shows desire. If one feels joy at her smile, but remains calm in its absence knowing that all the Mother does is good, then there is no demand or desire.

13 September 1938

SRI AUROBINDO

*(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 530-41)*

## ‘THE CALM SERENITY OF PERFECT CERTITUDE’

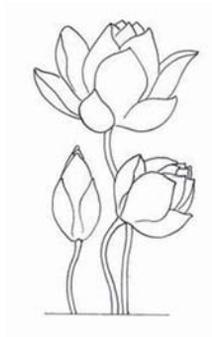
May 2, 1914

BEYOND all human conceptions, even the most marvellous, beyond all human feelings, even the most sublime, beyond the most magnificent aspirations and the purest flights, beyond Love, Knowledge and the Oneness of Being, I would enter into constant communion with Thee, O Lord. Free from all shackles I shall be Thyself; it will be Thou who wilt see the world through this body; it will be Thou who wilt act in the world through this instrument.

In me is the calm serenity of perfect certitude.

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 133)*



## **ARYA**

*(Continued from the issue of July 2014)*

VI. Some Clarifications

VII. Matters Practical

## VI. SOME CLARIFICATIONS

### Outer activity

**Disciple:** Do you promise that the world of the Gods will descend?

**Sri Aurobindo:** I don't promise anything. "If the Supramental comes down," that is what I say.

**Disciple:** Can it be obstructed by us?

**Sri Aurobindo:** No. Yet you can help it.

**Disciple:** Would it not create a noise in the world?

**Sri Aurobindo:** You must not expect to make noise. It is a *silent* work. Publicity would attract hostile forces. You can take up external work only when it is *in* you: when you are doing the Sadhana in the mind then outer activities like the *Arya* and writing, etc., can go on. But when I came down to the vital I stopped all that.

(Evening Talks: 500)

### Yogic force

*Methinks you are making just a little too much of the Yoga-Force, when you speak of poetry, music, painting, etc. I will take Dilip's classical example, to illustrate my viewpoint. He himself, and everybody, agrees that what progress he has made in music and literature has been greatly accelerated by the Yogic Force. But why? Well, because the things were in him, and if he went on cultivating them as assiduously, sincerely, earnestly, outside as he has done here, can you say that he wouldn't have taken such strides in those directions? For any real and remarkable achievement, the main issue is to be born with the capacity and then to have the determination to develop it. Then Force or no Force, one will have the result. Well?*

Will you explain to me how Dilip who could not write a single good poem and had no power over rhythm and metre before he came here, suddenly, not after long "assiduous" efforts blossomed into a poet, rhythmist and metrist after he came here? Why was Tagore dumbfounded by the "lame man throwing away his crutches and running" freely and surely on the paths of rhythm? Why was it that I who never understood or cared for painting, suddenly in a single hour by an opening of vision got the eye to see and the mind of understanding about colour, line and design? How was it that I who was unable to understand and follow a metaphysical argument and whom a page of Kant or Hegel or Hume or even Berkeley left either

dazed and uncomprehending and fatigued or totally uninterested because I could not fathom or follow, suddenly began writing pages of the stuff as soon as I started the *Arya* and am now reputed to be a great philosopher? How is it that at a time when I felt it difficult to produce more than a paragraph of prose from time to time and more than a rare poem short and laboured, perhaps one in two months, suddenly after concentrating and practising Pranayam daily began to write pages and pages in a single day and kept sufficient faculty to edit a big daily paper and afterwards to write 60 pages of philosophy every month? Kindly reflect a little and don't talk facile nonsense. Even if a thing can be done in a moment or a few days by Yoga which would ordinarily take a long, "assiduous, sincere and earnest" cultivation, that would of itself show the power of the Yoga-force. But here a faculty that did not exist appears quickly and spontaneously or impotence changes into highest potency or an obstructed talent changes with equal rapidity into fluent and facile sovereignty. If you deny that evidence, no evidence will convince you, because you are determined to think otherwise.

(*Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo: 369-70*)

### **Karmayoga**

*If we with our old ideas, are bewildered and question you repeatedly about it, please excuse us.*

Yes, but if I have to write the same thing over and over again for each sadhak, — well!

Let one thing be clear — I do not mean by work action done in the ego and the ignorance, for the satisfaction of the ego and in the drive of rajasic desire. There can be no karmayoga without the will to get rid of ego, rajas and desire which are the seals of ignorance.

Another thing, I do not mean philanthropy or the service of humanity or all the rest of the things — moral or idealistic — which men substitute for the deeper truth of works.

I mean by work action done for the Divine and more and more in union with the Divine — for the Divine alone and nothing else. Naturally that is not easy at the beginning, any more than deep meditation and luminous knowledge are easy or even true love and bhakti are easy. But like the others it has to be begun in the right spirit and attitude, with the right will in you, then all the rest will come.

Works done in this spirit are quite as effective as bhakti or contemplation. One gets by the rejection of desire, rajas and ego a peace and purity into which the peace ineffable can descend — one gets by the dedication of one's will to the Divine, by the merging of one's will in the Divine will the death of ego and the enlarging into

the cosmic consciousness or else the uplifting into what is above the cosmic, — one experiences the separation of Purusha from Prakriti and is liberated from the shackles of the outer nature; one becomes aware of one's inner being, and feels the outer as an instrument; one feels the universal Force doing one's works and the self or Purusha watching or witness but free; one feels all one's works taken from one and done by the universal or the supreme Mother or by the Divine Power controlling and acting from behind the heart. By constant reference of all one's will and works to the Divine, love and adoration grow, the psychic being comes forward. By the reference to the Power above one can come to feel it above and its descent and the opening to an increasing consciousness and knowledge. Finally works, bhakti and knowledge join together and self-perfection becomes possible — what we call the transformation of the nature.

These results certainly do not come all at once; they come more or less slowly, more or less completely according to the condition and growth of the being. There is no royal road to the divine realisation.

This is the karmayoga as it is laid down in the Gita and developed by myself in the *Arya*. It is founded not on speculation and reasoning but on experience. It does not exclude meditation and it certainly does not exclude bhakti, for the self-offering to the Divine, the consecration of all oneself to the Divine which is the very essence of this karmayoga are essentially a movement of Bhakti. Only it does exclude a life-fleeing exclusive meditation or an involved Bhakti shut up in its own inner dream taken as the whole movement of the Yoga. One may have hours of pure absorbed meditation or of the inner motionless adoration and ecstasy, but they are not the whole of the integral Yoga.

*(Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo: 85-86)*

### **Arya style and method not for a weekly**

Pondicherry  
Sept. 2. 1920

Dear M.

. . . The Standard Bearer is, I am afraid, subject to the criticism passed on it; the criticism is general and I felt it myself. It is a sort of weekly "Arya"; but the Arya style and method are not what is wanted for a weekly paper. What you need to do, is to make the ideas easy to the people and give them a practical direction. At present you give only a difficult philosophy and abstract principles. I shall write more about this matter hereafter as soon as I find time.

A. G.  
(CWSA 36: 248)

### **Global thinking**

“To contact” is a phrase that has established itself and it is futile to try to keep America at arm’s length any longer; “global” also has established itself and it is too useful and indeed indispensable to reject; there is no other word that can express exactly the same shade of meaning. I heard it first from Arjava who described the language of *Arya* as expressing a global thinking and I at once caught it up as the right and only word for certain things, for instance, the thinking in masses which is a frequent characteristic of the Overmind.

(CWSA 35: 158)

### **Sitting on the path**

It is not clear what your Guru meant by my sitting on the path; that could have been true of the period between 1915 and 1920 when I was writing the *Arya*, but the sadhana and the work were waiting for the Mother’s coming. In 1923 or 1924 I could not be described as sitting on the path, so far as the sadhana was concerned, but it may perhaps be only a metaphor or symbol for the outward form of the work not yet being ready. The statement about my having gone too high to redescend for work in the world was made in almost the identical terms by another Yogi also; it referred to my condition at the time and cannot be taken as anything more.

(CWSA 35: 269)

### **Mental account**

*What is meant by: 1. the psychic nature, 2. spiritual nature, 3. supramental nature, 4. divine nature?*

To answer these questions it would be necessary to write a volume. I have written some letters about the psychic being and the self — you can get hold of those and read them.

Supramental nature can only be understood if one understands what supermind is and that is not altogether possible for mind so long as it does not open into the higher planes. So far as a mental account can be given, I have done it in the *Arya*.

Divine Nature is the nature of the divine Consciousness, Truth, Peace, Light, Purity, Knowledge, Power, Ananda on whichever plane it manifests. Supermind is one plane of the Divine Nature. The Divine is Sachchidananda.

(CWSA 35: 87)

### **Arya and ‘Overmind’**

*In the whole of The Synthesis of Yoga [as originally published in the Arya] there is nowhere any mention of Overmind. If there is anything in that book similar to what you now call Overmind, it would be in the last seven chapters.*

At the time when these chapters were written, the name “overmind” had not been found, so there is no mention of it. What is described in these chapters is the action of the supermind when it descends into the overmind plane and takes up the overmind workings and transforms them. It was intended in later chapters to show how difficult even this was and how many levels there were between human mind and supermind and how even supermind, descending, could get mixed with the lower action and turned into something that was less than the true Truth. But these later chapters were not written.

(CWSA 35: 144)

### **Overmind not the same as supramental reason**

*Is Overmind the same as what you call “supramental reason” in the Arya?*

No, — although there is a supramentalised overmind which is not very different from it, but overmind has always something relative in its knowledge.

(CWSA 35: 145)

### **No mention of Overmind**

*In the Arya there is no mention of the Overmind. You have mentioned the supramental or Divine Reason in the gradations of the Supermind, but from its description it is quite different from the Overmind. Why was the Overmind not mentioned and clearly distinguished from the Supermind in the Arya?*

The distinction has not been made in the *Arya* because at that time what I now call the Overmind was supposed to be an inferior plane of the Supermind. But that was because I was seeing them from the Mind. The true defect of Overmind, the limitation in it which gave rise to a world of Ignorance is seen fully only when one looks at it from the physical consciousness, from the result (Ignorance in Matter) to the cause (Overmind division of the Truth). In its own plane Overmind seems to be only a divided, many-sided play of the Truth, so can easily be taken by the Mind as a supramental province. Mind also when flooded by the Overmind lights feels itself living in a surprising revelation of divine Truth. The difficulty comes when we deal with the vital and still more with the physical. Then it becomes imperative to face

the difficulty and to make a sharp distinction between Overmind and Supermind — for it then becomes evident that the Overmind Power (in spite of its lights and splendours) is not sufficient to overcome the Ignorance because it is itself under the law of Division out of which came the Ignorance. One has to pass beyond and supramentalise Overmind so that mind and all the rest may undergo the final change.

(CWSA 35: 145-46)

### Arya and the Supermind

**Disciple:** What name can be given to your philosophy — *viśiṣṭādwaita*, *kevalādwaita*, or *śuddhādwaita*?

**Sri Aurobindo:** Or, *dwaitawāda* of Madhvacharya or *dwaitādwaita* of Nimbarka? Unfortunately all philosophy is mental, i.e., intellectual, while the Supramental is not mental. Therefore, it is not possible to express it completely — because the mind can't. Even when Supermind takes up the task, it only gives indications, gives to the mind some side of itself, some aspect.

**Disciple:** But you have written philosophy in the *Arya*.

**Sri Aurobindo:** *Arya* was written because of Richard. After starting it he went away and left me alone to fill 64 pages per month. *The Life Divine* is not philosophy but fact. It contains what I have realised and seen. I think many people would object to calling it philosophy. Of course, there are elements of all the systems in the *Arya*. But Supermind would remain even if the whole of the *Arya* were rubbed out or had never been written. Supermind is not to be philosophised about, it is to be lived.

**Disciple:** When one lives in the Supermind then there will be perfect expression of it, I believe.

**Sri Aurobindo:** Not necessarily. I have been telling you it can't be fully expressed. It can be experienced and lived. Do you think living it is inferior to expressing it?

(*Evening Talks*: 233-34)

### Supermind

*X says further: "The Supermind will not descend into any of the sadhaks. I have read in the Arya about the nature of the Supermind. It is so great that no human being can bear it in itself."*

I do not know to what passage of the *Arya* the reference is. It is certain that the Supermind is far above the human mind and cannot be grasped by the human mind. That is the reason why this Yoga has to be undertaken — so as to make man grow out of the human mind and prepare him for supermind.

(CWSA 35: 349)

### **Merging in the sun**

*I don't think X was referring to any particular passage of the Arya. But he has the impression that you have said that the supermind is so far above the human mind that the mind cannot grasp it. So he says that it is impossible for the supermind to come down into a human being. Have you spoken to him about this?*

No. It was the old idea that human consciousness can reach and merge in the Sun (Supermind) — by Samadhi, I suppose — but cannot redescend from there.

(CWSA 35: 350)

### **Working of the Supermind**

*Would you say something in brief about how the Supermind works on the earth consciousness in order to transform it?*

No. I have never written on that except in *Arya* and do not propose to start now. It would be mere words to the mind which would be likely to make its own wrong constructions about it. The sadhak should first get the higher consciousness down and know something by experience of the higher planes before trying to know what is the Supermind.

(CWSA 35: 284-85)

### **Only by the supramentalisation of the consciousness**

*You write in Bases of Yoga, "The whole principle of this Yoga is to give oneself entirely to the Divine alone . . . and to bring down into ourselves . . . all the transcendent light . . . and Ananda of the supramental Divine. . . ." And then, "It is only after becoming one with the supramental Divine . . ." and also, "It is only the bringing down of the supramental Light, Power and Bliss . . ." These passages indicate that it is possible for the Jiva to rise up into and bring down the supramental consciousness. But in the Arya you define the supermind as the truth-will of Sachchidananda. How could any human being except one who has come for the divine manifestation reach or bring down the supermind? This is something for the Divine alone.*

It is the very principle of this Yoga that only by the supramentalisation of the consciousness which means rising above mind to supermind and the descent of the supermind into the nature can the final transformation be made. So if nobody can

rise above mind to supermind or obtain the descent of the supermind, then logically this Yoga becomes impossible. Every being is in essence one with the Divine and in his individual being a portion of the Divine, so there is no insuperable bar to his becoming supramental. It is no doubt impossible for the human nature being mental in its basis to overcome the Ignorance and rise to or obtain the descent of the Supermind by its own unaided effort, but by surrender to the Divine it can be done. One brings it down into the earth Nature through his own consciousness and so opens the way for the others, but the change has to be repeated in each consciousness to become individually effective.

(CWSA 35: 135)

### **Overmind view of things**

About Nirvana:

When I wrote in the *Arya*, I was setting forth an overmind view of things to the mind and putting it in mental terms, that was why I had sometimes to use logic. For in such a work — mediating between the intellect and the supra-intellectual — logic has a place, though it cannot have the chief place it occupies in purely mental philosophies. The Mayavadin himself labours to establish his point of view or his experience by a rigorous logical reasoning. Only, when it comes to an explanation of Maya he, like the scientist dealing with Nature, can do no more than arrange and organise his ideas of the process of this universal mystification; he cannot explain how or why his illusionary mystifying Maya came into existence. He can only say, “Well, but it is there.”

(CWSA 35: 248)

### **Use of the term ‘chaitya purusha’ in the *Arya***

**Sri Aurobindo:** Did you refer to the dictionary to find out whether Chaitya Purusha can mean the psychic being, the soul?

**Disciple:** I did, but the word is not given there in that sense; it only carries the sense of Chaitya of the Buddhists and the Jains.

**Sri Aurobindo:** That is quite another meaning. But what about this one?

**Disciple:** But you have yourself used it in the *Arya* at two places.

**Sri Aurobindo:** How is that? Where?

**Disciple:** In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, in the fourth chapter about the Four Aids; you have mentioned there Chaitya Guru, the inner guide.

**Disciple:** In Vaishnavite literature it means the portion — Amsha — of the Divine which guides a man. It is called Chaitya Guru.

**Sri Aurobindo:** I wanted to know if the word has a fixed connotation. If it has not, then one can use the word Chaitya Purusha for the psychic being. It has the

advantage of carrying both the functions of the psychic being: it is the direct portion of the Divine in the human and it is also the being that is behind the Chitta.

(*Evening Talks*: 222)

### **‘Psychic centre’**

*How is it that in the Arya you never laid any special stress on the psychic centre and considered the centre above the head the most important in your Yoga? Is it because you wrote under different conditions and circumstances? But what exactly made you shift your emphasis?*

You might just as well ask me why in my pre-Arya writings I laid stress on other things than the centre above the head or in the post-Arya on the distinction between overmind and supermind. The stress on the psychic increased because it was found that without it no true transformation is possible.

(CWSA 35: 152)

### **Vision of Brahman**

Pondicherry  
21 Sept 1914

. . . In the third issue of Arya, at the end of the second instalment of the Analysis of the Isha Upanishad, you will find a description of this vision of the [Brahman] which may be of help to you in understanding the idea. (October number now in the Press.)<sup>1</sup> . . .

(CWSA 36: 295)

### **Ideal of Human Unity**

I have begun in the issue of the Arya which is just out a number of articles on the Ideal of Human Unity. I intend to proceed very cautiously and not go very deep at first, but as if I were leading the intelligence of the reader gradually towards the deeper meaning of unity, — especially to discourage the idea that mistakes uniformity and mechanical association for unity.

