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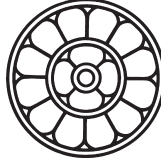
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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All correspondence to be addressed to:

MOTHER INDIA, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002, India

Phone: (0413) 2233642

e-mail: [motherindia@sriurobindoashram.org.in](mailto:motherindia@sriurobindoashram.org.in)

Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

Founding Editor: K. D. SETHNA (AMAL KIRAN)

Editors: RAVI, HEMANT KAPOOR, RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

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# MOTHER INDIA

## MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXVIII

No. 1

*“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”*

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## THE WAYS OF THE SPIRIT [1]

What points ascending Nature to her goal?  
'Tis not man's lame transcribing intellect  
With its carved figures rigid and erect  
But the far subtle vision of his soul.

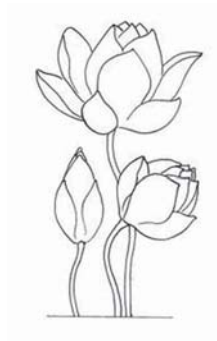
His instruments have served his weakness well  
But they must change to tread the paths of Fire  
That lead through his calm self immeasurable  
To the last rapture's incandescent spire.

The spirit keeps for him its ample ways,  
A sense that takes the world into our being,  
A close illumined touch and intimate seeing,  
Wide Thought that is a god's ensphering gaze,

A tranquil heart in sympathy with all,  
A will wide-winged, armed, imperial.

SRI AUROBINDO

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



# SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS ON THE MOTHER

(Continued from the issue of November 2014)

## ASPECTS OF THE MOTHER'S LIFE IN THE ASHRAM

### The Mother's Music

It is not by knowledge of music that the understanding [*of the Mother's music*] comes; nor is it by effort of the mind — it is by becoming inwardly silent, opening within and getting the spontaneous feeling of what is in the music.

1932

\*

*I feel within me a tendency for music, but I understand nothing of harmony, tune and rhythm. Yet sometimes when I hear the Mother's music, I am spell-bound and lose all sense of time.*

It is not necessary to have technical knowledge in order to feel what is behind the music. Mother of course does not play for the sake of a technical musical effect, but to bring down something from the higher planes and that anyone can receive who is open.

16 September 1933

\*

*When I entered the Mother's room, she had just finished playing for a long time — that is why I did not expect her to play for me.*

The Mother has played music from her childhood upwards — so it is no trouble to her to sing or play several times.

16 September 1933

\*

*Why does my mind become so full of joy listening to the Mother's music? Today while listening to her play, my mind, my heart, my whole consciousness became full of peace and joy and then went high up somewhere.*

What else is the Mother's music except the bringing down of these things? She does not play or sing merely for the music's sake, but to call down the Divine Consciousness and its Powers.

16 September 1933

\*

*Yesterday when the Mother was playing her music, I was much struck by the descent of forces in me. I clearly experienced these three elements: aspiration, surrender and the receiving of blessings. First, her soul as the immanent Divine aspired to the transcendent Divine; it was a call for her transcendent Self to come down and take possession of the downtrodden natures of her children. Then the surrender: in her zeal for union with her highest Divine Self, she almost loses herself. Then from the highest, her Voice comes down for the benefit of her children. She receives the blessings from above and showers them upon all her children. I do not know how far I am right.*

I think it is fairly correct. At any rate the first and second parts are quite correct. I do not remember the third in this form but it was a firm assurance of the realisation.

27 September 1933

\*

*Is it true that when the Mother plays on the organ she calls down the Gods of the higher planes to help us?*

Not consciously.

9 February 1934

\*

*You wrote in reply to my letter of yesterday: "Not consciously." Does it mean that the Gods are attracted to the Mother's music and so come down to hear it?*

They may be.

10 February 1934

\*

*When the Mother plays the organ, something new enters into my consciousness.  
Does she really bring down something while playing?*

If she did not bring something, why should she play at all?

19 April 1934

\*

*Yesterday I heard the Mother playing Indian music and a few days ago she  
was corresponding with X about Indian music.*

The Mother's music has often been recognised by Y as Indian music of this or that raga. The Mother plays whatever comes through her — she does not usually play any previously composed music whether European or Indian — the latter in fact she has never learned.

11 September 1934

\*

*Some people think that in the Overmind and Supermind there will be no need  
of prayer or aspiration. They must have forgotten that even our Mother has  
aspired constantly, day and night, or that when she plays her music we feel  
that she is praying.*

Yes. All that is very true. It is a prayer or an invocation that Mother makes in the music.

1 June 1935

### **The Mother's Attitude towards Music and Other Arts**

Why should you think the Mother does not approve of expression, — provided it is the right expression of the right thing, — or suppose that silence and true expression are contradictory? The truest expression comes out of an absolute inner silence. The spiritual silence is not a mere emptiness; nor is it indispensable to abstain from all activity in order to find it.

26 April 1931

\*



For the moment I am answering only to your question about the music. Let me say at once that all of you seem to have too great an aptitude for making drastic conclusions on the strength of very minor facts. It is always perilous to take two or three small facts, put them together and build upon them a big inference. It becomes still more dangerous when you emphasise minor facts and set aside or belittle the meaning of the main ones. In this case the main facts are (1) that the Mother has loved music all her life and found it a key to spiritual experience, (2) that she has given all encouragement to your music in special and to the music of others also. She has also made clear the relation of Art and Beauty with Yoga. It is therefore rather extraordinary that anyone should think she only tolerates music here and considers it inconsistent with Yoga. It is perfectly true that Music or Art are not either the first or the only thing in life for her, — any more than Poetry or Literature are with me, — the Divine, the divine consciousness, the discovery of the conditions for a divine life are and must be our one concern, with Art, Poetry or Music as parts or means only of the divine life or expression of the Divine Truth and the Divine Beauty. That does not mean that they are only “tolerated”, but that they are put in their right place.

29 October 1932

\*

*At the music one or two words of X's song practically made me weep with rapture, and some of Y's soft and deep turns of phrase almost led to tears. Afterwards it was silence. Is it the Mahalakshmi aspect of the Mother that is working these days?*

On the music days it is always the Mahalakshmi aspect that is prominent.