(CWSA 36: 286)

1. See ‘The Vision of the Brahman’ in *Isha Upanishad*, CWSA 17: 30.

### **The Future Poetry**

*The . . . articles that Sri Aurobindo contributed to Arya under the general caption, The Future Poetry, [were] initially inspired by a book of Dr. Cousins's: in the fullness of time, however, the review became a treatise of over three hundred pages of Arya.*

[Altered to:] . . . started initially with a review of a book of Dr. Cousins's; but that was only a starting point for a treatise . . .

It was not the intention to make a long review of Cousins' book, that was only a starting point; the rest was drawn from Sri Aurobindo's own ideas and his already conceived view of art and life.

(CWSA 36: 114)

### **One fell swoop**

*If I remember right, you wrote to me that work is only a means for the preparation of the spiritual life; otherwise it has no spiritual value.*

[Sri Aurobindo underlined "only", put a question mark above it, and wrote:] Lord God! when did I make this stupendous statement which destroys at one fell swoop the two volumes of the *Essays on the Gita* and all the seven volumes of the *Arya*? Work by itself is only a preparation, so is meditation by itself, but work done in the increasing Yogic consciousness is a means of realisation as much as meditation is.

(CWSA 35: 744)

### **Writing Arya in vain?**

*My theory about work hampering one-pointed concentration finds some support, I think, from your own example. (I proceed very cautiously, though).*

? [Sri Aurobindo underlined 'cautiously' and put a question mark above it.]

*You have said that 9/10 of your time is spent in doing correspondence, works, etc., whereas only 1/10 is devoted to concentration. One naturally asks, why should it not be possible for you to do concentration and work at the same time?*

For me, correspondence alone. I have no time left for other “works etc.” Concentration and meditation are not the same thing. One can be concentrated in work or bhakti as well as in meditation. For God’s sake be careful about your vocabulary, or else you will tumble into many errors and loosenesses of thinking.

If I devoted 9/10 of my time to concentration and none to work — the result would be equally unsatisfactory. My concentration is for a particular work — it is not for meditation divorced from life. When I concentrate I work upon others, upon the world, upon the play of forces. What I say is that to spend all the time reading and writing letters is not sufficient for the purpose. I am not asking to become a meditative Sanyasi.

*Did you not retire for five or six years for an exclusive and intensive meditation?*

I am not aware that I did so. But my biographers probably know more about it than I do.

*If the Supramental Divine himself differentiates between work and concentration and finds it difficult to radiate his force among the few sadhaks contemporaneously with his work of correspondence, etc., what about undivines and inframentals like us?*

Between concentration on correspondence alone and the full many-sided work — not between work and correspondence.

It does not mean that I lose the higher consciousness while doing the work of correspondence. If I did that, I would not only not be supramental, but would be very far even from the full Yogic consciousness.

*[Sri Aurobindo underlined the phrase “contemporaneously with his work of correspondence” and commented:]*

Say “by correspondence alone”. If I have to help somebody to repel an attack, I can’t do it by only writing a note. I have to send him some Force or else concentrate and do the work for him. Also I can’t bring down the Supramental by merely writing neatly to people about it. I am not asking for leisure to meditate at ease in a blissful indolence. I said distinctly I wanted it for concentration on other more important work than correspondence.

The ignorance underlying this attitude is in the assumption that one must necessarily do only work or only meditation. Either work is the means or meditation is the means, but both cannot be! I have never said, so far as I know, that meditation should not be done. To set up an open competition or a closed one between works

and meditation is a trick of the dividing mind and belongs to the old Yoga. Please remember that I have been declaring all along an integral Yoga in which Knowledge, Bhakti, works — light of consciousness, Ananda and love, will and power in works — meditation, adoration, service of the Divine have all their place. Have I written seven volumes of the *Arya* all in vain? Meditation is not greater than Yoga of works nor works greater than Yoga by knowledge — both are equal.

Another thing — it is a mistake to argue from one's own very limited experience, ignoring that of others, and build on it large generalisations about Yoga. This is what many do, but the method has obvious demerits. You have no experience of major realisations through work, and you conclude that such realisations are impossible. But what of the many who have had them — elsewhere and here too in the Asram? That has no value? You kindly hint to me that I have failed to get anything by works? How do you know? I have not written the history of my sadhana — if I had, you would have seen that if I had not made action and work one of my chief means of realisation — well, there would have been no sadhana and no realisation except that, perhaps, of Nirvana.

I shall perhaps add something hereafter as to what works can do, but no time tonight.

Do not conclude however that I am exalting works as the sole means of realisation. I am only giving it its due place.

You will excuse the vein of irony or satire in all this — but really when I am told that my own case disproves my whole spiritual philosophy and accumulated knowledge and experience, a little liveliness in answer is permissible.

(*Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo: 78-80*)

### **A few more volumes of the *Arya*?**

If spiritual and supramental were the same thing, then all the sages and devotees and Yogis and sadhaks throughout the ages would have been supramental beings and all I have written about the supermind would be so much superfluous rubbish. Anybody who had spiritual experiences would then be a supramental being; the Asram would be chock-full of supramental beings and every other Asram in India also. As for writing about these things, I do not see the utility. I have already two philosophical essays to write and I do not find them writing themselves. If I start explaining the supramental, it would mean a book of 200 pages at least and even then you would be no wiser than before — as everything I wrote would probably be misinterpreted in the terms of mental cognition. The supramental has to be realised, not explained; I therefore prefer to leave it to explain or not explain itself when it is there and not waste my time in explaining mentally the supramental. As to technical terms, I have explained many times over in a way sufficient for those who practise this Yoga. If I have to explain philosophically to others, I must write a few more volumes of the *Arya*. I have no time just now.

(CWSA 35: 141)

### **Sadhaks are like that**

*I regret to say that I haven't read your Arya and Essays on the Gita. So I don't know what you have said or how far, about the possibilities of yogic work. I have only a rough idea. Others' experiences are others' . . .*

Not the less true for that!

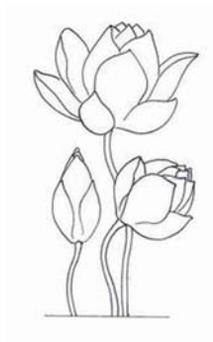
*By the way, Rishabhchand remarked that many are wavering between meditation vs. work. What do you think of that? In spite of the 7 volumes of Arya, 2 volumes of Essays on the Gita and repeated stress on work, your sadhaks are wavering!!*

My sadhaks are like that.

*So may I request you to thrash out the whole thing beyond doubt, question, wavering, etc., with that addition you said you'd make? Please consider that your yoga is absolutely new — the Karma part of it, I mean.*

Karmayoga is as old as the hills. What is this nonsense about its absolute newness? Donner-wetter! Tausend Teufel! [*Thundering weather! Thousand devils!*]

(Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo: 84-85)



## VII. MATTERS PRACTICAL

### Publications

. . . In 1914 after four years of silent Yoga he began the publication of a philosophical monthly, the *Arya*. Most of his more important works, those published since in book form, the Isha Upanishad, the Essays on the Gita, and others not yet published, the Life Divine, the Synthesis of Yoga, appeared serially in the *Arya*. These works embodied much of the inner knowledge that had come to him in his practice of Yoga. Others were concerned with the spirit and significance of Indian civilisation and culture, the true meaning of the Vedas, the progress of human society, the nature and evolution of poetry, the possibility of the unification of the human race. At this time also he began to publish his poems, both those written in England and at Baroda and those, fewer in number, added during his period of political activity and in the first years of his residence at Pondicherry. The *Arya* ceased publication in 1921 after six years and a half of uninterrupted appearance. . . .

(CWSA 36: 9)

### Absorbed in the practice of Yoga

. . . At Pondicherry, from this time onwards Sri Aurobindo's practice of Yoga became more and more absorbing. He dropped all participation in any public political activity, refused more than one request to preside at sessions of the restored Indian National Congress and made a rule of abstention from any public utterance of any kind not connected with his spiritual activities or any contribution of writings or articles except what he wrote afterwards in the *Arya*. . . .

(CWSA 36: 64)

### On requests for new writings

I have not begun writing in the papers — what is being published in the magazines is excerpts from the unpublished things in the *Arya* or translations such as *X* is making. So I cannot give anything.

As for past writings, I never take the initiative for publication in papers. *Y*, *X* or *Z* sometimes ask for leave to publish this or that somewhere where it is asked for and I consent — that is all.

(CWSA 35: 67-68)

### **A strict rule**

As to the Foreword, I had made a strict rule not to publish anything of the kind or anything except the books from the *Arya* and letters, so as to avoid any call on me from anyone. I don't know if I can break this rule now. In any case I shall have to read and consider, and I have now no time for anything but the correspondence and the work of concentration that is necessary — the pressure is too great for reading anything. So they should not depend on me for this Foreword.

(CWSA 35: 68)

### **Thank God!**

Look here! Do these people expect me to turn myself again into a machine for producing articles? The times of the *Bande Mataram* and *Arya* are over, thank God! I have now only the Asram correspondence and that is “overwhelming” enough in all conscience without starting philosophy for standard books and the rest of it.

And philosophy! Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher — although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry — I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher! How I managed to do it? First, because Richard proposed to me to cooperate in a philosophical review — and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse: and then he had to go to the War and left me in the lurch with 64 pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self. Secondly, I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there, automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!

I don't know how to excuse myself to Radhakrishnan — for I can't say all that to him. Perhaps you can find a formula for me? Perhaps — “so occupied not a moment for any other work; can't undertake because I might not be able to carry out my promise”. What do you say?

(CWSA 35: 70)

### ***The Yoga and Its Objects, Yogic Sadhan and The Synthesis of Yoga***

Sri Aurobindo is the author of *Yoga and Its Object*. It must be by an error of the printers that his name has been omitted.

But the book represents an early stage of Sri Aurobindo's sadhana and only a part of it is applicable to the Yoga as it has at present taken form after a lapse of more than twenty years.

The *Yogic Sadhan* is not Sri Aurobindo's own writing, but was published with

a note by him, — that is all. The statement made to the contrary by the publishers was an error which they have been asked to correct. There is no necessity of following the methods suggested in that book unless one finds them suggestive or helpful as a preliminary orientation of the consciousness — e.g. in the upbuilding of an inner Will etc.

A book giving some hints about the Yoga compiled from letters to the sadhaks is about to be published, but it cannot be said to be complete. There is no complete book on the subject; for even *The Synthesis of Yoga*, published in the *Arya* but not yet republished in book form, gives only the theory of different components of the Yoga (Knowledge, Works, Devotion) and remains besides unfinished; it does not cover the more recent developments of the Yoga.

(CWSA 35: 82)

### Arya Publishing House

Arya Office. Pondicherry  
9 March. 1926

Advance Distributing Company  
Pittsburgh. Pa.

Your letter of the 8<sup>th</sup> January to the Arya Publishing House has just been forwarded to me.

The publishing house restricted by the Government is not the A.P.H, but the Prabartak Publishing House which has no longer any connection with my work. My books were originally published by various agencies, but an arrangement has recently been made by which the preference for future editions or new publications will usually be given under fixed conditions to the A.P.H. It is from there that all my books already in print can be most readily secured. This arrangement however applies only to India and I have reserved rights of separate or sole publication in Europe, America and elsewhere.

I have suggested to the A.P.H to supply you with my works as requested by you, but I am told they have rules in the matter which may come in the way of an immediate compliance. The firm is still a small one and it is not likely that it will be able to supply you rapidly or on any large scale. If any pressing or considerable demand is created in America, it will be more convenient to publish there than to rely on India.

I am quite willing therefore that you should yourselves publish “parts of this literature” according to your proposal. I may observe that all proceeds of my books are set aside for furthering of the work for which the “Arya” appeared.

Vol II. No. 8 is no longer separately available; but a friend is willing to send

you his copy of the number temporarily for immediate use. I shall despatch it by this post. Please return it here as soon as it has served your purpose.

There is one full set of the "Arya" in Pondicherry, partly bound, which the owner wishes to devote to the work if he can get his price; but as full sets are no longer available in India, he estimates the value at Rs 500. If this offer is acceptable, the set will be sent on remittance of the amount to the Arya Office.

I have received recently letters from different parts of the United States which seem to indicate the beginning of a demand for my writings and, for other reasons also, I have been for some time desirous to bring out my works in America including those not yet published in book form. I do not know if it will enter into your views to take up this work. If so, please inform me of the conditions. All communications and remittances in connection with my works (other than for orders for supply of my books from the A.P.H.) should be sent to me to the following address.

Sri Aurobindo Ghose  
Arya Office  
Pondicherry  
French India

(CWSA 36: 383-84)

### **Publication abroad**

The ARYA Office  
Pondicherry French India

July 2. 26

To  
The ADVANCE DISTRIBUTING Co.  
Pittsburgh. Pa.

I am in receipt of your letter dated May 2<sup>d</sup> 1926 and the sum of Rs 500 and over sent by you for the complete set of the "ARYA". The complete set will be kept here in the office according to your suggestion; if needed at any time, it will be at your disposal. As to the missing numbers of Vol. VII — Nos 3 and 6 — as I understand, — I am writing to the A.P.H. where I have kept all the unsold numbers, and if these two are with them, as is most probable, they will be sent to you. I shall inform you if I find anyone here who needs the two superfluous numbers.

Next, as [to] the conditions of publication in America. I shall be glad to entrust the work to you and I leave it to you whether to keep your present name or take that

of the Arya Publishing Company, if you so desire. I do not know whether a rigorous self-limitation to the “Arya” material would be the best course; perhaps it would be better to make it the nucleus while other literature could be added which would be supplementary or consonant with the general idea and purpose.

I believe you are right in your suggestion regarding standardisation; conditions in India are different and the system here would not be advantageous or suitable, but I can understand that in America this system would be the best. I agree also that a limited edition in first-class style would be the best from the point of view of the financial return. In India we are obliged to suit the form and price of our publications to the purse of the average educated middle class who are the mass of the still very limited reading public.

The conditions I have made with the A.P.H. are of a special character and cannot be repeated in your case. I understand from what you have written that in America any profit from the sale of literature like the “Arya” publications is not at all probable unless and until a larger demand has been created than is likely for some time to come. A percentage on the sales would bring in only small sums while it might hamper the development of the work. Now small returns would be of very little use to me except for financing petty incidents and details of my work which can be otherwise met. The method and scope I have fixed for the future work to be done is of the large-scale kind and would need even from the beginning sums more like those raised by Swami Yogananda as described by you in your letter. I would prefer therefore that you should concentrate at present on the development of the publications and on getting them known as soon as possible and use the proceeds of the sale of the books for that purpose. If at any time a great demand arose and resulted in considerable profits, the question of a percentage of the sales to be remitted to me or any other arrangement in the matter could then be brought up again for consideration.

In regard to the order of issue I think you are right in selecting “War and Self-Determination” as a preliminary publication. The “Essays on the Gita” seems to me preeminently fitted to take the lead in a standardised series, but it would be necessary to await the publication of the “Second Series” by the A.P.H. The “First Series” covering the first six chapters of the Gita is being reprinted with only one necessary correction and should be out in a few days. But I have had to make extensive additions, alterations and corrections and to remould to some extent the language of the Second Series now to be published in book form for the first time. I have sent the M.S. to the A.P.H and I hope that it will be out in two or three months at the outside, when it will be sent to you. At present I am preparing a revised edition of the “Ideal of Human Unity”, already published in Madras but now out of print, and the “Psychology of Social Development”, not yet published in book form, which I propose to bring out under another title, “The Human Cycle”. The “Synthesis of Yoga” is too large a work to be included in a single book; I propose to publish it in

India in four parts, each devoted to one of the four Yogas, — Works, Knowledge, Devotion and Self-Perfection, — but this would involve a slight recasting here and there so as to make each volume in itself sufficiently complete. There remain, apart from some uncompleted works, the “Life Divine” and “The Future Poetry” which could be published, subject to the writing of a Preface, almost as they are and the smaller books or booklets already published some of which might be put together as you suggest so as to form part of the standardised volumes. That is the situation as regards the “Arya” writings. I gather that, having view to the conditions in America you propose to print “War and Self-Determination” first as a booklet, to start the standardised series with “Essays on the Gita” and to follow with the “Life Divine”. I would have no objection to such an order of issue.

. . . That is one considerable advantage of America; there is evidently a sufficiently widespread eagerness and openness of mind to new things. We have to see whether this will be sufficient to open the mind also to deep and true things. The spiritual future of America is not yet decided; it is in the balance. There is a great possibility before her, but it depends on Americans themselves whether she will make good and realise it. Otherwise she will follow the disastrous curve of other western peoples. India and America stand prominent at the two poles that have to meet and become one, the spiritual and the material life; one has shown a preeminent capacity of realisation on the spiritual, the other on the material plane. America must be able to receive freely India’s riches and to give freely in return from her own for the material organisation of a higher life on the physical plane; this is at once a condition and her chance. At present it is only a possibility; let us see whether it can be made an achieved and perfected symbol. . . .

(CWSA 36: 385-88)

### **To Dr. S. Radhakrishnan**

2.10.34

I regret that you should have had to wait for the publication of your book on account of the contribution I could not write. I had intimated to Dilip that it would be practically impossible for me and I could not make a promise I would most likely be unable to fulfil. I think he hoped I would still find time somehow to write.

I am entirely taken up by my present work which is exceedingly heavy and pressing and from which I cannot take my hands for a moment or spare the necessary energy or time for anything else. I have been obliged to put aside all mental or literary work and even to suspend sine die the revision for publication of the unpublished works in the “Arya” which I had undertaken. There is no chance of any alteration in this state of affairs in any near future. It is not a matter of choice but of necessity for me. I hope therefore you will excuse me for not being able to comply with your request. I regret very much that I have to disappoint you, but it is not possible for me to avoid it.

Sri Aurobindo  
(CWSA 36: 444-45)

**Delicate position**

[after October 1914]

Dear M—

I have not written for a long time for several reasons. Our position here since the war has become increasingly difficult and delicate, as the administration is run for the moment by certain subordinates who are actively hostile to the Swadeshis. I have therefore adopted a policy of entire reserve, including abstention from correspondence with Bengal even with officially unobjectionable people. Our correspondence now is chiefly limited to Arya business. . . .

(CWSA 36: 221)

**Extreme pressure of Yoga**

[end 1919]

Dear M.

About your scheme of a weekly paper — as for the name it is not difficult to find; it could be called the “Standard-bearer”. But are you quite sure you will be able to live up to the name and carry the thing on in the requisite manner? Nalini and Suresh are not likely to be able to write; one does not write at all in English, the other can do it if he likes, but is even more *মহুৰগতি* than in Bengali. To write for an English weekly would be beyond his present energies. As for myself, I am at present unable to write or do anything substantial, because of the extreme pressure of my Yoga, which has entirely occupied my time, — except for what I am obliged to give to the “Arya” and even that I have cut short as much as possible, — for the last few months. This state of things is likely to go on for the rest of the (English) year; whether it will be changed in the beginning of the next is more than I can tell with any certainty. The whole work might fall on your two Chandernagore writers. An English weekly cannot be conducted like a Bengali monthly or fortnightly. And it is not going to be a political paper of the ordinary kind which can be filled up anyhow. It will have to maintain a high reputation to be at all successful. These things however are for you to consider; you know your own strength and how far the field in Bengal is ready. As to the symbol, none has come to me. I am not altogether favourably inclined to the Uttara Yogi idea, nor anyone else here. It sounds too like the old style of spiritual pretension, and, when it is put in a current English production, suggests *bujruki*. Plain colours and as few symbols as may be are what we want at the beginning. Indian spirituality has lost itself in a jungle of symbols and shlokas

and we have to get out of them on to the plain and straight ways and the open heights, where we can see the “much work that has still to be done”. Why any editor? Let the Shakti herself be the editor. . . .

(CWSA 36: 232-33)

### New economic phase

Jan 2. 1920

Dear M—

. . . As to the *Standard-bearer*, I cannot write now, as it would take too long and delay this letter. I shall write afterwards or send word. Your insured packet reached us yesterday. The increase comes in a good moment, as with Saurin in Bengal the Aryan Stores is simply marking time and the Arya is in a new economic phase which means for the moment some diminution of income.

A. G.  
(CWSA 36: 235)

### Arya work

Pondicherry  
May 1920

Dear M.

. . . The work of the Arya has fallen into arrears and I have to spend just now the greater part of my energy in catching up, and the rest of my time, in the evening, is taken up by the daily visit of the Richards. I hope to get over the worst part of this necessity by the middle of June, so that by the time you come I may have a freer atmosphere to attend to the currents of the work and the world about me. There is now the beginning of a pressure from many sides inviting my spiritual attention to the future कर्म and this means the need of a greater outflowing of energy than when I had nothing to do but support a concentrated nucleus of the Shakti. I doubt however whether I shall be in a fit condition for meeting the demand till August, especially as I have not been able to get the physical basis yet put right by the power of the vijnana. After that we shall see what and how much can actually be done under the new circumstances. Meanwhile your visit may help to get things into preparatory line both in the inward motor-power and the outward determination.

A. G.  
(CWSA 36: 245)

**Visa-ing of the Arya**

[1916 – 1918]

Dear M.

What has become of the “Pravartaka”. The last number was very good, but for a long time we have had no other. Is the administration withholding visa or are there other reasons for the irregularity? I hope it is not a discontinuance. We have the “Arya” here visaed without delay or difficulty.

If you have difficulties of any kind, it is as well to let me know at once; for I can then concentrate what force I have more particularly to help you. The help may not be always or immediately effective, but it will count and may be more powerful than a general will, not instructed in the particular necessity. You must not mind if you do not get always a written answer; the unwritten will always be there.

I leave it to the Manager of the Arya to write to you about business matters.

K.

(CWSA 36: 227-28)

**To a would-be contributor to the Arya**

Pondicherry  
Sept. 3. 1919

Dear Sir,

I regret that not knowing you would require the copy back, — we do not usually return manuscripts, — I have entered upon it certain alterations to indicate the kind of changes which would be needed if you wished to have it published in the “Arya”. The magazine aims at a very high standard of style and thinking, and I make it a rule to admit nothing which is not in my judgment as perfect as possible in both directions. Your poem is noble throughout in idea and has fine lines, but is not throughout of one piece; that is to say, it is written in a high and almost epic strain, but there are dissonant turns and phrases which belong to a lower pitch of writing. I was about to write to you to this effect. I understand from your letter that you wish now to publish the poem elsewhere; but the copy is spoilt for the purpose, though I can return it if you still desire.

Yours sincerely  
Aurobindo Ghose  
Director, “Arya”

(CWSA 36: 254)

### **Poetry received for reviewing**

As to Suhrawardy, you can if you like send the complimentary portion of my remarks with perhaps a hint that I found his writing rather unequal, so that it may not be all sugar. But the phrases about “album poetry” and chaotic technique are too vivid — being meant only for private consumption — to be transmitted to the writer of the poems criticised; I would for that have expressed the same view in less drastic language. As I have already said once, I do not like to write anything disparaging or discouraging for those whom I cannot help to do better. I received much poetry from Indian writers for review in the *Arya*, but I always refrained because I would have had to be very severe. I wrote only about Harindranath because there I could sincerely, and I think justly, write unqualified praise.

(CWSA 27: 625)

### **Financial success**

*The magazine [Arya] was presumably not a financial success.*

It was, in fact; it paid its way with a large surplus.

(CWSA 36: 102)

### **Discontinuing the *Arya***

[c. January 1926]

. . . I have ever since I came to Pondicherry been obliged to withdraw more and more first from public life and then from all outer activities and absorb myself in a long and arduous inner endeavour. I had to discontinue the “*Arya*” for this purpose and for a long time I wrote nothing, not even any letters. Now although the needed intensity of the inner concentration is not over, it is becoming more possible for me to turn my face towards action on the physical plane. I take the opportunity of your card to do what I then failed to do, even after so long a lapse of time. . . .

(CWSA 36: 382)

### **Stopping of the *Arya***

**Disciple:** Does not a stage come when it becomes necessary to give up all action?

**Sri Aurobindo:** You cannot make a general rule like that. Some may have to give up all action temporarily, — but for others it may not be necessary at all. I

myself have been doing work constantly through the *Arya* and other things. And I stopped the *Arya* when I found that I had to put myself out too much, — so to say, externalise too much. The second reason was that I was required to be drawn within myself in order to develop certain experiences, so that the energy might be used for inward work. In a certain sense I can say that I never stopped doing work — even political work.

**Disciple:** In a sense! In what sense? I want to have some idea about it.

**Sri Aurobindo:** It is not so difficult as you think; one can put out his force to support certain movements and oppose others.

**Disciple:** Is that work confined to India?

**Sri Aurobindo:** It was confined to India in the beginning but now it is not confined to India.

At first I was not very successful, — very often it seemed to produce no result at all and I found that the work was done afterwards in quite another way than what I had expected or insisted. The same result came but it arrived in another way. The reason, probably, was that I used to put too much vital force with the Power. Of course, the vital is quite essential, but now it is pure and subtle vital force.

**Disciple:** You did it for what purpose — as something necessary or as an exercise?

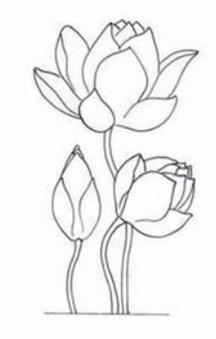
**Sri Aurobindo:** It was shown as something that was to be done. It was not from the Supermind, of course. If it was from there then the full knowledge would be there from the beginning. I did not know what was going to happen. I simply was shown the thing that was to be done and did it.

**Disciple:** How did you come to know that a certain thing is to be done?

**Sri Aurobindo:** Through the Higher Mind.

(*Evening Talks: 155-56*)

(*Concluded*)



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

**(A Compilation)**

*(Continued from the issue of June 2014)*

[The articles P. Brunton refers to in the following letter are causeries written by K. D. Sethna for *All India Weekly*, a popular literary magazine at the time. A good number of them were kept by Sethna and titled “The Thinking Corner”. In 1996 they appeared in book form: *The Thinking Corner — Causeries on Life and Literature* published by The Integral Life Foundation. — Ed.]

“Jasmine Villa”, Hyderali Road  
Mysore, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1944

My dear Sethna,

Your letter of January 31 has been lying all this time in my desk simply because I have had a series of illnesses which deprived me of the necessary energy for tackling correspondence or carrying on my usual work. Now I am very much better and you are amongst the first to be written to now that convalescence is over. Thank you for sending three book packets containing *All India Weekly*. Naturally I read your articles in them with much delight. And satisfaction too, because of the implied recognition and appreciation of your fine talents.

The piece of work which I liked best was the creative translation from Dante.

Since when have you been writing for this journal and are you going to write every week for it?

With reference to the four principal points raised in your letter:

(1) The absence of a universal consensus of opinion amongst philosophers certainly does indicate the inability of intellect to arrive at indisputable truth. But the alternative which you propose, of an integral satisfaction of all sides of our nature, is superior but still not enough. For the other sides which complement intellect, viz. feeling, mystical intuition and mystical experience will also suffer from the same deficiencies. There is the same possibility of endless contradiction here. I therefore arrive at the conclusion that a new faculty is really needed wherewith to ascertain ultimate truth, one which, if its possession is gained, will function in precisely the same manner in all persons. Such a faculty was I believe used by sages like Krishna

and Buddha, I give it the name of 'insight'. The purity of this insight must necessarily be a consequence of the purity of the entire character and mentality of the man who has it. This applies not only in the moral realms but also in the intellectual and emotional realms of his being. For the very sanskaras of a virtuous nature which helped his progress in earlier stages must now be discarded as much as those of a vicious nature. The very tendencies of the intellect which brought him to his spiritual standpoint must also be discarded. Only by this ruthless self-pruning can he respond utterly impersonally to reality and not falsify it. It is, I presume, the same as the divinisation of the human mind of which you write.

(2) Metaphysical idealism could certainly be interminably argued about, as you say, especially with the neo-realists. It is however as worthy of consideration by the spiritually minded as other doctrines because it has been held by a number of leaders in the mystical field and that not merely through intellectual activity but also through mystical experience. It is difficult for me to get over this hurdle of anti-mentalism in my appreciation of the Aurobindonian world-view, with which otherwise I am largely in close accord. But here of course we are up against the same difficulty of the equally contradictory character of such experience. You are however incorrect in stating that the drift of science is away from Berkeley. It is true that Berkeley's view of mentalism was a limited and imperfect one, only a beginning in fact. But it was a beginning in the right direction. The lately published book of Sir James Jeans entitled *Physics and Philosophy*<sup>1</sup> shows that the contrary to your belief is the actual case. He concludes, "As we pass from this phenomenal world of space and time to this substratum we seem, in some way we do not understand, to be passing from materialism to mentalism and so possibly from matter to mind. . . . Modern physics has moved in the direction of mentalism."

(3) The thirst for perfection is certainly present within us. I believe with you that the thirst is a pointer to its eventual slaking. But there is no necessary implication that this will be attained whilst we are in the flesh and on a level of existence where everything is doomed, as Buddha points out, to decay and death. It is more likely to be done on a higher level where such limitations could not exist. The perfection we seek and the immortality we hope for are more likely to be mental rather than physical achievements. For all mystics including yourself are at least agreed that there is such a level of untainted purely spiritual being.

(4) I could very easily put myself in the receptive mood which would see Sri Aurobindo's teaching in the light that you see it. I understand and sympathise greatly with such a standpoint. But I would have to emerge from it again, for the critical intellect would come back to renewed activity and ask insistent questions. I have however tried to keep a proper relation between the critical intellect and the mystical intuition, despite appearances which may have misled you to believe otherwise.

1. Originally published in 1942. — Ed.

I must say that you are the best advocate of Sri Aurobindo's teaching amongst all his disciples whom I know of. And this is true not only because you have a most convincing pen but also because you have a human personality which reflects that splendid integrality which is rightly the outstanding characteristic of the Sage of Pondicherry's teaching. I should be delighted to hear from you again and hope you will pardon the delay in writing you, a delay which will not be repeated again.

How are things with you in Bombay? I have the idea at the back of my head of paying a visit to your city at the end of this year but whether it would be possible to do so will depend upon my state of health.

With my peace and all good wishes,

Paul Brunton

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[K. D. Sethna's reply reproduced from *The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*, 1992, pp. 17-32. — Ed.]

## AUROBINDONIAN VIEWPOINTS

### Two Letters

[These letters are to the same English author to whom the preceding one was written and they form a sequel to it.]

#### 1

You say that it is not in the mind alone that endless contradiction can happen. I concur with you. It is not only philosophers who keep disagreeing. Yogis also take up positions poles apart from one another on the basis of their actual spiritual experiences. This is possible because reality can be spiritually experienced, no less than intellectually reconstructed, in various aspects. But we are naturally led to inquire what should be considered the ultimate truth of which so many aspects are possible. You suggest that to ascertain that truth we require a new faculty which you call "insight"— a faculty "which, if its possession is gained, will function in precisely the same manner in all persons." And you add the important remark: "Such a faculty was I believe used by sages like Krishna and Buddha...."

Two implications I read in your belief. One is indirect — namely, that reality has been "insighted" in past ages and that all we can do is to repeat their performance: the new faculty is in fact old and is new only for those who have not developed it. The other and direct implication is that Sri Krishna and Buddha had the same insight into reality. I hope you will excuse me if to neither implication I can give a fervent Yea. I don't think that except on very general grounds we can speak of Buddha's

insight and Sri Krishna's as the same. As soon as we probe into the matter we come upon a big difference. And the difference serves to indicate the line of progress which, despite my acknowledging the grandeur of past spirituality, I consider to be beckoning us beyond everything the past has achieved.

Buddha made an ultimate dichotomy between the world and reality. The world he regarded as an illusion to be discarded at last for a formless and featureless and impersonal beatific a-cosmism which he named Nirvana. Before the final dropping of the world there goes on a strange concomitance of reality and illusion, Nirvana and embodied nature. During that prelude Nirvana throws a luminous quiescence on our mind, vitality and body. Rather, since it is itself actionless, we should say our mind, vitality and body reflect the luminous quiescence of Nirvana. This quiescence means a lot of wonderful change in our nature — a change dynamic as well as static since our nature or Prakriti is a dynamism and unavoidably puts whatever light it catches to active uses. But the change due to Nirvana is not all that is involved in the Gita nor is Nirvana there the *summum bonum*. Though Sri Krishna in the Gita speaks of Nirvana — Brahma-Nirvana he terms it, suggesting a difference from the utterly negative shade given by Buddha — it is for him one aspect of Brahman, an aspect we cannot do without, yet not all-fulfilling. Brahman is Purushottama, the Transcendental Being who is not limited by His own static eternity and who dynamically manifests our universe and acts as its Lord. And Purushottama manifests our universe through His Para-Prakriti or Super-Nature. Super-Nature is marked out from Nature here which is a derivation or veiled play of it: it is that which is divine and has the power of divinising all that is below. Its dynamism is the perfect original of the lower one which is the sole dynamism Buddha deals with and which catches illumination from Nirvana. Towards the Supreme Being who is both impersonal and personal and towards His divinising Super-Nature we with our instruments of mind, vitality and body have to move by the Krishnaesque insight: in our experience in the cosmos we have to manifest them. The ideal of divinising the person in us and our embodied existence is involved in Sri Krishna's pronouncements as it certainly is not in Buddha's, for it is clear that in Nirvana there can be no divine counterpart of the varied complexity that is active in Nature.

In the works of Sri Aurobindo the ideal is brought out in its clearest fullness. His Yoga is founded on his experience of a Consciousness which, over and above combining all that Yogis in the past have known, holds the secret of satisfying and fulfilling on earth our whole embodied existence. Such a Consciousness seems to me, because of its integral character, the ultimate Reality — and “insight”, therefore, is in my opinion developable with utter completeness only through the Aurobindonian Yoga.

The conditions mentioned by you for developing it are very good indeed, but, as formulated by you, are they not liable to appear somewhat one-sided, since they are, in your words, “a ruthless self-pruning”? “Only by this ruthless self-pruning,”

you write, “can [we] respond utterly impersonally to reality and not falsify it.” One may suggest that self-pruning is necessary and impersonality is necessary, yet there is the fact of a diverse personality in us. By self-pruning and impersonality we rise above personality’s defects, but, if carried to an exclusive extreme, they might throw personality entirely into the shade and move finally to submerge it in some Beyond which takes us for good out of the manifested universe. Personality is an important fact of our existence and for manifestation it is indispensable. It wants fulfilment in the Divine and not just to be transcended until it can be annulled. Reality must answer to its impassioned many-toned appeal. So, except at the risk of one-sidedness, “insight” cannot be developed by paying scarce heed to the essence of personality and to personality’s complex richness. We must not grow bare in growing pure.

I don’t think you actually mean “bareness” by your “purity”. Manifestation to the utmost is not outside your path. Yet, I may say, your utmost does not reach far enough because you believe we can do nothing save ring appropriate changes of application on the spiritual possibilities revealed in the past. I do not wish to sound cocky. I have a deep reverence for the rishis and masters and prophets whose souls shine from the past like everlasting torches upon our troubled ways and I see that we cannot throw aside the core of their realisations. But I can’t help seeing too that the evolution Sri Aurobindo is bent on accomplishing has no exact precedent.