25 December 1933

\*

What can be stranger than this idea of yours that Mother likes only European music and does not like or appreciate Indian music — that she only pretends to do it or that she tolerates it so as not to discourage people! Remember that it is the Mother who has always praised and supported your music and put her force behind you so that your music might develop into spiritual perfection and beauty. In your poetry it was I that supported you most, in detail; the Mother could only do it with a general force, because she could not read the original (though she found them in translations very beautiful), but that in music it has been just the other way round. You surely are not going to say that all that was unfelt? And the development of X? That too was Indian music, not European. And then when I write to you in praise of your

music, do you think it is only my opinion that I am transmitting? Most often it is her words that I use to express our common feeling.

26 December 1933

\*

*There have been instances where people have taken up music with your approval, and they have worked at it only to find out later that it was not their line. What a waste of time for nothing! This is the thought that curbs my enthusiasm for writing poetry. Otherwise I quite understand that one has to suffer the "pangs of delivery". What do you say?*

Approval or permission? People get it into their heads that they would like to do some music, because it is the fashion or because they like it so much, and the Mother may tolerate it or say, "All right, try." That does not mean they are predestined or doomed to be musicians — or poets — or painters according to the case. Perhaps one of them who try may bloom, others drop off. *X* starts painting and shows only a fanciful dash at first, after a time he brings out work, remarkable work. *Y* does clever facile things; one day he begins to deepen and a possible painter in the making outlines. Others, — well, they don't. But they can try — they will learn something about painting at least.

Labour at your sestets if the spirit pushes you. The Angel of Poetry may be delivered out of the labour, even if with a forceps.

24 May 1935

\*

You have spoken of your singing. You know well that we approve of it and I have constantly stressed its necessity for you as well as that of your poetry. But the Mother absolutely forbade *X*'s singing. To music for some again she is indifferent or discourages it, for others she approves as for *Y*, *Z* and others. For some time she encouraged the concerts, afterwards she stopped them. You drew from the prohibition to *X* and the stopping of the concerts that Mother did not like music or did not like Indian music or considered music bad for sadhana and all sorts of strange mental reasons like that. Mother prohibited *X* because while music was good for you, it was spiritually poison to *X* — the moment he began to think of it and of audiences, all the vulgarity and unspirituality in his nature rose to the surface. You can see what he is doing with it now! So again with the concerts — though in a different way — she stopped them because she had seen that wrong forces were coming into their atmosphere which had nothing to do with the music in itself; her motives were not mental. It was for similar reasons that she drew back from big public displays like Udayshankar's. On the other hand she favoured and herself

planned the exhibition of paintings at the Town Hall. She was not eager for you to have your big audiences for your singing because she found the atmosphere full of mixed forces and found too you had afterwards usually a depression; but she has always approved of your music in itself done privately or before a small audience. If you consider then, you will see that here there is no mental rule, but in each case the guidance is determined by spiritual reasons which are of a flexible character and look only at what in each case are the spiritual conditions, benefits, possibilities. There is no other consideration, no rule. Music, painting, poetry and many other activities which are of the mind and vital can be used as part of spiritual development or of the work and for a spiritual purpose — “it depends on the spirit in which they are done”.

24 October 1936

### Golconde<sup>1</sup>

The institution of visitors' cards was not made for love of discipline or rule-making, but out of practical necessity. People from the town were coming in pretending to be visitors and taking their meals in the dining room and unpermitted visitors were passing themselves in for the Darshan; it was not possible for the dining room workers or the gatekeepers to know all the visitors or who were or were not genuine. I don't see myself why anybody should object or resent this necessary precaution. The alternative would be to let everybody who wanted enter for the Darshan and to let anybody who wanted to take his meal in the dining room. That would soon make things impossible.

As for X's handbag that is part of the special rules for Golconde. These rules, which do not obtain for the rest of the Asram houses, are read out to everybody who is to stay in Golconde and if he does not want he can be given accommodation elsewhere. X seemed to be very happy about his stay here; if he was not really so and felt badly about these rules, why on earth did he refuse to stay in your place?

I may mention that he told Y that there were two things he specially admired in the Asram, first the fact that everybody here rich or poor or of whatever caste was on the same level, and secondly the discipline of the Asram. He said, according to Y, that the absence of discipline was the great bane in India, neither individuals nor groups had any discipline. Then why did he weep merely because he was not allowed to put his handbag in a place not intended for it? I do not agree myself with him in the idea that there is perfect discipline in the Asram; on the contrary, there is a great lack of it, much indiscipline, quarrelling and self-assertion. What there is, is organisation and order which the Mother has been able to establish and maintain in spite of all that. That organisation and order is necessary for all collective work; it has been an object of admiration and surprise for all from outside who have observed

1. *A large Ashram residence and guesthouse built in the late 1930s.* — Ed.

the Asram; it is the reason why the Asram has been able to survive and outlive the malignant attacks of the Catholic priests and of many people in Pondicherry who would otherwise have got it dissolved long ago. The Mother knew very well what she was doing and what was necessary for the work she had to do.

Discipline itself is not something especially Western; in Oriental countries like Japan, China and India it was at one time all-regulating and supported by severe sanctions in a way that Westerners would not tolerate. Socially whatever objections we may make to it, it is a fact that it preserved Hindu religion and Hindu society through the ages and through all vicissitudes. In the political field there was on the contrary indiscipline, individualism and strife; that is one reason why India collapsed and entered into servitude. Organisation and order were attempted but failed to endure. Even in the spiritual life India has had not only the free wandering ascetic, a law to himself, but has felt impelled to create orders of Sannyasins with their rules and governing bodies and there have also been monastic institutions with a strict discipline. Since no work can be done successfully without these things — even the individual worker, the artist for instance, has to go through a severe discipline in order to become efficient — why should the Mother be held to blame if she insists on discipline in the exceedingly difficult work she has had put in her charge?