Taking up the synthesis Sri Krishna made of the Yoga of Knowledge, Works and Devotion, he goes forward to a spiritual integrality exceeding even that splendid synthesis. He says that liberation is not enough; nor is it enough to let our embodied nature be influenced by the light of the Divine, not even the dynamic light that was displayed by the synthesis *à la* Sri Krishna. If everything came originally from the Divine, there must be in the Divine the archetypal truth of everything, a truth not lying idle in the Transcendental but ever pressing for manifestation. And the manifestation of it would be a divine person with a divinised mind, vitality and body. So Sri Aurobindo speaks of a descent into us of what he designates as Gnosis or Supermind as well as of an ascent to it. The descent will mean an embodied existence of a divine order in every respect and no longer of an order that is flawed by the human and the mortal. Yes, in every respect there must be Godhead and immortality: even our physical stuff must be entirely transformed! A new apocalypse is here beyond the visions of the past — divinisation has, in Sri Aurobindo’s vocabulary, a novel significance<sup>2</sup> — and yet we feel that the unprecedented is most logical. Anything short of the Aurobindonian divinising leaves Nature without sufficient justification of her being: as an emanation of the Divine she must be capable of divinisation in every inch of her when her whole principle is a progressive evolution.

2. The novelty, of course, is not restricted to body-transforming. The latter is a sign of the utter integrality of the divinising process and the integrality extends also a transforming to mind and vitality beyond anything done before.

Because she is capable we have the thirst for perfection. The thirst has been recognised since the dawn of history, but up to now the integral logic of it has not been grasped. Until it is grasped we shall never be satisfied: always a clash will take place in our psychology and under various guises we shall have “the refusal of the ascetic” and “the denial of the materialist”. No compromise will be lasting: every apparent equilibrium will collapse. For, there is an imperative in man’s constitution driving him towards the spiritual integrality insisted on by Sri Aurobindo. Without our openly feeling that imperative, there will never be a common “insight” for all persons. How can we reach in the sphere of spiritual experience a common insight unless we envisage with unblurred eyes our total constitution’s bedrock need? The bedrock need shows itself in our thirst for perfection — and the common origin, in God, of everything denotes the integral range of the need and the integral range of its satisfaction. You say you believe with me that the thirst for perfection is a pointer to its eventual slaking in the Spirit. But you erect a certain barrier: “there is,” you write, “no necessary implication that this will be attained whilst we are in the flesh and on a level of existence where everything is doomed, as Buddha points out, to decay and death. It is more likely to be done on a higher level where such limitations could not exist.” If you attend closely to the words “thirst for perfection” you will seize Sri Aurobindo’s view. Can our thirst be for perfection if the cry of the physical being is left without an answer from God? Our physical being has its innate demand for joy, for luminous effectivity, for healthy perpetuation. These demands are summed up in the agelong quest for the *elixir vitae*. Can you ignore the intensity of such a quest?

The misery of an imperfectly constituted body open to attack on every side and gravitating towards dissolution is not due simply to our attachment to material things: it is due also to our innate sense of a great lack — a lack of what our body is hungering after. We try and try to appease its hunger. Blind alleys meet us everywhere because we do not turn to “the secret path” of mysticism for the body’s fulfilment. Our failure leaves us frustrated: we may detach our attention from the failure but deep in our subconscious there lurks a brooding dangerous sadness packed with resistance to spirituality if spirituality finds no means to justify earth in terms of earth itself. Not to see in bodily life the thirst for perfection is to close our eyes to a mighty fact. To seek its appeasement outside the Divine is to keep groping for ever. To hold that it will never be slaked in the Divine is to give up aiming at integral realisation of Him, for that realisation must consist in His descent on all the levels of our nature as well as in our ascent to Him in the Gnosis. If we admit that matter has come originally from God and if we admit that matter cries out for fulfilment, there can be no getting away from the conclusion that our body can be divinised and should be divinised. Perfection would not be perfect without fulfilment on our level of flesh no less than on every other level.

By acquiescing in Buddha’s doctrine of the doom of the body we erroneously

take a present condition for an everlasting one. It is quite obvious that the body as at present inhabited by us decays and dies. But Sri Aurobindo discerns no inevitability of decay and death. What is the doom Buddha speaks of? Who or what has fixed the doom? The doom, to Buddha, is consequent on the body's being compounded of parts. The compounded must fall asunder: that is his logic. It is, however, conceivable that a force counteracting the tendency of a compound to break up can hold together the parts indefinitely. It is all an affair of balance. The mere compounding need bring no decomposition and disintegration. So the real cause must lie deeper. The real cause is that no force in Nature is able to maintain the body for good, much less to keep it up at a pitch of perfect health. Must we accept this inability in Nature as final? We must if our attitude is, like Buddha's, illusionist. Buddha's logic is binding only if our attitude argues no support or archetype of the body in the Spirit. Give up illusionism and the logic crumbles down. Declare that it is the Spirit that has become all things and immediately we unchain ourselves from Buddha's dictum. For then there must be, unknown to us, a connection between incorruptible substance of Spirit and matter's corruptible substance. Not only this, but, as the Spirit must be one-yet-multiple to manifest a multiple universe, there is a spiritual formation connected with the material formation that is our body. A spiritual body, whose substance and form are in absolute tune with the light and perpetuity that are proper to the Spirit, is all the time behind our unstable aggregate of elements and waits to manifest itself in it. Indian Yogas have often spoken of a causal body — *kāraṇa śarīra* — governing the gross and the subtle ones from its occult station above in the Spirit's ether. No complete descent, emergence and organisation of the causal in both the gross and the subtle were taught or methodised. Sri Aurobindo is the first to proclaim the necessity and practicableness of making the *kāraṇa śarīra* totally active in the open. When the substance, form, law and force of that body are brought into play within our present material being, there is no reason why our components, freed from their imperfections, should not perpetually hold together in unmarred health. We are mortal simply because we have not yet discovered how to make our body share in the Spirit's perfect and immortal consciousness. There is no radical gulf between that consciousness and our body, there is only an apparent and pragmatic gulf.

Everything depends on what power of being is in charge. The vital or mental power is unable to bring about a divinisation. Buddha's spirituality, though gigantic in itself, also misses the superb secret. Buddha looked for liberation from the cycle of births, not for divinisation of all that birth involves. The Vedic attempt to establish the Gods in our nature-parts, the Vaishnava attempt to incarnate the personal deity through the love-surge of the central person in us, the soul or psyche round which our personal nature is organised, and the Tantric attempt to render the Shakti, the Mother-power, of the Supreme effective in all our *chakras* come near to it. There has, however, been a general falling short both in idea and practice because the

particular dynamism of the Divine which Sri Aurobindo names Supermind or Gnosis was never completely possessed — or, if possessed, it was mostly in the tranced consciousness and seldom in the wide-awake one. In Sri Krishna the wide-awake possession may have been there, but it was not directly operative: the directly operative dynamism was a secondary power of the Supermind — the Overmind. The Overmind is a global and not an integral truth-consciousness: there is in it a well-rounded harmony, on the whole, of the one-yet-multiple Spirit but in detail a *penchant* for multiplicity and hence for division, while in the Supermind a precise all-balancing and hence all-fulfilling harmony subsists both on the whole and in detail. Under the Overmind's rule we can grow divinised on earth to a considerable extent without being able to preserve ourselves from that outermost dividing-up which is the body's death. Under the sway of the Supermind there can be entire divinisation and no compulsive dragging away from it: we are free to cast aside what we have done, we are not bound to it but we are also able to manifest perfection and preserve it here and now. This capacity and that freedom are the goal of earth: they are the Supermind's prerogatives which Sri Aurobindo wants exercised. Sri Krishna in the Gita heads towards them without overtly disclosing them: while the Supermind seems to be his background the Overmind is his forefront. If his forefront had been supramental he would have done what Sri Aurobindo has indicated for us today.

But the reason why, where dynamic operation was concerned, the Supermind stayed in the background is not just some individual defect in Sri Krishna. Buddha's a-cosmic extremism is also not traceable to merely a *lacuna* in him. There are universal factors no less than individual: the stage of world-evolution, the *Zeitgeist* and the urgent need of the hour combine to colour the spirituality of leaders like Buddha and Sri Krishna. To deem them altogether myopic and incapable is a mistake, as it is also a mistake to deem them the *ne plus ultra* and forget new conditions and the new spirituality those conditions must demand. Sri Krishna used the Overmind dynamism and could not help doing so because the time was not ripe for the work of the Gnosis, especially on the body. Many ups and downs, many divergent zigzags had to occur before the time could ripen for the Aurobindonian Yoga. It appears that, among several factors, an age of Science had to emerge for such a work to be taken in hand. Nothing save a stress on the physical as blindly strong as at the beginning was Science's could help the psychological moment of an unusual task like laying the Spirit's touch on its old enemy and despised impediment, the body, for integral divinisation. Then there is the subconscious effect of Science's brilliant endeavour to see in the body the cause, function and aim of everything that we are: by its advances towards proving all spiritual states to be material it also paved the way for a vision of matter as no utterly incommensurate contrary of spiritual states. Further, the development of radio has in a very impressive manner given the human mind a sense of effective wideness and of practical simultaneity of presence

everywhere through a sort of physical translation of the Spirit's consciousness. As impressive in diminishing the incubus of unconquerable inertia and grossness associated with matter in opposition to Spirit is dissolving of matter into pure energy — "radiant energy", as the suggestive technical designation goes. Lastly, we have the admission that so far as the science of physics is concerned we do not require to know the nature of the entities we discuss but only their mathematical structure, the way they affect our measuring instruments; physics, indeed, reflects the fluctuations of world qualities but our exact knowledge is of their "pointer-readings", not of the qualities and as a result it leaves us open-minded as to what reality is. Developing out of this open-mindedness there are the celebrated Jeans-Eddington trends: what began as a tremendous stress on the physical has, in an important domain of Science, ended in a doubt in the mind of one scientific school whether the physical universe is its own explanation. The doubt does not remove the stress on the physical which is now an inalienable portion of whatever life-programme we may adopt, but it has robbed of trenchant finality the line once drawn between the actual spatio-temporal phenomena and the hypothetical mystery of God. In addition, it has suggested a change in our idea of Nature's laws. Both in Jeans and Eddington you will observe the disposition to consider the nineteenth century's "laws of iron" statistical and nothing more. So the obsession about decay and death is weakened and Buddha's "doom" for the body is found likely to be a statistical law, a generalisation from a large number of past and present cases rather than an absolute inevitability. Thus Science has by many routes co-operated obliquely or straightforwardly with Sri Aurobindo's mission. Apart from the scientific *milieu* the integral Yoga would be an anachronism. Apart from the integral Yoga the scientific *milieu* would lose its deepest rationale.

Living in that *milieu* and wanting to do Yoga, a man is bound to be restless and discontented until he embraces Sri Aurobindo's integrality.

## 2

It is a pity a genuine traveller like you of the *via mystica* does not follow to the full the finger of light Sri Aurobindo points ahead of us. Will you pardon my daring to suspect that the "critical intellect", which keeps you dissatisfied and which you wish to keep in action, omits to criticise certain magnificent spiritual philosophies of the past sufficiently and fails to interpret Sri Aurobindo with the requisite piercing through from words to their meaning? How else am I to understand the overweight you give to pronouncements of long ago which come from realisations apt once but not necessarily for all time and "the hurdle of anti-mentalism" you encounter in the Aurobindonian world-view with which you are in sympathy in several respects?

I have touched already on past spiritual systems. I should like now to figure

out clearly what your “hurdle” consists in. You urge that metaphysical idealism has been held by a number of leaders in the mystical field and this not merely through intellectual activity but also through mystical experience. Your faith in it seems to be strengthened by Sir James Jeans’s exposition of modern physics in his most important book so far, *Physics and Philosophy*. According to you, Berkeley’s view of mentalism was a limited and imperfect one, only a beginning in fact, but a beginning in the right direction, which agrees with the trend of present-day physics.

When you ascribe anti-mentalism to Sri Aurobindo you are at once right and wrong. Right if you mean that he does not accept the mental consciousness in any form as the world-creator. Wrong if you mean that he does not accept consciousness at all as the creator of the world. Mind, to Sri Aurobindo, is not a synonym of consciousness: it is just one degree. Are you ascribing anti-mentalism to him by yourself employing the word “mind” broadly to signify consciousness and thinking he assumes for matter an existence outside consciousness altogether? I can quote you passages galore from *The Life Divine* to demonstrate that when a broad sense is read into the word “mind” Sri Aurobindo is not anti-mental in the least. Here is one: “The world is real precisely because it exists only in consciousness; for it is a Conscious Energy one with Being that creates it. It is the existence of material form in its own right apart from the self-illuminated energy which assumes the form, that would be a contradiction of the truth of things, a phantasmagoria, a nightmare, an impossible falsehood.”<sup>3</sup> Sri Aurobindo is anti-mental only when the sense is narrowed. Correctly, the sense should be narrowed; else we confuse the issue at stake. I for one act the anti-mentalist with the narrow sense in view, and if I aver that the drift of Science is away from Berkeley I must be taken to mean not that modern physics thinks matter contains its own explanation but that, in the first place, it does not agree to Berkeley’s foundational premiss — “matter exists wholly as a percept of our consciousness” — and that in the second place, the term “mentalism” or “idealism” is *mal à propos* in Science as in philosophy.

On page 203 of *Physics and Philosophy* Jeans says that before mentalism “can be seriously considered some answer must be found to the problem of how objects can continue to exist when they are not being perceived in any human mind”. Is it not evident that Berkeley’s foundational premiss is negated by Jeans? And once it is negated, what remains of Berkeley? You will argue that Berkeley postulates the mind of God as that in which objects when unperceived in any human mind exist. But this is an arbitrary step on the Bishop’s part. If our percepts are sufficient, God’s mind is not required; if they are not, why choose God’s mind rather than matter’s independent externality? Berkeley’s final conclusion flatly contradicts his initial premiss. Logically the conclusion should be solipsism: as Hume reasoned, we have no right even to speak of many human minds, we must reduce other human beings

3. *The Life Divine*, CWSA Vol. 21, p. 25. — Ed.

to the same status as objects and they must be deemed a percept in the experiencing mind: I who perceive am the sole mind: everything I perceive — person or object — is my idea! Surely, Science, assuming both the plurality of scientific observers and the common field in which they work, cannot hold any truck with Berkeley's foundational premiss: it cannot be dubbed Berkeleyan in its tendencies.

Can it be dubbed mentalist or idealist at all, even though in an un-Berkeleyan way? In my opinion, whatever holds matter's explanation cannot be described as "mentality" or "ideas" if by these things we mean, as we strictly should, either the contents of our own small consciousness or anything akin to their peculiarity on a large scale. I therefore maintain further that for Science, as for any other branch of knowledge, no mind of any sort can be the *fons et origo* of the universe. Science may be drifting away from materialism and it may be legitimately doing so, though the legitimacy is not granted by all scientists; nonetheless, Jeans is not justified in his mentalist inferences. Perhaps I am puzzling you by blowing hot and cold. Let me state my view in some detail, also glancing *en passant* at Jeans's philosophical position.

According to *Physics and Philosophy*, in order to explain what happens in space and time to the world of "matter and radiation" that we know, we have to construct mathematical formulas which are such that they imply a substratum in which our perceptual experience of matter and radiation in space and time do not apply at all. What kind of substratum is this? Jeans argues that since all mechanical models of it based on perceptual experience fail us and since the new mathematics is the only representation we can make and since this mathematics is mental, the universe's substratum is likely to be one of thought in a universal mind existing free of the phenomenal world but acting as the origin of it. To such an argument certain scientists retort by asking us to understand that the new mathematics is purely a conceptual scheme by which we connect phenomena and that to speak of its corresponding to any substratum-reality existing as a universal mind, is misleading: an abstract device within our own minds, correlating phenomena, is all that we can regard as existing besides those phenomena themselves with their queer character which puzzles the model-making engineer beloved of classical physics.

I do not want at the moment to cast my vote for or against the retort. My own point in the discussion is that, even if our present mathematics and the hypothesis underlying it are correct and serve as a sign towards an originative reality immaterial and free of the phenomenal world, it is hopelessly inadequate to consider it a universal mind instead of a consciousness higher than the mind. The universe's substratum must be such as would be able to produce the world of phenomena which we name physical, it must be able to hold the origin of matter and radiation in space and time. Jeans seems to think a universal mind fulfils this condition. You agree with him. Of course I must not forget you have mentioned not only Jeans but also mystics as bearing you out. Mystical evidence is certainly to be given importance. Yet I make

bold to submit that if mystics have spoken of a universal mind as holding in its mental stuff a full and final origin of matter and radiation they have ill-chosen their language as much as Jeans has done. A simple consideration will elucidate my point.