I don't see on what ground you expect order and organisation to be carried on without rules and without discipline. You seem to say that people should be allowed complete freedom with only such discipline as they choose to impose upon themselves; that might do if the only thing to be done were for each individual to get some inner realisation and life did not matter or if there were no collective life or work or none that had any importance. But this is not the case here. We have undertaken a work which includes life and action and the physical world. In what I am trying to do, the spiritual realisation is the first necessity, but it cannot be complete without an outer realisation also in life, in man, in this world. Spiritual consciousness within but also spiritual life without. The Asram as it is now is not that ideal, for that all its members would have to live in a spiritual consciousness and not in the ordinary egoistic mind and mainly rajasic vital nature. But all the same, the Asram is a first form which our effort has taken, a field in which the preparatory work has to be done. The Mother has to maintain it and for that all this order and organisation has to be there and it cannot be done without rules and discipline. Discipline is even necessary for the overcoming of the ego and the mental preferences and the rajasic vital nature, as a help to it at any rate. If these were overcome outward rules etc. would be less necessary; spontaneous agreement, unity, harmony and spontaneous right action might take its place. But while the present state of things exists, with the abandonment or leaving out of discipline except such as people might choose or not choose to impose upon themselves, the result would be failure and disaster. One has only to think what would have been the result if there had been no rules and no discipline prohibiting sex-indulgence; even with them things have not been so very

good. On that principle the work also would have gone to pot, there would have been nothing but strife, assertion by each worker of his own idea and self-will and constant clashes; even as it is, that has abounded and it is only the Mother's authority, the frame of work she has given and her skill in getting incompatibles to act together that has kept things going.

I do not find that Mother is a rigid disciplinarian. On the contrary, I have seen with what a constant leniency, tolerant patience and kindness she has met the huge mass of indiscipline, disobedience, self-assertion, revolt that has surrounded her, even abuse to her very face and violent letters overwhelming her with the worst kind of vituperation. A rigid disciplinarian would not have treated these things like that.

I do not know what ill-treatment visitors have received, apart from the insistence on rules of which you complain, but it cannot be a general complaint, otherwise the number of visitors would not be constantly increasing nor would so many people want to come back again or even come every time or so many want to stay on if the Mother allowed them. After all they do not come here on the basis of a social occasion but for Darshan of those whom they regard to be spiritually great or in the case of constant visitors for a share in the life of the Asram and for spiritual advantage and for both of these motives one would expect them to submit willingly to the conditions imposed and not to mind a little inconvenience.

As regards Golconde and its rules — they are not imposed elsewhere — there is a reason for them and they are not imposed for nothing. In Golconde Mother has worked out her own idea through Raymond, Sammer and others. First, Mother believes in beauty as a part of spirituality and divine living; secondly, she believes that physical things have the Divine Consciousness underlying them as much as living things; and thirdly, that they have an individuality of their own and ought to be properly treated, used in the right way, not misused or improperly handled or hurt or neglected so that they perish soon or lose their full beauty or value; she feels the consciousness in them and is so much in sympathy with them that what in other hands may be spoilt or wasted in a short time lasts with her for years or decades. It is on this basis that she planned Golconde. First, she wanted a high architectural beauty, and in this she succeeded — architects and people with architectural knowledge have admired it with enthusiasm as a remarkable achievement; one spoke of it as the finest building of its kind he had seen, with no equal in all Europe or America; and a French architect, pupil of a great master, said it executed superbly the idea which his master had been seeking for but failed to realise; but also she wanted all the objects in it, the rooms, the fittings, the furniture to be individually artistic and to form a harmonious whole. This too was done with great care. Moreover, each thing was arranged to have its own use, for each thing there was a place, and there should be no mixing up, or confused and wrong use. But all this had to be kept up and carried out in practice; for it was easy for people living there to create a complete confusion and misuse and to bring everything to disorder and ruination in a short

time. That was why the rules were made and for no other purpose. The Mother hoped that if the right people were accommodated there or others trained to a less rough and ready living than is common, her idea could be preserved and the wasting of all the labour and expense avoided.

Unfortunately the crisis of accommodation came and we were forced to house people in Golconde who could not be accommodated elsewhere and a careful choice could not be made. So, often there was damage and misuse and the Mother had to spend sometimes 200/300 Rupees after Darshan to repair things and restore what had been realised. Z has taken the responsibility of the house and of keeping things right as much as possible. That was why she interfered in the handbag affair — it was as much a tragedy for the table as for the doctor, for it got scratched and spoiled by the handbag — and tried to keep both the bag and shaving utensils in the places that had been assigned for them. If I had been in the doctor's place, I would have been grateful to her for her care and solicitude instead of being upset by what ought to have been for him trifles although, because of her responsibility, they had for her their importance. Anyhow, this is the rationale for the rules and they do not seem to me to be meaningless regulation and discipline.

Finally, about financial arrangements. It has been an arduous and trying work for the Mother and myself to keep up this Asram, with its ever-increasing numbers, to make both ends meet and at times to prevent deficit budgets and their results, especially in this war time, when the expenses have climbed to a dizzy and fantastic height. Only one accustomed to these things or who had similar responsibilities can understand what we have gone through. Carrying on anything of this magnitude without any settled income could not have been done if there had not been the working of a Divine Force. Works of charity are not part of our work, there are other people who can see to that. We have to spend all on the work we have taken in hand and what we get is nothing compared to what is needed. We cannot undertake things that would bring in money in the ordinary ways. We have to use whatever means are possible. There is no general rule that spiritual men must do works of charity or they should receive and care for whatever visitors come or house and feed them. If we do it, it is because it has become part of our work. The Mother charges visitors for accommodation and food because she has expenses to meet and cannot make money out of air; she charges in fact less than her expense. It is quite natural that she should not like people to take advantage of her and allow those who try to take meals in the dining room under false pretences; even if they are a few at first, yet if this were allowed, a few would soon become a legion. As for people being allowed to come in freely for Darshan without permission, which would soon convert me into a thing for show and an object of curiosity, often critical or hostile curiosity, it is I who would be the first to cry "stop".

I have tried to explain our standpoint and have gone to some length to do it. Whether it is agreed with or not, at any rate it is a standpoint and I think a rational

one. I am writing only on the surface and I do not speak of what is behind or from the Yogic standpoint, the standpoint of the Yogic consciousness from which we act; that would be more difficult to express. This is merely for intellectual satisfaction, and there there is always room for dispute.

25 February 1945

\*

As for Golconde, it is in that house of all the 80 or more houses in the Asram that she has been trying to carry out her idea of physical things, their harmony and order and proper treatment, she has not been imposing it elsewhere except in the matter of cleanliness and hygiene, which are surely not objectionable. I may say that you are mistaken in thinking that everybody who stays in Golconde is in a state of misery or revolt. On the contrary, there are many who have asked to be put and are put there at their own request every time they come. And they are not Europeans. Mother thoroughly appreciated and praised the old Indian way of living, its simplicity, harmony and order when she saw it exemplified by X and his brother in the Asram, but that is not the way of living most prevalent nowadays which is a mixture. Chairs, tables, electric fans etc. are European introductions, but I don't suppose those who have got accustomed to them would like to give them up or return to the true simplicity of Indian life. That however is by the way. But I fail to see why you should treat this external trifle as of so stupendous an importance. Mother should be free to carry out her idea in this corner of her kingdom; all that is to be seen is that those who violently dislike it should not stay in Golconde.

25 October 1945

### **The French Book *L'Ether Vivant***

Many of the questions asked in your letter about the condition after death are dealt with in the French book *L'Ether Vivant*. This book was written by Paul Richard, but all the substance was taken by him from the Mother, as he himself had no knowledge about these things. You can send the book to the Mother and she will mark the passages. You should also read what is said in the *Conversations* about these things.

18 November 1931

### **Meeting the Dead**

*Is there any indication the Mother has received to tell her that my brother's soul really wanted at the end to come to her Light and the Master's?*

Mother cannot say particularly because so many people come to her in the night for the passage to the other side whom she has not known in the body. Your brother may very well have been one of them and in view of X's account, there is little doubt that he must have been.

December 1933

\*

When Mother said that it was not good to try to meet the dead, she was speaking from a spiritual standpoint which is not usually known or regarded by the spiritists.

25 August 1936

\*

It is not for everything that the souls of the departed come direct to the Mother, but this is a special action of hers and usually she sees the persons whom she has to help. But she has seen only X's mental being and it was still interested in earthly things; his vital being she has not seen and it is that that usually comes for help. Some however come at a later stage of the passage and not at first.

8 December 1936

### **Speaking to People about Past Lives**

The Mother only speaks to people about their past births when she sees definitely some scene or memory of their past in concentration; but this happens rarely nowadays.

30 June 1933

\*

Mother does not usually look into past lives; only when things come of themselves from the past she looks.

24 July 1934

### **Sending Ethereal Beings to the Sadhaks**

*X said that ever since he wrote the sonnet "Hieroglyphics" as a joke, sonnets no longer come to him; this, you said, is because sonnets have a being of their*



*own which is shocked by any crudity, jesting or misuse. My mind then caught the idea that there are beings, probably of the intuitive plane, who have very subtle and refined vibrations. At times they enter human beings and then something of their peace, refinement and purity manifests in men. But if there is anger, passion, desire, vanity or unrefinement, they recede and live in their own region. These beings are ethereal, peaceful, pure, loving, shy, like beautiful children. One should not injure their sense of harmony, purity, refinement and beauty by allowing any lower vital crudities. Mother sends one of these beings to each of us according to his possibility.*

There is much truth in what you write — there are beings of that kind and your description is good. But it is not to *each* one that Mother sends them — only to some when there is an opening.

28 January 1934

### **An Occult or Yogic Faculty**

X has reported Mother's observation correctly but he does not seem to have understood it. The Mother never meant that by merely willing one could know at once what was in someone else or that all one's impressions about him would be spontaneously and infallibly correct. What she meant was that there is a faculty or power (an occult or Yogic faculty) by which one can get the right perceptions and impressions and if one has the will to do so, one can develop it. Not at once, not by an easy method — tra la la and there you are: it may take years and one has to be careful and scrupulous about it. For these are intuitive perceptions and intuition is a thing that can easily be imitated by many other movements of consciousness that are much more fallible. Your impressions may be mental or vital and a mental or vital impression may have something to justify it or may not — but even in the first case there is no certainty at all that it will be correct; even if there is that something, it may be incorrectly caught or caught with much mixture of error, twisted into falsehood, put in the wrong way etc. etc. And there may be no justification at all; it may be a mere wrong formation of your own mind or vital or else somebody else's wrong impression conveyed to you and accepted by you as your own. Your impression may be the result of a want of affinity between you and the other person, so that if he impresses you as null and neutral, it is because you cannot feel what is in him, it does not come home to you — or, again, if you feel that he is in a wrong condition, it may be only because his vital vibrations rub yours the wrong way. There are lots of things like that which one must have the power to distinguish very carefully and exactly; until one knows one's own consciousness and its operations well, one cannot know the operations of the consciousness of others. But it is possible to develop a certain

direct sight or a certain direct feeling or contact by which one can know, but only after much time and much careful, scrupulous and vigilant observation and self-training. Till then one can't go about saying that this is an advanced sadhak or that one is not advanced and that other is no good at all. Even if one knows, it is not necessary always to air one's knowledge.

9 February 1935

### **The Mother Takes upon Herself Difficulties and Illnesses**

*Why did the Mother fall ill last time, she who is beyond the reach of death and disease? Why did she take medicine like her blind children, she who is the cause of all medicines? Why did she suffer innocently like her frail children? Was it all a show to mask her infiniteness? Kindly write something to stop these questions in my mind.*

It is much easier for the sadhak by faith in the Mother to get free from illness than for the Mother to keep free — because the Mother by the very nature of her work had to identify herself with the sadhaks, to support all their difficulties, to receive into herself all the poison in their nature, to take up besides all the difficulties of the universal earth-Nature, including the possibility of death and disease in order to fight them out. If she had not done that, not a single sadhak would have been able to practise this Yoga. The Divine has to put on humanity in order that the human being may rise to the Divine. This is a simple truth, but nobody in the Asram seems able to understand that the Divine can do that and yet remain different from them — can still remain the Divine.

8 May 1933

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*People believe that their difficulties and illnesses are taken away by the Mother and so she sometimes suffers or, as X puts it, "Mother has to pay." Is this suffering due to the identity of consciousness that the Mother calls into play and thus enters into the depths of obscure Matter? But at that rate there would be too great an onrush of these things on her from many sadhaks. An idea comes to me of taking upon myself some of these difficulties and illnesses so that I can also suffer with her pleasantly?*

Pleasantly? It would be anything but pleasant either for you or for us.