Mentalism can describe a universal mind only by analogy with the nature of mind known to us. What is that nature? A universal mind would differ in many respects from the individual mind. Suppose we grant that, unlike the individual mentality, it does not labour under the defect of perceiving in matter and radiation an objectivity beyond itself, an objectivity which cannot be equated with its own perceiving. Would it even then be adequate? If it is still to be a mind and not a higher form of consciousness it must have some characteristic affinity to our mode of being, to something in our awareness of the subjective world if not of the objective. The utmost we can do is to concede the universal mind an experience of the so-called objective world as though that world were subjective to it, so that it knows objects as its own stuff put out for play. In that case, as long as its stuff is mental, it must hold physical objects in the way we hold what we name our mind's subjective contents. As we develop and arrange and order our conceptions and feel them to be emanations of our own self, the universal or cosmic mind would deal with matter and radiation. But just as we are aware of a background of which our self appears to be a projection and our thoughts a semi-mysterious substance which we do not feel to be entirely controlled by us as our own, so too the cosmic mind would be conscious of a secret background and the physical objects which are its substance would be a half-mystery which it cannot master and shape to integral perfection. The cosmic mind would not escape the dim sense that it is working out what it receives from it-knows-not-where and that, while its working out is as if it were acting in itself and by its own right, it is being used by some power vaguely present behind it. Its own triumph of unity would be a harmony of arranged accords and discords — it would have an organised equilibrium haunted by an internal incapacity for a perfect ordering and out-flowering of things. As we individuals are conscious of depths unplumbed within us, of a check upon our subjective life from backgrounds unknown, of a limited sway over our own thoughts, of a bound to our creativity and our will, even so the cosmic mind must feel in its consciousness of matter and radiation as its own mental stuff an inherent absence of fullness and finality.

If we assert that there is no such absence we are talking of a status of consciousness to which it is illicit to apply the name "mind". An infinite consciousness, omniscient and omnipotent, limiting itself freely and without the least ignorance or incapacity, may be spoken of as mind in the broadest of senses, but then the term we employ loses all meaning. It becomes a synonym of consciousness in any and every degree. In the West the tendency to "mentalise" everything is habitual. But when we cast about to examine consciousness in the world around, we discern several degrees. The animal's is one degree, the plant's is another, the metal's as

shown by Bose's detection of a power of response to stimuli is a third. We may generalise beyond the metal and say that a hidden consciousness resides in the atom itself. But it would not be proper to class all these degrees as mental: they are obviously sub-mental. On our own level we may conceive an extension, a universality. We may go on conceiving a diminution of many defects, but we cannot blot out every resemblance to the ideative stuff and self that is mind as experienced by us. Remove every shade of likeness and you will have only consciousness in common and nothing mental.

Indeed we may aver that the sub-mental is really the mental concealed or involved, but when we reach the mental stage and widen and intensify it to the furthest, do we come to the ultimate? Are we not obliged to overpass the mental frontier if we speak of an omniscient and omnipotent consciousness? Are we not compelled to speak of mind at even its widest and intensest as the Beyond-mind concealed or involved? I think we are, unless both psychology and language are to be amorphous and inaccurate. No mind, universal or cosmic though it may be, can possess the essentials of being the first and last reality. It must always be an intermediate light. No doubt, a universal mind exists and mystics have experienced it, but if they have not experienced a greater reality which puts it forth as an instrument, they have not found an all-containing, all-constituting, all-penetrating, all-creative consciousness. Neither by physics, metaphysics nor mysticism can we ever hope to make mentalism adequate to a consciousness absolutely and ultimately originaive of spatio-temporal phenomena from a poise free of constraint by space and time.

The cosmic mind can only be a particular mode of action adopted by a far superior consciousness which is spiritual and not mental. The principle of all mind is endlessly to divide and endlessly to aggregate: to measure off, limit and depiece, then put the pieces together and keep adding up to arrive at a whole. Evidently such a principle must be there for the Spirit to originate the physical universe of divisibility into infinitesimal units and diverse heaping up of those units to make objects. Evidently such a principle is also responsible for the ignorance which shuts us off from the Spirit's light, for ignorance means the fragmentation of the Infinite, in which the fragments stand apart, forgetting the Infinite that makes them one and striving to reach it by being added up. Division and fragmentation, however, do not *per se* cause ignorance. At their root, they are just the Spirit's self-play of multiplicity. As long as the basic unity is not lost, there is no lapse from knowledge. The dividing and fragmenting mind, therefore, is in essence a movement of the Spirit: the creative Gnosis, following its one-yet-multiple trend, brings about the divine archetype of mentality. In that archetype there is no ignorance, since the mind-movement is fully aware of itself as formulated by the Spirit and undivided from the Spirit. This mind-movement is not self-sufficient as would be by definition the universal mind which mentalism supposes to be final: it is part and parcel of a supramental reality. A new projection from the archetypal mind which is in union with the supramental blaze of

knowledge is needed to render ignorance possible. That projection is the cosmic or universal mind — mentality unliaisoned with the omniscient and omnipotent Spirit. The lack of liaison does not affect the archetype with ignorance, it affects only the projection. Ignorance occurs when, though the archetype is aware of the mental cosmicity it has formulated as an instrument, the instrument becomes oblivious of the power formulating it, even as one side of a man's personality sometimes forgets the many-sided whole of which it is a portion and becomes exclusively concentrated in itself.

The ignorance that is ours would not be there without the cosmic mind becoming ignorant. Of course the cosmic mind is not completely ignorant, the complete ignorance takes place when a total plunge is made by the Spirit into a self-formulation at the opposite pole of its supreme knowledge. We physical beings are “evolutes” out of the total plunge: we rise, as the Vedic hymn of creation has it, out of a darkness that is wrapped in darkness, we are emergents from a sea of the “unconscious”, a formidable abyss of black self-loss. So our ignorance is a special one. Behind our individual mentality there is a purer individualisation which is less ignorant, a standpoint of the cosmic mind. Experiencing that standpoint and breaking from it into the cosmic mentality we reduce our ignorance as much as we can without exceeding the mind-formula divided from the Beyond-mind. Yet the true knowledge is not there until the division between us and the Spirit is destroyed. The integral destroying is in the Sun of consciousness which is the Vedic and Upanishadic description of the Gnosis. There are lower grades of mystical experience in which, despite the division not being there, the dynamic use of the Spirit's knowledge is less intense, less luminous, less effective. It is these grades that mystics mostly attain, grades from the Overmind downwards to the frontier where the cosmic ignorance starts on that *descensus Averno* ending in the terrible catastrophe of the “unconscious” from which our world evolves. At even the lowest grade above that frontier something more intense, more luminous, more effective than any universal mind is attained. The first country of the cosmic ignorance is the universal mind itself, cut off as it is from its spiritual and supramental source. Consequently, I rate mentalism an error for its failure to look further than this mind and to discern as inevitable to this mind the vague feeling of a profundity and a puissance hidden behind and above.

I may, in justice to Jeans, remark that he uses the terms “mind” and “mentalism” about the universe's substratum when what he actually intends is, as he phrases it in one place, “a consciousness superior to our own”. So my quarrel with him resolves at bottom to one of terminology. My quarrel would be of more than terminology if he were a Berkeleyan, which he surely is not in his present book, believing as he does that things in the universe “cannot be mere constructs of our individual minds and must have existences of their own.” He differs from the materialists inasmuch as he opines that the way we can best understand in physics the course of events creates the likelihood of a universal substratum analogous in character to mathe-

matical knowledge — that is, a substratum of consciousness. His argument may be right or wrong; but I agree with his central thesis about consciousness and differ only from his use of the word “mind” to cover “spirit”.

I think my quarrel with you is also due to the same reason. If you drop “mind” and “mentalism” and urge that the physical world has no reality independent of and outside a basic consciousness, every Aurobindonian will shake hands with you and say “Right-O!” According to Sri Aurobindo it is a spiritual and supramental Gnostic consciousness that has originally emanated the physical world as one particular infinity of its multi-infinity substance and force, knows it with complete identity both static and dynamic and is working out divine possibilities in what it has emanated as apparently the very opposite of all that is divine.

*(To be continued)*

K. D. SETHNA  
(AMAL KIRAN)

*We say to humanity, “The time has come when you must take the great step and rise out of a material existence into the higher, deeper and wider life towards which humanity moves. The problems which have troubled mankind can only be solved by conquering the kingdom within, not by harnessing the forces of Nature to the service of comfort and luxury, but by mastering the forces of the intellect and the spirit, by vindicating the freedom of man within as well as without and by conquering from within external Nature. For that work the resurgence of Asia is necessary, therefore Asia rises. For that work the freedom and greatness of India is essential, therefore she claims her destined freedom and greatness, and it is to the interest of all humanity, not excluding England, that she should wholly establish her claim.”*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 6-7)*

# **SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI**

*(Continued from the issue of July 2014)*

## **Chapter: XXXV**

### **A Political Split: A Boon for the Nation**

History very seldom records the things that were decisive but took place behind the veil; it records the show in front of the curtain. Very few people know that it was I (without consulting Tilak) who gave the order that led to the breaking of the Congress and was responsible for the refusal to join the new-fangled Moderate Convention which were the two decisive happenings at Surat. Even my action in giving the movement in Bengal its militant turn or founding the revolutionary movement is very little known.

Sri Aurobindo<sup>1</sup>

INDIAN historians have barely studied the widespread effect, immediate and far-reaching, conspicuous and subtle, of that momentous split on the national mind and on the course of events that followed. Even R. C. Majumdar, one of the foremost and enlightening historians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, states in his monumental work *Struggle for Freedom*,

The unfortunate split at Surat is a great landmark in the history of the Congress, as it practically ended the first phase of that great national organisation.<sup>2</sup>

But it was much more than a great landmark in the history of the National Congress; it was an event of infinitely greater significance. It was a landmark in the history of this great nation. We may count a hundred causes that contributed to the realisation of freedom forty years later: the non-violent struggle under Gandhi-ji's leadership, the abrupt change in the global political scenario with the World War II for its backdrop, the Labour Party coming to power in Britain, so on and so forth. But no single factor could be more decisive than the conviction of the Indian people that they must be liberated from a foreign rule. Though an oft-quoted truism, it is nevertheless true that there could be nothing more powerful than the idea for which the time had come.

The Surat event confirmed the arrival of that idea.

The time indeed had come for the people of India to view foreign rule not as a sanction providentially ordained for eternity (as the primary class textbooks in the early years of the twentieth century suggested), nor as a super-giant that must be appeased with supplicant resolutions to be formally passed by a passive Congress in order to receive from it tiny drops of mercy. The Surat split symbolised a hitherto unprecedented change in the minds of the people who mattered. What Nevinson saw on his return journey from Surat — large crowds collected on the platforms of the railway stations through which their trains passed cursing without the least inhibition the Moderate leaders like Gokhale and Surendra Nath — the latter's ears never having entertained anything but adulation till that fateful trip of his to Surat! — exemplified the surging popular disgust with those who had taken for granted their monopoly of the nation's leadership.

Nobody had mobilised or motivated those excited people; no speeches had been delivered at their native places instigating them to cry out against intolerance. The Nationalist leaders were not in the habit of condemning individuals in any harsh fashion in public; they only criticised policies that were growing more and more humiliating for the nation, attitudes which the time-spirit would discard.

It would be a hyperbole to state that the large Indian masses were crying for freedom. They remained too non-political for that grand ideal situation to be possible. But for the first time ever, a prominent part of the population, a large number of youths — students in particular — and the Middle Class including its lowest and lower strata, were growing irresistibly attracted to the goal of freedom.

Contrast this visible new mood of the nation with the mind of the Moderates. Wrote Gokhale in the *Modern Review*:

Only mad men outside lunatic asylums could think or talk of independence.<sup>3</sup>

Further, he announced in a speech:

Some have gone so far as to talk of independence as an object of practical pursuit. We owe it to the best interests of the country to resist the propaganda with all our resources. It means the sure destruction or at any rate the indefinite postponement of all those opportunities for slow but peaceful progress which are at present within our reach. There is no alternative to British rule, not only now but for a long time to come, and any attempts made to disturb it, directly or indirectly, are bound to recoil on our own heads.<sup>4</sup>

While the dazzling leaders of the National Congress, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Surendra Nath (a would-be 'Sir'), Gokhale and the rest lost their lustre, even a leader like Lala Lajpat Rai who, glowing in the glory of having just come out of British jail and highly valued by the Nationalists as a man of courage, looked defused.

He realised the genuineness of the fear of the Nationalists, but it appears that he had suddenly developed a mood to shine as a statesman above all differences and disputes. The atmosphere, however, was not conducive for his mood to be satisfied.

Ganesh Srikrishna Khaparde, one of the most active Nationalist leaders of the time, wrote in his personal diary for the 29<sup>th</sup> of December 1907 that Lala Lajpat Rai was losing his popularity. Generally, the children shouted “Bande Mataram” whenever they saw a big leader out in the street. But they did not do so any longer when they saw Lala Lajpat Rai.<sup>5</sup>

A study of the events that followed the Congress break-up shows that leading members among the ruling class were made aware of the danger that India’s aspiration for freedom was growing incorrigibly bold, though still articulated only by a section of the people. The process of readiness to face the inevitable could not but have begun, consciously or subconsciously, among the intellectual elite in the ruling hierarchy. For them the conscious device to face it would be to take recourse to new modes of repression.

Sri Aurobindo had hoped that the country would be strong enough to face the repression, at least in Bengal and Maharashtra, where the enthusiasm had become intense and almost universal; but he thought also that even if there was a temporary collapse the repression would create a deep change in the hearts and minds of the people and the whole nation would swing over to Nationalism and the ideal of independence. This actually happened . . .<sup>6</sup>

The immediate reaction of the rulers ran along the expected lines. Their wrath against Sri Aurobindo and Tilak was uncontrollable. Before a full year had passed an incident gave them the opportunity to arrest Sri Aurobindo. An article written by Tilak linked to the same incident was enough for the authorities to transport him to Burma (Myanmar) and put him behind bars for six years.

The fact that Sri Aurobindo was acquitted as allegations against him could not be substantiated in the court of law made the government doubly furious. Never before had the man at the highest office of the administration been known to have developed so much fear for a native as Lord Minto, the Governor-General of British India, developed for Sri Aurobindo. His colossal machinery managed to construct a pretext to pounce upon him once again, but the object of these ploys gave them the slip. (Of that later.)

But the magic of the dream of freedom was at work. Sri Aurobindo did not tarry in the political arena, but in no time Tilak became the most trusted national leader once he returned to active politics after suffering the incarceration. He alone was identified with the highest aspiration of the nation, complete freedom which the cause of the Surat Split highlighted.

The historian Percival Spear, while analysing the event, confirms this reality,

though with a tinge of reluctance:

Today it is rather the fashion to regard the Moderates as timid time-servers and Tilak as a fearless patriot and political seer. Indeed, there is something to be said for this view of Tilak; for it was his program, not the Moderate one, which achieved fulfilment in 1947, and it was his method of active resistance to government, rather than the Moderate one of remonstrance, which secured it.<sup>7</sup>

Needless to say, at the end of the Surat event what Tilak came to represent was an ideal of which Sri Aurobindo was the concealed source. Left to himself Tilak would still have liked to work through a united Congress and Sri Aurobindo admits that Tilak was justified in his assessment of the prevailing conditions and in his outlook. But Sri Aurobindo could see the futility of Tilak's optimism. He knew that Tilak would make no headway through the path clogged by the benevolent or charitable patriotism of the host of Moderate leaders.

The Surat break-up, clearly desired by Sri Aurobindo, could probably have taken place in a less dramatic way. But subsequently available records show that the Moderates had made such clumsy and clandestine arrangements that they were bound to precipitate it. Khaparde's personal diary entry for the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 1907 has this entry:

We found that *Badmashes* were introduced into the pandal and given badges to make them look like Congress workers. Dr. Gadre discovered this and brought it to light.<sup>8</sup>

According to Khaparde the shoe that symbolised the crescendo of the session was a Moderate device to snub Tilak though the missile seems to have decided by itself to hit the very opposite target Surendranath and even to act out an extra bit by meeting the mighty Pherozeshah's head before settling down on the floor. In fact, the debate on issues like whether the 'President' had already been elected or not or whether Tilak could be declared 'Out of Order' or not were brought down to a gross material plane and thankfully led to a quick finish, courtesy a Moderate delegate, probably a certain Ambalal, who hurled a chair at Tilak, an act that became an impromptu call to the Nationalists to react. And they acted appropriately as we have already learnt from the first-hand witnesses, Nevinson in particular.

Thus Sri Aurobindo's instruction had a smooth run.

The Moderates issued a Press Note containing their version of the proceedings of the Congress. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of December, Sri Aurobindo, Tilak, G. S. Khaparde, H. Mukerjee and B. C. Chatterjee signed a rejoinder to it.<sup>9</sup>

The next day Sri Aurobindo left for Baroda.

As soon as the news of his travel to Baroda reached the city the Principal of the

college notified his decree strictly barring the students from meeting him or participating in any of his programmes. The campus looked quiet. But as soon as Sri Aurobindo's carriage, starting from the railway station approached the part of the road that passed by the college, thunderous cries of "Bande Mataram" exploded in the air and the students rushed out into the street to greet their revered professor till the other day and now a national hero. What must have been most touching to the onlookers and exasperating for the Principal, was the fact that they took over the carriage from the carter, unfastened the horses and pulled the vehicle themselves in a procession shouting slogans till its destination, the house of Khaserao Yadav.<sup>10</sup>

We conclude this chapter with an observation from R. C. Majumdar:

The following doggerel verse, very popular in 1907-8, probably represents the view of the general public:

Repression comes, but Reform lingers,  
And we linger on the shore,  
And the Moderates wither,  
And Extremist is more and more.