*But perhaps all these ideas are only conjectures of people.*

It is rather a crude statement of a fact. The Mother in order to do her work had to take all the sadhaks inside her personal being and consciousness; thus personally (not merely impersonally) taken inside, all the disturbances and difficulties in them including illness could throw themselves upon her in a way that could not have happened if she had not renounced the self-protection of separateness. Not only illnesses of others could translate themselves into attacks on her body — these she could generally throw off as soon as she knew from what quarter and why it came — but their inner difficulties, revolts, outbursts of anger and hatred against her could have the same and a worse effect. That was the only danger for her (because inner difficulties are easily surmountable), but matter and the body are the weak point or crucial point of our Yoga, since this province has never been conquered by the spiritual Power, the old Yogas having either left it alone or used on it only a detailed mental and vital force, not the general spiritual force. It was the reason why after a serious illness caused by a terribly bad state of the Asram atmosphere, I had to insist on her partial retirement so as to minimise the most concrete part of the pressure upon her. Naturally the full conquest of the physical would revolutionise matters, but as yet it is the struggle.

31 March 1934

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*Is it inevitable that in the process of conversion and transformation all these resistances, disturbances, revolts should come? Could they be eliminated to some extent from the very beginning of one's sadhana so that there would be less of these things for the Mother to take into herself?*

The nature of the terrestrial consciousness and of humanity being what it is, these things were to some extent inevitable. It is only a very few who escape with the slighter adverse movements only. But after a time these things should disappear. It does so disappear in individuals — but there seems to be a great difficulty in getting it to disappear from the atmosphere of the Asram — somebody or other always takes it up and from him it tries to spread to others. It is of course because there is behind it one of the principles of life according to the Ignorance — a deeply rooted tendency of vital Nature. But it is the very aim of sadhana to overcome that and substitute a truer and diviner vital Force.

1 April 1934

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*You have written to me that standing is not good for Mother, and yet I see the Mother standing in concentration on the staircase for at least fifteen minutes every night. Remembering what you told me, I feel so anxious. I feel she has only to sit down on a seat or a chair. Can it not be done, please?*

When Mother stands on the stairs in full concentration it is quite a different thing from standing talking with people. In the former condition nothing can touch her. In the second she has to identify herself with the general physical consciousness and open herself to its forces, so the conditions are not the same. Nowadays there is an improvement in the physical, but still limits must be kept.

5 November 1934

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*There are people who tend to take away one's vital strength. What should one do? Should one not talk to others or merely exchange smiles with them or walk gravely past them? Should one try to help others at all?*

The danger of helping others is the danger of taking upon oneself their difficulties. If one can keep oneself separate and help, this does not occur. But the tendency in helping is to take the person partially or completely into one's larger self. That is what the Mother has had to do with the sadhaks and the reason why she has sometimes to suffer — for one cannot always be on guard against any backwash when one is absorbed or in action. There is also the difficulty that the persons helped get the habit of drawing and pulling on your forces instead of leaving it to you to give just what you can and ought to give. And many other smaller possibilities one who helps others has to face.

29 January 1935

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*Somebody told me that when the Mother tries to do something with X, if his vital does not agree, he revolts against her with such a force that it sometimes brings illness to her body.*

There are many who did that in the past. I don't know that he does it now. But all bad thoughts upon the Mother or throwing of impurities on her may affect her body as she has taken the sadhaks into her consciousness, nor can she send these things back to them as it might hurt them.

17 March 1936

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*Do people really throw their impurities on the Mother or does she draw their impurities into herself in order to purify them?*

There is not the slightest necessity for the Mother drawing impurities into herself — any more than for the sadhak inviting impurity to come into himself. Impurity has to be thrown away, not drawn in.

18 March 1936

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*I don't know whether the Mother was joking or was serious when she wrote to me: "But why should I have any desires either? You want me to be burdened with desires about you, so that you be free from desires? That might be good for you — not for me." I suppose this was a joke. Certainly we all wish to unload our desires on the Mother so that she may reject them or transform them.*

The idea of unburdening desires, imperfections, impurities, illnesses on the Mother so that she may bear the results instead of the sadhaks is a curious one. I suppose it is a continuation of the Christian idea of Christ suffering on the cross for the sake of humanity. But it has nothing to do with the Yoga of transformation.

1 November 1936

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*Do our grumblings and imputations against the Mother hurt her in some way? Does this have any undesirable effect on her body?*

I cannot say that it does not have an effect — sometimes it may not have, if she is on her guard, at other times it has. It is not the imputations that do it, but the force behind which throws the darkness in you and takes the form of a vital upsetting in you but passes on to her as an attack on the body since other things in her are unattackable. That is why these moods should never be formed against her.

12 January 1937

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What you saw is correct, but if the attitude of the sadhak is the true psychic attitude, then the Mother has not to suffer; she can act on them without anything falling on her.

22 January 1937

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*Mother has stopped the Pranam because something happened with her eyes. Sometimes we notice that she catches a cold. How do these things happen since she is the incarnated Divine?*

It is due to attacks. As the material is not yet conquered, the Mother's body has to bear the attacks which come daily and to which the sadhaks freely open the doors. If she cut off her consciousness altogether from that of the sadhaks or put them outside her consciousness, these things would not happen.

8 February 1937

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*I could not help writing in order to know why the Mother's left cheek was swollen. I was shocked to see it at the Sunday meditation. Is it due to the impurities of the sadhaks thrown on her, which she gladly receives for our relief? Or is it due to some other reason?*

It is due to the impurities of the sadhaks thrown on the Mother.

*How calmly she bears the agonies of her children. Is there no end to it? Will it disappear after the full transformation of the physical?*

There seems to be no remedy possible before the physical change. If the Mother puts an inner wall between her and the sadhaks, it would not happen, but then they would be unable to receive anything from her. If all were more careful to come to her with their deepest or highest consciousness, then there would be less chance of these things happening.

3 May 1937

### **The Mother and Medicines**

*I know that we inflict a lot of undesirable things on the Mother and that sometimes she does not reject them, but takes them upon herself. But why should she not reject her cold and accept a medicine to do it? I am therefore enclosing a new phial, an olfactory; Mother should take half-a-dozen inhalations in each nostril four times a day. That is all that is necessary.*

Mother does not use medicines so it is no use sending them to her. But there are people who send to her suggestions such as "Oh you are very ill, you won't be able to sit through the Pranam" and some of these are thrown with force and she has to

work them out of the system, as happened today at Pranam. If you will give these people a medicine which will stop this habit of theirs, it will be very useful.

5 September 1936

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*I am afraid Mother still has a strong photophobia. X said there is ptosis also . . .*

What is ptosis?

*which may remain if neglected.*

Why do people make such prognostications? Suggestions of the kind ought never to be made, mentally even — they might act like suggestions and do more harm than any good medicines could do.

*X doesn't understand, and neither do I, why Mother doesn't take kindly to medicines and doctors when it could be cured in a short time, he says. Well, what could I say! Shall we stop medical reports or do you see them? Frankly, I don't know how much our allopathic medicines can help.*

Then why don't you understand? If medicines can't help, what's the use of putting foreign matter in the eye merely because it is a medicine? Medicines have a quite different action on the Mother's body than they would have on yours or X's or anybody else's and the reaction is not usually favourable. Her physical consciousness is not the same as that of ordinary people — though even in ordinary people it is not so identical in all cases as science would have us believe.

1 February 1937

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*I am surprised to hear that even "prognostications" are very harmful. So far we have taken these things as simple superstitions.*

Prognostications of that kind should not be lightly thought or spoken — especially in the case of the Mother — in other cases, even if there is a possibility or probability, they should be kept confidential from the person affected, unless it is necessary to inform. This is because of the large part played by state of consciousness and suggestion in illness.

*What is ptosis? Ptosis means drooping of the upper eyelid by a paralysis temporary or otherwise.*

But, confound it, there is nothing of the kind. The drooping of the eyelid was quite voluntary.

2 February 1937

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*Whatever little doctors have found by experience to be effective, you absolutely disallow. For instance, they recommend Calomel for diarrhoea; you say it is not to be given . . .*

It is no use discussing these matters — the Mother's views are too far removed from the traditional nostrums to be understood by a medical mind, except those that have got out of the traditional groove or those who after long experience have seen things and can become devastatingly frank about the limitations of their own "science".

*Milk of Magnesia is usually harmless; but it can also be harmful, as it was in this case.*

Ideas differ. Both the Mother and X were horrified at the idea of a child of 4 months being given a purgative. The leading children's doctor in France told the Mother no child under 12 months should be given a purgative, as it is likely to do great harm and may be dangerous. But here, we understand, it is the practice to dose children freely with purgatives from their day of birth almost. Perhaps that and overadministration of medicines is one cause of excessive infant mortality.

4 April 1937

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*Once Mother asked me to try this method of diagnosis: instead of analysing the various possibilities and probabilities and then diagnosing by elimination, to just keep quiet and go at it. So also in the case of choosing medicines. Just wait for the true intuition of the thing to come.*

Well, so that's how the Mother's statements are understood! A free permit for anything and everything calling itself an intuition to go crashing into the field of action! Go at it, indeed! Poor it!

What the Mother says in the matter is what she said to Dr. X with his entire agreement — viz. reading from symptoms by the doctors is usually a mere balancing between possibilities (of course except in clear and simple cases) and the conclusion is a guess. It may be a right guess and then it will be all right, or it may be a wrong



guess and then all will be wrong unless Nature is too strong for the doctor and overcomes the consequences of his error — or at the least the treatment will be ineffective. On the contrary if one develops the diagnostic flair, one can see at once what is the real thing among the possibilities and see what is to be done. That is what the most successful doctors have, — they have this flashlight which shows them the true point. *X* agreed and said the cause of the guessing was that there were whole sets of symptoms which could belong to any one of several diseases and to decide is a most delicate and subtle business, no amount of book knowledge or reasoning will ensure a right decision. A special insight is needed that looks through the symptoms and not merely at them. This last sentence, by the way, is my own, not *X*'s. About development of intuition afterwards — no time tonight.

6 April 1937

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*I am afraid X has obstinate constipation. Treatment? Well, I am damned, for except enema castor oil is the medicine for children in our "science".*

All "science" does not recommend castor oil for children — I think it is a nineteenth century fad which has prolonged itself. The Mother's "children's doctor" told her it should not be done — also in her own case when a child the doctors peremptorily stopped it on the ground that it spoiled the stomach and liver. I suppose you will say doctors disagree? They do! When *Y*'s child reached Madras, the first doctor said "Stop mother's milk for three days", the second said "Mother's milk to be taken at once, at once!" So, sir. Anyhow for *X* Mother proposes diet first — small bananas *Z* will give, very good for constipation — papaya if available in the garden. Also as he is pimply, coconut water on an empty stomach. Afterwards we can see if medicine is necessary.

9 April 1937

### **The Mother and Eye Treatment**

*I believe the Mother is using glasses for reading. Would she like to try my treatment [palming, etc.]?*

The Mother has seen that these methods are perfectly effective, but she cannot follow a treatment because she has no time. Her sight is variable: when she can rest and concentrate a little and do what is necessary, she can read without glasses.

8 July 1934

### Giving Money to the Mother

You will find with this a letter from the Mother giving you her point of view with regard to the request for a written statement from herself about approaching people for money. You must make X understand that this is not done and cannot be done. If he feels moved to do this as work for the Mother, the knowledge that it is needed should be enough. It is not a question of a public appeal for funds, but of getting friends and sympathisers to help. You will see from the Mother's letter the spirit in which it should be done.

circa 29 April 1938

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The Mother has never objected to people who "cannot pay" residing or visiting the Asram without paying; she expects payment only from visitors who can pay. She did object strongly to the action of some rich visitors (on one occasion) who came here, spent money lavishly on purchases etc. and went off without giving anything to the Asram or even the smallest offering to the Mother, that is all.

21 October 1943

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*My book is going into a second edition. The publisher promises to send me what he owes me (to be offered to the Mother, of course). So far he hasn't sent me a pice. I wonder how much he will send in the end? Do you think I am getting too commercial?*

If you give the money to the Mother, that can't be commercial; commerce implies personal profit, and here your profit is only spiritual.

2 April 1944

### The Mother's Accounts

*X showed me the play of numbers in his account book today. The total was Rs. 7 As. 7 Ps. 7. Today is also the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of the year and after I decided to write to you about this I saw that the number on the door of the house where I was working was also 7. Elsewhere one does not come across such a play of numbers. I think it occurs here because the numbers (perhaps the occult beings of numbers) feel at ease in our atmosphere — as do the sparrows in the main building! — and they play with the numbers if one plays*

*upon them and loves them. In government departments and other places they feel the atmosphere mechanical, heavy and rigorous and so they do not find any joy in such play.*

I suppose your explanation is correct — at least from the occult point of view. The Mother is always having these numerical harmonies in her accounts.