To Arabinda Ghose is due the chief credit for the triumphal emergence of the Extremist Party and the virtual extinction of the Moderate Party which was shortly to follow.<sup>11</sup>

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

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# ABRAHAM LINCOLN — NOBLE AND RESOLUTE

## 1. Introduction – a leader of genius

THE MOTHER once asked Mona Sarkar to bring her the photos of the revolutionaries of the Indian National Movement, particularly those who were associated with Sri Aurobindo. The conversation went as follows:

**The Mother:** Did you bring the photos of the revolutionaries as I asked you to, last time?

**Mona:** Yes, Mother. (*Mona hands Her the book The Roll of Honour, containing photographs and information on the revolutionaries who died in the struggle for India's independence.*)

**The Mother:** “The Roll of Honour”. They did well to print this quotation over his photograph.

**Mona:** Yes, Mother. It is a quotation from Lincoln, printed above his photograph.

**Mother:** It is very well done. It looks very beautiful and it is a beautiful quotation. Only towards the end, it sounds a little like propaganda — it would have been better if he had put “all turn towards the Divine for guidance . . .”

The quotation of Abraham Lincoln (printed above the caption ‘The Roll of Honour’) which Mother appreciated was an extract from his Gettysburg address:

It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause, for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.<sup>1</sup>

More words have been written about Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth President of the United States, than any historical personage except that of Jesus Christ. For most Americans, Lincoln is an icon at par with George Washington, until then America's undisputed secular saint-cum-leader. In opinion polls taken by *Life*

1. Mona Sarkar, *Indomitable Spirit*, p. 19.

magazine in 1948, the *New York Times* magazine in 1962, and the *Chicago Tribune* magazine in 1982, historians and political scholars ranked Lincoln as the best President in American history. On the centenary of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Martin Luther King, Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in August 1963 to deliver his "I have a Dream" speech to persuade President Kennedy to strive towards a society based on racial equality. King, echoing the opening words of Lincoln's Gettysburg address, declared:

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been scarred in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

Unquestionably, Lincoln was a visionary born ahead of his time; had it not been for him it would have taken decades for the Negroes to be freed from slavery. Kennedy was impressed by the speech, though on his part, he had already appointed unprecedented numbers of African-Americans to high-level positions in the administration and strengthened the Civil Rights Commission. When Jacqueline Kennedy lived in the White House, she sought comfort in the Lincoln Room in times of trouble. "The kind of peace I felt in that room," she recalled, "was what you feel when going into a church. I used to feel his strength, I'd sort of be talking to him."<sup>3</sup> Leo Tolstoy described him thus, "Of all the great national heroes and statesmen of history Lincoln is the only real giant. Alexander, Frederick the Great, Caesar, Napoleon, Gladstone and even Washington stand in greatness of character, in depth of feeling and in a certain moral power far behind Lincoln. . . . he was a Christ in miniature, a saint of humanity whose name will live thousands of years in the legends of future generations."<sup>4</sup> The celebrated American poet Walt Whitman idolised Lincoln and insisted that only the combined genius of Plutarch, Aeschylus and Michelangelo could have captured Lincoln's likeness. History Professor Douglas Brinkley says that the Lincoln inspiration is nothing new, "All Presidents walk the corridor and think about Lincoln. They stare at his portrait. Richard Nixon used to drink gin and have the Secret Service take him to the Lincoln Memorial at night just to talk to Lincoln's statue."<sup>5</sup> Theodore Roosevelt wore a lock of Lincoln's hair in a

2. Website: [www.americanrhetoric.com](http://www.americanrhetoric.com)

3. Website: [www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com)

4. Website: [www.loa.org](http://www.loa.org)

5. Website: [www.cbsnews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com) (article by Phil Hirshkorn)

ring on his finger. In 1916, Woodrow Wilson visited Lincoln's birthplace and said: "This little hut was the cradle of one of the great sons of men, a man of singular, delightful, vital genius who presently emerged on the great stage of the nation's history. Such are the authentic proofs of the validity and vitality of democracy."<sup>6</sup>

Lincoln's speeches and writings have been subjected to much study and scholarship. His contemporary, Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of best selling novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, eulogised his literary talents and affirmed that his passages in the state papers were "worthy to be inscribed in letters of gold."<sup>7</sup>

President Barak Obama, rather than remain in Washington for his inaugural, chose to travel to Philadelphia, and return via train to replicate the 137-mile trip that Lincoln had taken some 150 years ago en route to delivering his first inaugural Presidential address. The theme of Obama's Inaugural speech is taken from a phrase in Lincoln's Gettysburg address, "A New Birth of Freedom" and he also made it a point to use Lincoln's Bible whilst being sworn in as President at his inauguration. Asked which book, apart from the Bible, he would find essential to have in the Oval Office, Obama answered, *Team of Rivals* — referring to Pulitzer Prize winning author, Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. He considered it as "a wonderful book . . . a remarkable study in leadership"<sup>8</sup> and divulged that he turns to Lincoln's writings when searching for answers. In times of crisis many American Presidents and other public figures would calm themselves and try put themselves in Lincoln's shoes and then imagine what he would have done, if he were alive, whilst facing the same predicament.

## 2. Unravelling the mystique of Lincoln — childhood and youth

This article is an attempt to unravel the persona and mystique of Abraham Lincoln, the quintessential self-made man who rose, by sheer determination and drive, from acute poverty and a rather difficult and lonely childhood to the highest pinnacle — the US Presidency. He is considered to be one of the most literate, eloquent and sagacious Presidents, besides being the most loved. Personally, too, he is a role-model of self-cultivation, refinement, industriousness and utter humaneness — it should be remembered that he received almost no formal education and very little love during his childhood and adolescence. Further, this article touches upon two defining historical events — the American Civil War and the ensuing path-breaking emancipation of Negro slaves, a gigantic step in the continual process of eradicating racial discrimination. The backdrop of the tense and horrific American Civil War

6. Website: [www.lincoln.loa.org](http://www.lincoln.loa.org)

7. Website: <http://books.google.co.in> (Abraham Lincoln, G. S. Boritt, *Lincoln on Democracy*)

8. Website: <http://reviewingbooksandmovies.blogspot.in>

reveals the extreme tests and ordeals that Lincoln had to endure and brings forth his extraordinary nobility and resoluteness under the most trying and stressful of circumstances.

On his idol's resolve in facing adversity, President Obama wrote: "Lincoln's rise from poverty, his ultimate mastery of language and law, his capacity to overcome personal loss and remain determined in the face of repeated defeat — in all this, he reminded me not just of my own struggles. He also reminded me of a larger, fundamental element of American life — the enduring belief that we can constantly remake ourselves to fit our larger dreams."<sup>9</sup>

The personality of Abraham Lincoln perplexed his contemporaries and early biographers. Josiah G. Holland, whose *Life of Abraham Lincoln* was published in 1866, said he had "conversed with multitudes of men who claimed to know Mr. Lincoln intimately; yet there are not two of the whole number who agree in their estimate of him. The fact was that he rarely showed more than one aspect of himself to one man. He opened himself to men in different directions . . ."<sup>10</sup> Lincoln had an aura of profundity and mystique. A friend observed, "He made simplicity and candour a mask of deep feelings carefully concealed." His friend, Judge David Davis, found him the most inscrutable man he'd ever met. Lincoln's wife, Mary, clarified, "he was not a demonstrative man, when he felt most deeply, he expressed the least."<sup>11</sup> Lincoln was a master of self-control, discipline and will power. Fellow attorney Henry Rankin wrote, "He held his nerves in control . . . Under the most unusual and trying circumstances, he showed no embarrassment in his countenance, bodily movements, or deportment. He maintained an even serenity and composure."<sup>12</sup>

He often liked being alone; this enabled him to think things over without any interruptions. Conversely, his intimate friend Joshua F. Speed, with whom Lincoln lived in his bachelor days in Springfield, recollected: "Mr. Lincoln was a social man, though he did not seek company; it sought him." Speed recalled that friends came every evening to his house: "They came there because they were sure to find Lincoln. His habit was to engage in conversation upon any and all subjects except politics."<sup>13</sup> Lincoln overcame years of isolation, loneliness and a lack of love through Joshua Speed and his friends in New Salem. He took a joy in enchanting his friends by narrating stories and anecdotes. His junior law partner, William Herndon, recalled that in Springfield he could keep his friends laughing till dawn. At social gatherings, during his days as a lawyer, Elizabeth Allen Bradner recalled that "Mr. Lincoln was

9. Website: [www.time.com](http://www.time.com)

10. Website: [www.mrlincolnanfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnanfriends.org)

11. See Stephen B. Oates, *Abraham Lincoln — The Man Behind the Myths*, pp. 35-36.

12. Website: [www.mrlincolnanfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnanfriends.org) (Henry Rankin, *Abraham Lincoln: The First American*, p. 56)

13. Website: [www.mrlincolnanfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnanfriends.org) (Rufus R. Wilson, editor, *Intimate Memories of Lincoln*,

always the life of a party, full of anecdotes and ready with impromptu stories told at the expense of the other lawyers. Mr. Lincoln was at my house one evening in one of his happiest moods. Walking up and down he struck his head against the chandelier in our living room, halted and said: ‘How awkward I am,’ after which he continued his walk and again hit his head against the chandelier, remarking with a smile that they had none of these things at his house.”<sup>14</sup>

Despite being a lonely man Lincoln was liked and made friends wherever he went. Friendship was an important concept for Mr. Lincoln. Writing his political autobiography in 1860, Lincoln recalled that after his business failed in New Salem, “He was now without means and out of business, but was anxious to remain with his friends who had treated him with so much generosity.” However, an 1854 editorial — which Mr. Lincoln probably wrote for the *Illinois Journal* but which referred to himself in the third person — suggests that Mr. Lincoln understood the limits of friendship.<sup>15</sup> Illinois Governor Richard J. Oglesby wrote: “Mr. Lincoln was not a man of strong attachments. He was the warm friend of few men but he was the true friend of mankind. He loved man as he loved his God — logically.”<sup>16</sup> Former Congressman Isaac Arnold wrote to Herndon: “I rather agree with you — about Lincoln’s affection for men — if you mean personal attachments. He had warm friends though. But take men as a whole I think he thought better of them than they deserve. He had more faith in mankind, the masses than any other man I ever knew. He was never directly acquainted with the vice, corruption of our great cities — man as he knew him best on the frontier was, as Lincoln believed, disposed to do right — but in these great corrupt cities there is always a large class far below Lincoln’s general estimate of humanity.”<sup>17</sup> Historian Benjamin Thomas wrote: “Notwithstanding Lincoln’s geniality he was a lonely man; for there was a remoteness and innate dignity about him that kept acquaintances at arm’s length.”<sup>18</sup> Leonard Swett noted: “Some of Mr. Lincoln’s friends insisted that he lacked the strong attributes of personal affection which he ought to have exhibited. I think this is a mistake. Lincoln had too much justice to run a great government for a few favourites, and the complaints against him in this regard when properly digested amount to this, and no more: that he would not abuse the privileges of his situation.”<sup>19</sup>

Lincoln had an encyclopaedic knowledge on many subjects and possessed an extraordinary ability to convey practical wisdom, illustrating human nature and psychology, in the form of humorous tales that his listeners could remember and repeat. Lincoln did not tell a story merely for the sake of the anecdote, but to point

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 120-21.

15. Website: [www.mrlincolnanfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnanfriends.org)

16. Website: [www.mrlincolnanfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnanfriends.org) (Letter from R. J. Oglesby to W. H. Herndon, January 5, 1866)

17. *Ibid.* (D. L. Wilson and R. O. Davis, *Herndon’s Informants*, p. 587)

18. *Ibid.* (Michael Burlingame, editor, *Lincoln’s Humor*, p. 144)

19. *Ibid.* (D. L. Wilson and R. O. Davis, *Herndon’s Informants*, p. 166)

a moral or clench a fact.<sup>20</sup> This great storytelling talent was based on his prodigious memory and metamorphosed into a great oratorical skill which would eventually propel his legal and more importantly, his political career.

In May 1862, during the Civil War, Lincoln took a ship as he personally wanted to visit the battlefield. During the journey the President eased the anxieties of the crew and fellow passengers by his high-spirited discourse. General Viele marvelled how Lincoln was always the centre of the circle gathered on the quarterdeck, keeping everyone engrossed for hours as he recited passages from Shakespeare, “page after page of Browning and whole cantos of Byron.” Talking much of the day, he interspersed stories with anecdotes from his “inexhaustible stock”. Many, as usual, were directly applicable to a point made in conversation. Besides his intellectual prowess Lincoln playfully demonstrated that in “muscular power he was one in a thousand”, possessing “the strength of a giant”. He picked up an axe and “held it at arm’s length at the extremity of the [handle] with his thumb and forefinger, continuing to hold it there for a number of minutes. The most powerful sailors on board tried in vain to imitate him.”<sup>21</sup>

Marquis de Chambrun — who observed him during the tense Civil War years — remained intrigued by Lincoln’s temperament. On first impression, he “left with you with a sort of impression of vague and deep sadness.” Yet he “was quite humorous”, often telling hilarious stories and laughing uproariously. “But all of a sudden he would retire within himself; then he would close his eyes, and all his features would at once bespeak a kind of sadness as indescribable as it was deep. After a while, as though it were by an effort of his will, he would shake off this mysterious weight under which he seemed bowed; his generous and open disposition would again reappear.”<sup>22</sup>

Lincoln had suffered from severe episodes of depression in his adolescence and adult life. In his endeavour to overcome his depression his intrinsic strong will developed further. In his later years there continued to be a streak of sadness and melancholy in him but he tempered it with his humour and goodness. His intense personal sufferings made him more sensitive and empathetic to the misery of others.

In his biography of Lincoln, Herndon wrote: “In general terms his life was cold — at least characterised by what many persons would deem great indifference. He had, however, a strong latent capacity to love: but the object must first come in the guise of a principle, next it must be right and true — then it was lovely in his sight. He loved humanity when it was oppressed — an abstract love as against the concrete love centred in an individual. He rarely used terms of endearment, and yet he was proverbially tender and gentle. He gave the keynote to his own character

20. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 630.

21. See *Ibid.*, pp. 436-37.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 723.

when he said: ‘With malice towards none, with charity for all.’ In proportion to his want of deep, intense love he had no hate and bore no malice. His charity for an imperfect man was as broad as his devotion to principle was enduring.”<sup>23</sup> Author Doris Kearns Goodwin examines Lincoln’s sensitivity:

Lincoln’s abhorrence of hurting another was born of more than simple compassion. He possessed extraordinary empathy — the gift or curse of putting himself in the place of another, to experience what they were feeling, to understand their motives and desires. The philosopher Adam Smith described this faculty: ‘By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation . . . we enter as it were into his body and become in some measure him.’ This capacity Smith saw as ‘the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others’. In a world envired by cruelty and injustice, Lincoln’s remarkable empathy was inevitably a source of pain. His sensibilities were not only acute, they were raw. ‘With his wealth of sympathy, his conscience, and his unflinching sense of justice, he was predestined to sorrow,’ observed Helen Nicolay, whose father would become Lincoln’s private secretary.

Though Lincoln’s empathy was at the root of his melancholy, it would prove an enormous asset to his political career. ‘His crowning gift of political diagnosis,’ suggested Nicolay, ‘was due to his sympathy . . . which gave him the power to forecast with uncanny accuracy what his opponents were likely to do.’ . . . Such capacity to intuit the inward feelings and intentions of others would be manifest throughout his career.<sup>24</sup>

Curiously Lincoln’s empathy extended also to his foes. In the last days of the war Lincoln’s bodyguard William Crook observed that Lincoln seemed to absorb the horrors of the war into himself. Crook had witnessed Lincoln’s “agony when the thunder of the cannon told him that men were being cut down like grass.” He had seen the anguish on the President’s face when he came within “sight of the poor, torn bodies of the dead and dying on the field of Petersburg.” He discerned his “painful sympathy with the forlorn rebel prisoners”, and his profound distress at “the revelation of the devastation of a noble people in ruined Richmond.” In each instance, Lincoln had internalised the pain of those around him — the wounded soldiers, the captured prisoners, the defeated Southerners. Little wonder that he was overwhelmed at times by a profound sadness that even his own resilient temperament could not dispel.<sup>25</sup>

23. William H. Herndon, *Herndon’s Life of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 483.

24. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 104.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 724.

Remarkably, Lincoln's sensitivity was blended with self-confidence. William Herndon, who was very close to Lincoln, having spent 16 years as his junior law partner, tries to analyse the mysterious psyche of Lincoln: "He was a very sensitive man . . . a diffident man, somewhat, and a sensitive one and both of these added to his oddity, an awkwardness, etc. Lincoln had confidence, full and complete confidence in himself, self-thoughtful, self-helping, and self-supporting, relying on no man."<sup>26</sup> His friend Leonard Swett wrote, "From the commencement of his life to its close, I have sometimes doubted whether he ever asked anybody's advice about anything. He would listen to everybody; he would hear everybody, but he never asked for opinions. I never knew him in trying a lawsuit to ask the advice of any lawyer he was associated with. As a politician and as President he arrived at all his conclusions from his own reflections, and when his opinion was once formed he never had any doubt but that it was right."<sup>27</sup> When someone's quality of work had been sub-standard, Lincoln commented, "When you want a thing done, do it yourself."<sup>28</sup> Influential and astute politician Simon Weed after meeting President-elect Lincoln in 1861 wrote: "his mind is at once philosophical and practical. He sees all who go there, hears all they have to say, talks freely with everybody, reads whatever is written to him; but thinks and acts by himself and for himself."<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, author Doris Kearns Goodwin describes in her remarkable book, *A Team of Rivals*, Lincoln's willingness to listen to his cabinet and advisors with an open mind, believing that the desired solution was as likely to be found in the suggestions of others as in the ideas he generated himself.<sup>30</sup>

Let us first examine Lincoln's difficult and impoverished youth for this is essential to understand his complex multi-faceted personality. His ancestors migrated to United States in 1637 from England. Lincoln's grandfather was killed by a Red Indian — years later Lincoln reportedly commented, "I don't know who my grandfather was; I am more concerned to know what his grandson will be."<sup>31</sup> His father was left an orphan when six years old, in poverty and uneducated. He grew up to be a hardworking carpenter and farmer, respected by his neighbours. Lincoln's mother was illiterate and her father's identity is not clear as she was brought up by relatives. Lincoln was extremely reticent about his mother. He referred to his parents' ancestry as both being products of undistinguished families. During his childhood he nearly drowned but was fortunately saved by a neighbour's boy. At the age of eight he shot a wild turkey. It was a traumatic experience for he loved animals and birds and thereafter he never pulled a trigger on any game. When he was a ten-year-

26. Website: [www.mrlincolnanfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnanfriends.org) (Letter from W. H. Herndon to Truman Bartlett, July 19, 1887)

27. Website: [www.mrlincolnanfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnanfriends.org) (Leonard Swett's letter to W. H. Herndon, January 17, 1866)

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

29. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 289.