7 July 1936

### **The Mother's Attire**

*Why does the Mother wear rich and beautiful clothes?*

Beauty is as much an expression of the Divine as Knowledge, Power or Ananda. Does anyone ask why does the Mother want to manifest the divine consciousness by knowledge or by power and not by ignorance and weakness?<sup>2</sup> It would not be a more absurd or meaningless question than this one put by the vital against wearing artistic and beautiful dress.

27 February 1933

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*Does it make any difference to the Mother's consciousness whether she puts on the best saris or the old ones, whether she lives in a palace or in a forest? What do these outer things add to the inner reality?*

Outer things are the expression of something in the inner reality. A fine sari or a palace are expressions of the principle of beauty in things and that is their main value. The Divine Consciousness is not bound by these things and has no attachment, but it is also not bound to abstain from them if beauty in things is part of its intended action. The Mother, when the Asram was still unformed, was wearing patched cotton saris; when she took up the work, it was necessary to change her habits, so she did so.

22 October 1935

2. The Mother also replied to this question. She wrote: "Is it your idea that the Divine should be represented on earth by poverty and ugliness?" — Ed.

### **The Mother's Photograph**

*When I get sleepy during meditation, I often just sit in a quietly concentrated wakefulness and look at the Mother's photo or your photo. Can I get the same amount of benefit simply by looking at Mother's photo or yours with all the concentration I can command?*

Yes, very many do.

*Sometimes in that state I pray; sometimes the inside is void — no thoughts or words at all, so I simply gaze. Am I pursuing the right line?*

Yes.

10 March 1933

### **The Mother's Naming of Cats**

The Mother gave names for cats because they understand and answer; she has never given any for birds and does not wish to do it. Now even for cats she is not giving names.

28 April 1932

### **The Mother's Symbol**

*In the chakra which is printed on the book The Mother, what colours are appropriate for the central dot and for the "four powers"? I am thinking of preparing a powder design with a little addition at the circumference.*

Centre and 4 powers white. The 12 all of different colours, in three groups, (1) top group red passing through orange towards yellow, (2) next group yellow passing through green towards blue, (3) blue passing through violet towards red. If white is not convenient, the centre may be gold (powder).

20 March 1934

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*In the chakra for the central circle you have asked me to use either white or gold — suppose I use gold at the centre, then should I use white at the strap around it? In that case the straps around the two bigger circles will have gold and the central strap alone will have white.*

The central circle need not have a strap — simply a gold disc.

11 April 1934

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*I have frequently been thinking of the Mother's symbol (chakra) and its significance. I have understood it as follows:*

*Central circle — Transcendental power.*

*Four inner petals — Four powers working from the Supermind to Overmind.*

*Twelve outer petals — Division of four into twelve powers from Overmind to Intuition and mind.*

*Is my conception at all tenable?*

Essentially (in general principle) the 12 powers are the vibrations that are necessary for the complete manifestation. These are the 12 seen from the beginning above the Mother's head. Thus there are really 12 rays from the sun, not 7, 12 planets etc.

As to the exact interpretation of the detail of the powers, I see nothing against the arrangement you have made. It can stand very well.

15 April 1934

### **The Mother's Flag**

About the blue flag. I presume you mean the flag with the white lotus. If so, it is the Mother's flag, for the white lotus is her symbol as the red lotus is mine. The blue of the flag is meant to be the colour of Krishna and so represents the spiritual or Divine Consciousness which it is her work to establish so that it may reign upon earth. This is the meaning of the flag being used as the Ashram flag, that our work is to bring down this consciousness and make it the leader of the world's life.

14 March 1949

SRI AUROBINDO

*(The Mother with Letters on the Mother, CWSA, Vol. 32, pp. 571-98)*

## MENTION OF PAUL BRUNTON IN SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS AND CONVERSATIONS

**Nirodbaran:** Ramana Maharshi was hardly known. It was Brunton who spread his name.

**Sri Aurobindo:** It is a strange measure of success people adopt in judging a spiritual man by the number of disciples. Who was a greater success — Ramana Maharshi surrounded by all sorts of disciples or Ramana Maharshi doing his sadhana in seclusion for years? Success to be real must be spiritual.

*[Then the talk turned on Ashrams in general and the mismanagement of some while the Guru remains indifferent. The difficulties of staying in some Ashrams were also cited.]*

**Sri Aurobindo:** One Mrs. Kelly went to see Maharshi and was seen fidgeting about due to mosquitoes during meditation. Afterwards she complained to him of mosquito bites. Maharshi told her that if she couldn't bear mosquito bites she couldn't do Yoga. Mrs. Kelly couldn't understand the significance of this statement. She wanted spirituality without mosquitoes.

Trouble also arises because of quarrelling among disciples.

**Purani:** A certain disciple of Maharshi criticised Brunton, saying he was using Maharshi's name and making money. He said too that Brunton was taking notes during meditation and that after jotting down what came into his head he would declare it was from Maharshi.

**Sri Aurobindo:** And yet Brunton is a seeker of the Truth, though he has serious difficulties.

Perhaps you know the famous story about Maharshi. Once, getting disgusted with the Ashram and the disciples, he started to go away to the mountains. He passed along a narrow path flanked by hills. He came upon an old woman sitting with her legs stretched across the path. He requested her to draw aside her legs but she wouldn't. Then he walked across them. She became very angry and said, "Why are you so restless? Why can't you sit in one place at Arunachala instead of moving about? Go back to your place and worship Shiva there."

23 December 1938

(Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, p. 53)

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[*Satyendra opened the conversation by asking a question on behalf of Dr. Savoro: "What is the connection between the causal body and the psychic being?" We do not quite remember exactly what Sri Aurobindo answered, but he said something like: "The psychic being is what is called the Chaitya Purusha in the heart; the causal body is part of the Superconscious." Then the talk turned on the Atman or Self and the psychic being. Sri Aurobindo said they are not the same. Ramana Maharshi was brought in by Satyendra who said that the Maharshi had realised the Self and that Brunton had written of the Maharshi's hearing of the Voice in the heart. Sri Aurobindo remarked that the Voice in the heart would refer to the psychic being and then it would decidedly not be the Atman realisation. At this point the Mother came in and asked Sri Aurobindo: "What are you speaking about?"*]

**Sri Aurobindo:** Satyendra has asked a question which does not hang together.

**Purani:** Kapali Shastri has given a version of the Maharshi's experience, which he heard from the Maharshi himself: "One day something opened in the heart and I began to hear 'I, I, I' and everywhere I started seeing the 'I'."