30. See website: [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov) (lecture by Harold Holzer)

31. Website: [www.quotationsbook.com](http://www.quotationsbook.com)

old, a horse kicked him in the head — it nearly killed him. Lincoln's father wanted to raise him to be a farmer and as a young boy he helped his father clear fields, chop wood or thresh wheat. Lincoln disliked farm work but toiled hard. He became a master axe-man and if one heard him felling trees it would appear that three men were working at the same time, so fast, strong and efficient was he. Lincoln resented his father for he forced him to work on the fields and discouraged him from studying, occasionally destroying his books and may have even physically abused him. The relationship between father and son was strained.

His mother died when he was nine years old and subsequently he never spoke about it. It was a huge blow to the family and soon after, his father journeyed for a few months to find a new wife abandoning his two children. Lincoln's twelve-year-old sister did the cooking and took care of him but the months without any adult guidance was lonely and difficult, especially since they were staying in a wild region. When his father returned with his new wife — Lincoln's step-mother — she was shocked to see the two abandoned children living like animals — wild, ragged and dirty. Soon they were washed and dressed by her. Lincoln, being never close to his father, received very little love during his childhood and adolescence. Lincoln's step-mother was uneducated but she radiated happiness and raised Lincoln and his elder sister just as her own children. He liked his step-mother because of her warm nature and fair ways. This was perhaps the only bright spot of his childhood. She saw in him a rare innate talent and encouraged him to read, learn and grow. She later said, "Abe never gave me a cross word or look and never refused in fact, or even in appearance, to do any thing I requested him. I never gave him a cross word in all my life. He was kind to everybody and every thing and always accommodate[d] others if he could — would do so willingly if he could."<sup>32</sup>

He went to school only after he crossed ten but his busy farming schedule allowed him to muster up merely a year of formal education. Lincoln, however, had an innate drive to learn and despite the odds against him taught himself to write and even developed interest in poetry. He soon became the family-cum-neighbourhood scribe, writing letters for one and all. It was also an invaluable learning curve in worldly wisdom as it obliged him to see the world through other people. He loved reading and neighbours recalled that he scoured the countryside for books and read everything that he could lay his hands on. Books were scarce as ownership of books at that time was a luxury and beyond his means. Through books he tried to identify with the great minds of the past. When he received a copy of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* he got so excited that he could hardly eat or sleep. He explored the wonders of history and literature and through books, his imagination travelled to other countries, imbibing their knowledge and culture. It was through literature that he was able to transcend his dismal surroundings. During lunch break and in

32. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 49-50.

between his farming chores he would read Parson Weems's biography of George Washington. The *War of Independence* so thrilled him that he felt that he was almost in the battlefield. He dreamt of Washington and Jefferson and idolised them as heroes who shaped American history. This book made such a deep impression on him that forty years later, when addressing the New Jersey legislators, he said: "I remember all the accounts" in Weems's book "of the battlefields and struggles for the liberty of the country . . . the great hardships endured at that time, all fixed themselves on my memory more than any single revolutionary event. . . . I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have been something more than common that those men struggled for."<sup>33</sup> Historian Douglas Wilson writes, "He was different from those around him. He knew he was unusually gifted and had great potential." His schoolmates saw that he was "clearly exceptional". Lincoln biographer, David Donald, observed, "he carried away from his brief schooling the self-confidence of a man who has never met his intellectual equal." His mind and ambition, his childhood friend Nathaniel Grisby recalled, "soared above us. He naturally assumed the leadership of the boys. He read and thoroughly read his books whilst we played. Hence he was above us and became our guide and leader."<sup>34</sup>

By the age of sixteen he was more than six feet tall, a superb athlete, strong, and also a wrestler to be reckoned with. He looked a bit odd with his high cheek bones, unruly hair, long arms and legs and one woman recalled that all the girls made fun of Abe but he didn't seem to mind because he was such a good fellow. At seventeen Lincoln left home for a time to work at a ferry. At nineteen he suffered a shattering blow when his elder sister — who had been a good support to him — died suddenly. When she died, a relative recalled, that Lincoln "sat down on a log and hid his face in his hands while the tears rolled down through his long bony fingers. Those present turned away in pity and left him to his grief." Within a decade he had lost both his mother and his only sibling. "From then on," a neighbour said, "he was alone in the world you might say."<sup>35</sup>

When Lincoln was twenty-one his father migrated to Illinois where he helped his father erect another log cabin, clear 10 acres of land, split fence rails and plant corn.

Soon after, Lincoln made a courageous decision to separate from his father — there was no bonding between father and son and he never saw his father again. He set off on his own, heading south, penniless. He got a job as a clerk at a general store in a town called New Salem. There the Clary Grove Boys, a gang of brazen youth in the neighbourhood, were feared by the town folk. The leader of this gang, Jack Armstrong, was considered to be the best wrestler in town and one day

33. Website: [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov) (lecture by James M. McPherson)

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

35. See *Ibid.*

challenged Lincoln to a wrestling match. The match started evenly but soon when it seemed that Lincoln would throw the champion to the ground the entire gang jumped on him. Instead of being cowed down Lincoln laughed, challenging them that he would take on all, one at a time. Impressed by his courage Jack Armstrong shook Lincoln's hand and befriended him.<sup>36</sup> Lincoln was "as brave a man as ever lived,"<sup>37</sup> said long time friend William Greene. Indeed, there were several tales of Lincoln's awesome strength and courage and four of these are narrated below.

A friend narrates: "He was the strongest man I ever knew, and has been known to lift a man of his own weight and throw him over a worm fence. Once, in Springfield, the Irish voters meditated taking possession of the polls. News came down the street that they would permit nobody to vote but those of their own party. Mr. Lincoln seized an axe-handle from a hardware store, and went alone to open a way to the ballot-box. His appearance intimidated them, and we had neither threats nor collisions all that day."<sup>38</sup>

In his first legislative campaign Mr. Lincoln displayed a characteristic which was to define his early personal and political image — a willingness to come to the physical defence of his friends. William H. Herndon wrote: "His maiden effort on the stump was a speech on the occasion of a public sale at Pappsville, a village eleven miles west of Springfield. After the sale was over and speechmaking had begun, a fight — a 'general fight', as one of the bystanders relates — ensued, and Lincoln, noticing one of his friends about to succumb to the energetic attack of an infuriated ruffian, interposed to prevent it. He did so most effectually. Hastily descending from the rude platform he edged his way through the crowd, and seizing the bully by the neck and seat of his trousers, threw him by means of his strength and long arms, as one witness stoutly insists, 'twelve feet away'. Returning to the stand and throwing aside his hat he inaugurated his campaign."<sup>39</sup>

Politicians learned that Mr. Lincoln was a good person to defend their principles and their persons. On one occasion, Whig attorney Edward D. Baker "was speaking in a court-house, which had once been a store house, and, on making some remarks that were offensive to certain political rowdies in the crowd, they cried: 'take him off the stand.' Immediate confusion ensued, and there was an attempt to carry the demand into execution," wrote biographer Joseph Holland, retelling a story told him by then Whig lawyer Usher F. Linder. "Directly over the speaker's head was an old scuttle, at which it appeared Mr. Lincoln had been listening to the speech. In an instant, Mr. Lincoln's feet came through the scuttle, followed by his tall and sinewy frame, and he was standing by Colonel Baker's side. He raised his hand, and the assembly subsided immediately into silence. 'Gentlemen,' said Mr. Lincoln, 'let us

36. See *Lincoln's Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, pp. 18-19.

37. Website: [www.mrlincolnandfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnandfriends.org) (Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress)

38. Ibid. (Francis Fisher Browne, *The Every-day Life of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 176-177)

39. Ibid. (William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Life of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 85-86)

not disgrace the age and country in which we live. This is a land where freedom of speech is guaranteed. Mr. Baker has a right to speak, and ought to be permitted to do so. I am here to protect him and no man shall take him from this stand if I can prevent it.” Mr. Lincoln’s dramatic entrance and dramatic appearance quickly subdued the crowd.<sup>40</sup>

During the 1840 presidential campaign, Baker and Mr. Lincoln were present when Usher F. Linder who gave a rousing partisan speech at the Springfield State House. The crowd grew rowdy and Mr. Lincoln determined that Usher might need some protection. He and Baker constituted themselves as bodyguards on the speaker’s platform. After Usher concluded, Mr. Lincoln said: “Linder, Baker and I are apprehensive that you may be attacked by some of those ruffians who insulted you from the galleries, and we have come up to escort you to your hotel. We both think we can do a little fighting, so we want you to walk between us until we get you to your hotel. Your quarrel is our quarrel and that of the great Whig Party of this nation; and your speech, upon this occasion, is the greatest one that has been made by any of us, for which we wish to honour, love, and defend you.” Linder said: “This I consider no ordinary compliment, coming from Mr. Lincoln, for he was no flatterer, nor disposed to bestow praise where it was undeserved.”<sup>41</sup>

Soon the Armstrong gang in New Salem came to admire Lincoln not only for his physical prowess but also for his wit and humour. He was a charming raconteur who could have his audience in splits. Even as a small boy he had a dry sense of wit and wrote in his notebook:

’Tis Abraham Lincoln holds the pen,  
He will be good, but God knows when.<sup>42</sup>

Rather than indulging in alcohol, dice or cards, Lincoln “sought relaxation in anecdotes”.<sup>43</sup> It is ironic that a man who had a rather unhappy and uneventful childhood should bring about happiness to others. Even Usher F. Linder, himself a noted humorist, exclaimed, “O Lord, wasn’t he funny.”<sup>44</sup> One incident that comes to mind is when in a courtroom battle Lincoln’s legal opponent had the law on his side and he knew it. As the opponent proceeded with vociferous arguments, he removed his coat and in doing so displayed his shirt that was buttoned at the back. When Lincoln took the floor he said: “Gentlemen of the jury, having justice on my side, I don’t think you will be at all influenced by the gentleman’s pretended knowledge of the law when you see he does not even know which side of his shirt

40. Ibid. (Joseph G. Holland, *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 96-97)

41. Ibid. (Francis Fisher Browne, *The Every-day Life of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 175-176)

42. *Lincoln’s Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, p. 16.

43. Website: [www.mrlincolnanfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnanfriends.org) (Letter of Joshua Speed to W.H. Herndon, December 6, 1866)

44. Website: [www.mrlincolnanfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnanfriends.org)

should be in front.” There was an uproarious laugh, from all corners of the courtroom, including the jury box, and Lincoln’s wit won him the case.<sup>45</sup> With his good sense of humour he used to disarm opponents and win friends.

Though Lincoln had only a year of formal education he had an innate intellectual force and his intrinsic nature drove him to constantly learn and gain knowledge. He studied grammar to polish up his English and became a voracious reader, even reading and reciting while walking, and for the simple townfolk of New Salem who never read anything, this was rather bizarre. He read the Bible, Shakespeare and poetry. He taught himself mathematics, a subject that also interested him. Law associates later recalled how Lincoln was often found reading Euclid in the middle of the night under candlelight with his feet sticking over the footboard of the bed, whilst the whole world was then sleeping. Besides, he also had a special talent for inventing mechanical things. His fellow lawyers found him studying astronomy, political economy and philosophy. “Life was to him a school,” fellow circuit rider Leonard Swett observed, “and he was always studying and mastering every subject which came before him.”<sup>46</sup> John Littlefield, a clerk in Lincoln’s law office, later recalled: “Lincoln displayed great eagerness to learn on all subjects from everybody. When he was introduced to persons his general method was to entertain them by telling them a story, or else cross-question them along the line of their work, and soon draw from them about all the information they had.”<sup>47</sup>

Despite receiving almost no formal education, Lincoln embarked on a life-long quest for learning and self-improvement. In his teens he was so intense and self-driven that, “nothing made him angrier, than his inability to comprehend everything that was told.”<sup>48</sup> Subsequently during his single term in the House of Representatives his colleagues were amused that Lincoln spent his spare time poring over books in the Library of Congress. The result of Lincoln’s “stunning work of self-education” metamorphosed into “intellectual power” revealed in his writings and speeches. Lincoln consorted with a group of freethinkers who read Voltaire and Thomas Paine and believed that reason should triumph over blind passion.<sup>49</sup>

While Lincoln was a Congressman in Washington in 1848, his young law partner, William Herndon, asked him for advice about how to succeed. Lincoln, quite typically, pondered over the question and then frankly admitted, “I hardly know what to say.” After searching for an answer, however, Lincoln soon found it within himself. The key to success was self-improvement. “The way for a young

45. See *Lincoln’s Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, pp. 26-27.

46. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 153.

47. Website: [www.mrlincolnanfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnanfriends.org) (Harold Holzer, editor, *Lincoln as I Knew Him: Gossip, Tributes & Revelations from His Best Friends and Worst Enemies*, p. 77)

48. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 50.

49. See Stephen B. Oates, *Abraham Lincoln — The Man Behind the Myths*, p. 40 and See *New York Times Book Review*, February 10, 2002 (William Lee Miller, *Lincoln’s Virtues: An Ethical Biography*)

man to rise,” Lincoln wrote, “is to improve himself every way he can.”<sup>50</sup>

This series will delve into his profound persona, examining his thoughts, speeches, actions, tenderness and how he reacted to the most traumatic circumstances in his life. It is a study of Lincoln’s astonishing humaneness and nobility, Lincoln who is considered by several scholars to be indisputably amongst the greatest men in living history.

*(To be continued)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

50. Website: [www.quod.lib.umich.edu](http://www.quod.lib.umich.edu) (Kenneth J Winkle, *Abraham Lincoln: Self-made Man*)

*We say to the nation, “It is God’s will that we should be ourselves and not Europe. We have sought to regain life by following the law of another being than our own. We must return and seek the sources of life and strength within ourselves. We must know our past and recover it for the purposes of our future. Our business is to realise ourselves first and to mould everything to the law of India’s eternal life and nature. It will therefore be the object of the Karmayogin to read the heart of our religion, our society, our philosophy, politics, literature, art, jurisprudence, science, thought, everything that was and is ours, so that we may be able to say to ourselves and our nation, ‘This is our dharma.’ We shall review European civilisation entirely from the standpoint of Indian thought and knowledge and seek to throw off from us the dominating stamp of the Occident; what we have to take from the West we shall take as Indians. And the dharma once discovered we shall strive our utmost not only to profess but to live, in our individual actions, in our social life, in our political endeavours.”*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 7)*

## RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of June 2014)

### XI

WE had been looking at the use of parison in a certain sentence. To refresh our memory, here is the sentence:

. . . the book on every page attracts and satisfies by its living force of style, its almost perfect measure, its delicacy of touch, its fineness and depth of observation and insight, its just sympathy and appreciation.<sup>1</sup>

Here we have three phrases paralleling each other:

. . . its living force of style,/its almost perfect measure,/its delicacy of touch.

and then we have two more, slightly longer phrases, parallel to each other:

. . . its fineness and depth of observation and insight,/its just sympathy and appreciation.

These are not just phrases of equal length (then it would have been a case of isocolon), but they also parallel each other. There is also repetition of the word "its", which stresses the parallelism and also lends the richness and complexity of another figure of speech, anaphora (to be discussed later).

There are two very fine examples of this figure in *The Hour of God*, which we quote, without any comments:

- a) If thou hast a duty, this is thy duty; if thou askst what shall be thy aim, let this be thy aim; if thou demandst pleasure, there is no greater joy . . .
- b) Live in his being, shine with his light, act with his power, rejoice with his bliss.<sup>2</sup>

Two more figures in this group still remain to be studied, enthymeme and polyptoton. Enthymeme has been defined by Aristotle as "a sort of syllogism". The

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

2. *Op. cit.*, a) p. 8, b) p. 11.

main difference between a logical syllogism and an enthymeme is that the latter is based on probabilities where the former is based on facts. Aristotle gives an example of enthymeme:

No man who is sensible ought to have his children taught to be excessively clever, for, not to speak of the charge of idleness brought against them, they earn jealous hostility from the citizens.<sup>3</sup>

This seems to be rather involved for a syllogism, but it can be broken down into one. Yet the fact remains that this argument is based, not on certainties, like syllogism, but on suppositions and probabilities. Such enthymemes are plentiful in our writer:

But it is precisely the possession of such a self-recognising spiritual attitude and the attainment of a satisfying artistic form for it which makes the poetry of a nation a power in the world's general culture.<sup>4</sup>

This is an argument, not a clear-cut syllogism. It is what Aristotle calls "a sort of syllogism", just like the example he has given. In case the example is not clear enough here is another. It is about philosophers. The writer says that there are great philosophers, but no philosophical tradition. Then he says:

Still in these fields there has been remarkable accomplishment and the influence on European thought has been occasionally considerable and sometimes capital.<sup>5</sup>

This sentence cannot be broken into a systematic syllogism. Yet it is quite obviously an argument, and it can be called an enthymeme.

The last figure in this group is polytoton which has many varieties. Longinus, who cannot really be called a rhetorician, has given five of them of which only the last and the most obvious will be mentioned here. In it the speaker suddenly addresses the hearer or the reader directly. Longinus emphasises the highly dramatic quality of this figure in no uncertain manner:

All such passages, by their directly personal address, bring the hearer right into the middle of the action being described. When you seem to be addressing, not the whole audience, but a single member of it . . . you will affect him most profoundly.<sup>6</sup>

3. *Rhetoric*, Freese, J. H. transl., Loeb Cl. Lib., II, xxi, 2.

4. *The Future Poetry*, p. 62.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

6. Dorsch, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

The examples he gives are all taken from history and narrative poetry, not oratory or drama. So it is equally well-suited for discursive prose. The second essay in *The Hour of God* is written almost entirely as an exhortation to the reader, interspersed with paragraphs written in the third person. Sometimes the change from the third to the second person and vice versa occurs in the same paragraph and then this change of persons (which is what polyptoton is) becomes remarkably effective. I shall give the last para without presuming to comment upon the figures of speech used, or the prose style:

Beautiful is the face of the Divine Mother, but she too can be hard and terrible. Nay, then, is immortality a plaything to be given lightly to a child or the divine life a prize without effort or the crown for a weakling? Strive rightly and thou shalt have; trust and thy trust shall in the end be justified; but the dread Law of the Way is there and none can abrogate it.<sup>7</sup>

*(To be continued)*

RATRI RAY

7. *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA Vol. 12, p. 156.

*We say to the individual and especially to the young who are now arising to do India's work, the world's work, God's work, "You cannot cherish these ideals, still less can you fulfil them if you subject your minds to European ideas or look at life from the material standpoint. Materially you are nothing, spiritually you are everything. It is only the Indian who can believe everything, dare everything, sacrifice everything. First therefore become Indians. Recover the patrimony of your forefathers. Recover the Aryan thought, the Aryan discipline, the Aryan character, the Aryan life. Recover the Vedanta, the Gita, the Yoga. Recover them not only in intellect or sentiment but in your lives. Live them and you will be great and strong, mighty, invincible and fearless. Neither life nor death will have any terrors for you. Difficulty and impossibility will vanish from your vocabularies. For it is in the spirit that strength is eternal and you must win back the kingdom of yourselves, the inner Swaraj, before you can win back your outer empire. There the Mother dwells and She waits for worship that She may give strength. Believe in Her, serve Her, lose your wills in Hers, your egoism in the greater ego of the country, your separate selfishness in the service of humanity. Recover the source of all strength in yourselves and all else will be added to you, social soundness, intellectual preeminence, political freedom, the mastery of human thought, the hegemony of the world."*

*Sri Aurobindo*

*(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 7-8)*

# AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

*(Continued from the issue of June 2014)*

## 10. Chanticleer's Wake-up Call

THE Monk of the Canterbury pilgrims had dipped the fellow travellers in a sea of depression what with his tales of illustrious personalities who had been made to bite the dust by Fate: among them Samson, Hercules, Nero, Julius Caesar. Even the battle-hardened Knight has had enough of tragedy, and tells him that his tale is a nuisance. There will be several tales for the company from the Miller, the Reeve, the Man of Law and the Nun's Priest, to name a few. Some of the story-tellers would be women: the Prioress, the Nun. High seriousness, sheer romance, raucous humour and moralising too. Of all the tales of Chaucer in this work, 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' has remained a favourite since my College days. The laughter that echoed in the room in 1955 as we tried to comprehend the language and the story it told, the quaint spellings, the shine in the eyes of our teacher as she tried to look serious but could not withhold her smiles: all this could have happened yesterday!

Though it is a fable about a cock and a fox, the telling does not lack in innuendos which would make people blush. As when the Priest concludes his tale, the Host of the Inn who is one of the pilgrims, compliments the Priest for his handsome appearance. It was as well he had taken to celibacy as a Nun's Priest! Else, he would have been like Chanticleer, getting as many wives as possible in his hold!

As desired by the Host and the Knight, "this gentle priest, this kindly man Sir John" begins his merry tale. It is a mock-heroic poem and begins on a sober note. There was an old and poor widow living in a cottage near a garden. She was kindly, patient, poor but by dint of hard work she managed to live with her three daughters. She was thrifty, had three cows, three sows and a sheep named Molly. A poor and healthy life, not like the showy but sickly lives of the rich!

With pungent sauce she never had to deal.  
No dainty morsel passed her throat, it's not  
A fancy diet found in such a cot,  
So overeating never caused her qualm.  
A temperate diet was her only balm,  
With exercise and a contented heart;  
The gout did not stop dancing on her part,  
And apoplexy never hurt her head.  
She had no wine to drink, nor white nor red,

Her board was mostly served with white and black  
 (Milk and brown bread, of which she found no lack),  
 Broiled bacon, and sometimes an egg or two.  
 Her work was much like dairywomen do.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the tale, Chaucer would contrast the lifestyle of the poor which is all hard work and thrift, and the wasteful and vain lives of the very rich. The unproductive rich is symbolised by Chanticleer. What a personality of smug arrogance!

His comb was finest coral red and tall,  
 And battlemented like a castle wall.  
 His bill was black and like the jet it glowed,  
 His legs and toes like azure when he strode.  
 His nails were whiter than the lilies bloom,  
 Like burnished gold the colour of his plume.  
 This gentle cock commanded at his leisure  
 A flock of seven hens to do his pleasure,  
 His paramours and sisters, each of whom  
 Like him had wondrous colouring in her plume.  
 But she with fairest colouring on her throat  
 Was that one called fair damsel Pertelote.

According to Sri Aurobindo such reflection upon what Chaucer was watching everyday helped him give something genuinely 'English', which is not life recorded in the Greek or Latin of the past or the French of the present. It is certainly with 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' in mind that Sri Aurobindo writes about Chaucer that he did not:

. . . ask himself what is the meaning of all this movement of life or the power in it or draw any large poetic idea from its vivid scheme and structure. He is not moved to interpret life; a clear and happy presentation is his business. It is there simply in the sunlight with its familiar lines and normal colours, sufficiently interesting in itself, by its external action, and he has to record it, to give it a shape in lucid poetic speech and rhythm; for to turn it into stuff of poetry that and the sunlight of his own happy poetic temperament in which he bathes it is all he needs. The form he gives to it is within its limits and for its work admirably apt, sufficient and satisfying, — altogether and excellently satisfying if we ask from it nothing more than it has to offer.<sup>2</sup>

1. All translations from 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' cited in this essay are by Ronald L. Ecker and Eugene J. Crook.

2. *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, pp. 66-67.

Philosophy there is none here and Chaucer does leave us to do the interpretation ourselves if we want. But we have no time to stand and ruminate, for the charming story in the mock-heroic pattern moves swiftly with descriptions and conversation alternating to create a whole new world which is also quite familiar. Oh yes, never a dull moment! When Chanticleer and his wives speak in this rather realistic story, we need not feel alarmed. Chaucer assures us that in those days beasts and birds could also speak and sing as we do.

One morning Chanticleer looks frightened for he has had a bad dream. He had dreamt that a huge hound had caught hold of him and killed him. But the practical Pertelote gives him a tongue-lashing. What cowards these men be!

We all desire, if heaven let it be,  
 Wise, hardy men of generosity,  
 Husbands discreet — not niggards, fools aghast,  
 Afraid of every weapon that comes past,  
 Nor haughty boasters. By that God above,  
 How dare you say, for shame, to your true love  
 That anything can make you so afeard!  
 Have you no manly heart to match your beard?  
 Alas! can you be so afraid of dreams?  
 Illusion's all it is, not what it seems.  
 Such dreams from overeating come to pass . . .

Well-said like any practical housewife of all times! Certainly, “admirably apt, sufficient and satisfying”. Pertelote could put to shame any modern Professor of Pharmacology by her dissertation on the humours that rule a man’s mind and body. How our personality has four temperaments, the sanguine, the choleric, the phlegmatic and the melancholic. Each person acts and lives according to his temperament. Pertelote can even quote Cato and fetch herbs that can cure her shivering husband. She will definitely purge him of worms in his belly as well as the worms in his mind! Chanticleer fights back and the couple would put to shame the best of television orators. He reels off stories about dreams coming true and travellers being murdered on the highway, and speaks of St. Kenelm and Macrobius, Scipio, the Old Testament, Croesus, Andromache . . . Chanticleer just cannot stop, he is in love with his own voice, he is garrulity personified. But he is either too deeply in love with his wife or is afraid of her and so puts an end to his melancholy and flatters her with a grand Latin phrase: *In principio, Mulier est hominis confusio* (which literally means ‘In the beginning woman is the cause of man’s confusion or ruin’ but which Chanticleer gallantly translates as ‘A woman is man’s joy and all his bliss.’). We then have a frolicky picture of Chanticleer with his many wives gambolling in the yard and looking for kernels. Chaucer’s mocking tone brings to

us a grand ball in a nobleman's high-ceilinged mansion.

So the days passed. And a day came when he was so happy he began to sing as the birds were all singing and the flowers were all in glorious bloom. Chaucer says that the story he would be relating now is as true as the tale of Lancelot of the Lake. There was a wily fox in a nearby grove that broke through the hedge of this old woman's backyard and hid itself in a bed of cabbages. He was waiting to get at Chanticleer, as a homicide who would wait to ambush and murder menfolk. Chaucer's grand indictment here is famous for its mock-heroic tone:

O false murderer, lurking in your den!  
 O new Iscariot, new Ganelon!  
 O false dissembler, like the Greek Sinon  
 Who brought the Trojans sorrow so severe!  
 A curse upon that day, O Chanticleer,  
 When to that yard you flew down from the beams!  
 Full warning you were given by your dreams,  
 That very day would bring adversity.  
 But that which God foreknows is what must be,  
 Or so, at least, some learned men contest.  
 As any worthy scholar will attest,  
 In schools there is a lot of altercation  
 About the matter, mighty disputation  
 (A hundred thousand men are in the rift).  
 In this the grain from chaff I cannot sift  
 As can the holy doctor Augustine,  
 Boethius, or Bishop Bradwardine . . .

The day was beautiful and Pertelote was sunbathing while Chanticleer began to sing. When in that merry mood, his eyes fell on the fox and his joy was shattered. He began to stutter in fear and would have run away but the words of the wily fox stopped him and began to flatter his singing abilities. The fox also says that the cock's parents had visited his lair and the father was a mighty great singer! It would indeed be great if Chanticleer also could visit him. He makes a request. Chanticleer should sing so that the fox could judge whether he had imbibed his great father's teachings well. Is there anyone who is immune to flattery, especially a vain character like Chanticleer? Chaucer was no doubt having a shot at the lords in the royal court who prefer to listen to flatterers than "the man who speaks to you the truth as best as he can".

An expert ballet dancer, Chanticleer got ready to sing. Standing high on his toes, he stretched his neck getting his throat ready. He closed his eyes: wasn't he going to experience in bliss the music of his creation? A familiar enough picture for

us who attend concerts, but it proved disastrous for Chanticleer's person. The fox made use of this opportunity when the bird was lost in his own vanity, grabbed him and ran away towards the woods.

But the fox had not calculated the power of Chanticleer's marital status. A multiplicity of wives may lead to domestic discord, but here it proved to be a blessing. There were so many of his wives around that they all set up a cackle, like Hell's Furies. The mock heroic style sizzles:

Surely not such a cry or lamentation  
 Did ladies make at Troy's devastation —  
 When Pyrrhus seized King Priam by the beard  
 And with his straight, unsparing sword then speared  
 And slew him (so relates the *Aeneid's* bard) —  
 As made all of the hens there in the yard  
 When they had seen the plight of Chanticleer.  
 Shrieked Pertelote so loudly all could hear,  
 More loudly than did King Hasdrubal's wife  
 When her husband at Carthage lost his life  
 And Romans made the town a conflagration.

Ever careful with her fowls, the old lady of the house heard the din and ran out with her daughters. They saw the fox carrying away Chanticleer and began to pursue the thief. As the ladies ran, they were followed by other maids, the cow, the dog and the hogs and the din was terrible. There is always a strength that flows into an individual if he realises that he is not alone in this world. There are others to pray for him, to save him, to love him and even lament if something should happen to him. This is exactly what happened to Chanticleer who heard the terrific din that was being made by those in pursuit. Yet, he knew the fox was swifter than them and once he was deep in the woods, the pursuers would lose track. Something had to be done, he thought, even as the shock of being caught by the fox wore off and he came back to full consciousness. It was clear he had no way to get out of the clutches of the fox that was determined to kill and eat him up. If only he could slither out!

The fox is no stranger to any area in this world. He is found everywhere and occupies a significant space in all cultures too. The popularity of 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' is also due to this fact that the character is so very familiar to all human beings. Almost all countries have their own folklore featuring foxes. There do not seem to be golden-hearted foxes, though. They are almost always cunning and deceitful. At the same time, no fox seems to be portrayed as a totally evil creature. A fox tale can give the child plenty of laughs. The fox that found the unreachable grapes to be sour has given us a very helpful term, "sour grapism". Chaucer's fox also is not totally evil. Chanticleer, though in mortal dread of the fox, now wonders whether

there can be a way out for him, after all. The fox had flattered him and won. Why not try the same trick against the fox?

Chanticleer cannot flatter the fox. It would be jejune for the fox is clever. Why not try flattery on another level? Sir fox, you are such a capable fellow, how dare these idiots follow you and shout so sheepishly, knowing well that they cannot succeed? Perhaps the fox should ask them to get lost while he speeds towards his forest lair. To use a grand simile, diamond cuts diamond! So our hero said:

I say,  
 What I would do, my lord, if I were you,  
 So help me God, is tell those who pursue,  
 “Turn back, you fools, you haughty churls all,  
 And may a pestilence upon you fall!  
 For now that I have reached the woodland’s side,  
 In spite of you this cock shall here abide —  
 I’ll eat him up right now in front of you!”

Did Chanticleer’s voice shake? Perhaps not. Even if it had, the fox would have been only too happy. How the world fears me! It is the typical stance of the Hitleresque tyrant. One moment is enough for the tyrant’s fall, one false step in his arrogance. All tyrants love to boast. Ozymandias did and look at what history has done to him! The fox cannot remain mum anymore, holding Chanticleer’s neck by his teeth. “In faith, that’s what I’ll do.” Here is a chance to boast of his invincibility! But the false step had been taken and Chanticleer was free! Not all the fox’s pleadings and saccharine words can bring down the bird that had flown up and perched on the tree. Can’t the bird realise that the fox had grabbed him only for some fun? Like every false witness in a court, the fox takes God’s name to assure Chanticleer of his honesty. The cock had learnt his lesson for life. Away flattery! “For him who wills to blink when he should see, God never let there be prosperity!”

The fox had learnt his lesson too. A lesson for all humanity:

“No,” said the fox, “but God bring to defeat  
 One whose demeanor is so indiscreet  
 That when he ought to hold his peace he chatters.”

Chaucer, read today, with a translator’s help, continues to be interesting for, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, he manages to be a witness for his times. Taking all his writings together, we can see that he was interested in all kinds of tales — romantic, tragic, flippant and moralistic. None of his tales of the Canterbury canon can be compartmentalised, though. All elements were mixed by him in such a way that he remains an eminently “readable writer”. ‘The Nun’s Priest’s Tale’ has the

form of a fable that was usually meant to convey a moral. Naturally so, for Aesop's Fables formed part of the educational syllabus in medieval times. Chaucer knew his Aesop through an 11<sup>th</sup> century Latin text very well. Edward Wheatley has even found a reflection of the real-life Aesop in the Nun's Priest who was accompanying the Prioress. Chaucer drew material from various sources, says Wheatley and here is a poem where narration and interpretation go hand-in-hand. There have been many learned critiques of the story, but somehow their heaviness is a sad contrast to the lightness of the Chaucerian touch which he received from his own sources in the Reynard Cycle of fables dealing with Reynard the Fox.

In the Reynard Cycle, Chanticleer lives in the farm of a rich man. His dream is rejected by his wife, Pinte. For the rest, the storyline is the same, but there are no mock-heroic passages. Chaucer's version belongs to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Interestingly enough, John Dryden wrote his version of Chaucer's tale too. Unlike Chaucer who makes me dependent on translators, Dryden's language is accessible even today. Essentially it is the same tale we find in Chaucer. He puts the moral of the tale pithily at the end, with no flourish, so that the reader might take it to his brain straightaway. That is Dryden's style, sheer "unredeemed intellectuality", according to Sri Aurobindo who read him with care and commended his rising above the mental consciousness now and then.

In this plain fable you the effect may see  
Of negligence, and fond credulity:  
And learn besides of flatterers to beware,  
Then most pernicious when they speak too fair.  
The cock and fox, the fool and knave imply;  
The truth is moral, though the tale a lie.  
Who spoke in parables, I dare not say;  
But sure he knew it was a pleasing way,  
Sound sense, by plain example, to convey.  
And in a heathen author we may find,  
That pleasure with instruction should be join'd;  
So take the corn, and leave the chaff behind.

The very fact that Chaucer is continued to be read with great interest and often critically by succeeding generations and that John Dryden found it worthwhile to transcreate 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' speaks volumes about the classic presence of *The Canterbury Tales*. A masterpiece of observation in every way, assuring us that this is the general run of humanity, warts and all.

*(To be continued)*



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