29 December 1938

(*Ibid.*, pp. 72-73)

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**Purani:** Paul Brunton writes that when he was in Egypt he met near a hill an ancient Egyptian who had died thousands of years ago and had been mummified. Brunton talked with him.

**Sri Aurobindo:** What happened afterwards to the Egyptian?

**Purani:** I believe he went back to the hill.

**Sri Aurobindo:** Then one can't say what exactly happened. The Egyptians held that at the time of death the Ka or vital being goes out of the body and after many years can return to it if it is preserved. That is the tradition behind mummification. Perhaps Brunton materialised the tradition? (*Laughter*)

**Purani:** Brunton cites the instance of a dead sparrow being revived by an Egyptian.

**Nirodbaran:** He says that of Vishuddhananda also. The sparrow was killed in his presence and it was revived. Is that possible?

**Sri Aurobindo:** Quite possible. Can't you revive a drowned man up to a certain time by physical devices? So, if one knows how, one can restore life in other cases too. One reintroduces the power and sets the organs to action. There are two ways: the first is to bring back the same spirit which is still not far away, and the second is to bring another spirit which wants to enter earth-life.

16 January 1939

(*Ibid.*, pp. 155-56)

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**Nirodbaran:** What are these newspaper cuttings you have brought?

**Purani:** Cuttings from Paul Brunton.

**Sri Aurobindo:** What about?

**Satyendra:** You have already seen these reports of his views on Yoga.

**Sri Aurobindo:** Oh!

**Satyendra** (*after a pause*): He says he has plumbed the depths of Yoga. At the beginning he made some foolish exaggerations about the claims of Yoga.

**Sri Aurobindo:** They were not foolish but deliberate exaggerations with plenty of imagination. He wrote with an eye to the reading public.

**Satyendra:** He says he has given up his search for Yoga as he has plumbed its depths.

**Sri Aurobindo:** Yes, he wants to include Yoga in the educational curriculum. A queer affair, this European mind!

**Satyendra:** He himself has gone in for several superficial things, magic, occult phenomena, etc. His book on Egypt has a lot of that stuff. He speaks of an Egyptian he met on the top of a hill, who prophesied the destruction of Europe.

**Sri Aurobindo:** That man 1200 years old, who had an Oxford accent in his speech? There was no Oxford accent 1200 years ago. It may be Paul Brunton's own Egyptian self and hence the accent. That book on Egypt is — (*Sri Aurobindo began to shake his head*). All the same, he had some sincere seeking for Yoga. It was spoiled by all sorts of people. He ought to have left everything in the hands of Maharshi.

**Purani:** He speaks highly of Vivekananda. He says he would have occupied the same place as Gandhi.

**Sri Aurobindo:** Which place? Wardha? (*Laughter*)

**Purani:** He means he would have had the same influence.

**Sri Aurobindo:** That's a different matter. He doesn't speak of Ramakrishna?

**Purani:** No, he speaks of Vivekananda.

**Sri Aurobindo:** What was at work was Ramakrishna's inspiration.

**Satyendra:** The idea of starting Yoga courses is rather funny.

**Sri Aurobindo:** They have started a school on Rajayoga in America. But it has nothing of Rajayoga.

**Nirodbaran:** In Bombay also there are schools.

**Satyendra:** They are for Hathayoga.

**Sri Aurobindo:** It was in connection with Hathayoga that I was at first puzzled. A Hathayogi was going about, lecturing that all moderns, including us, were of poor physique, with hollow cheeks. The next time I heard of him he was dead. (*Laughter*) He tried to be witty also: he used to say that our cheeks were like the Bay of Bengal. (*Laughter*)

1 December 1939

(*Ibid.*, pp. 272-73)



**Sri Aurobindo:** The Mother also believes in Sankalpa, as you can see from what she said to Paul Brunton when he asked her what he should do. She said, "You have to follow whatever will arise in you. When you have realised the Self, the Self will choose for you what to do." That is another thing European minds can't understand. They think all spiritual personalities must be of the same fixed type.

7 December 1939

(*Ibid.*, p. 291)

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**Purani:** Paul Brunton has come out again with an article on Yoga in the *Indian Review*.

**Sri Aurobindo:** What does he say?

**Purani:** The same old thing — that Yoga must be practised for humanity, so that humanity may benefit.

**Sri Aurobindo:** He has always said that.

**Purani:** He says that now he is under the guidance of a great Yogi who doesn't want to reveal himself. The Yogi has an eminent disciple whom everybody knows. If the disciple's name is disclosed, the Yogi will immediately be spotted. I wonder if he is hinting at you.

**Sri Aurobindo:** Me? But I have no eminent disciple!

**Purani:** What about Sir Akbar Hydari?

**Sri Aurobindo:** He is not exactly a disciple.

**Satyendra:** Perhaps Brunton himself is a disciple eminent enough?

**Purani:** He also says that he is not after money. The proof he gives is that if he were, he would not be contradicting his own past statements, as he is doing, and thereby risking his popularity.

**Sri Aurobindo:** Are people complaining that he is contradicting himself for the sake of money?

**Purani:** Yes. But he is contradicting himself, he says, for the sake of Truth.

**Satyendra:** The trouble is that he has started being a teacher before being sufficiently a student of Yoga.

**Purani:** Wasn't he giving directions to people from the beginning?

**Sri Aurobindo:** He has formed a group of his own, I believe.

**Purani:** He doesn't accept the theory of World-Illusion. He says it is a theory difficult to practise in life.

**Sri Aurobindo:** Practise in life? Nobody practises it. No Illusionist ever does.

**Purani:** What Brunton means is that he cannot carry out in life the theory of Illusion.

**Sri Aurobindo:** He means to accept of life only as much as is needed for the body?

**Satyendra:** He has spoken of an Egyptian stranger who talked to him in an Oxford accent and even knew his name. Hansraj also has written a book where another

such instance is given. When he went to the Himalayas he met a Sannyasi who at once addressed him by his name and then spoke in Marathi fluently although he wasn't a Maratha. What surprised Hansraj was that he soon began to speak in English. How did he know that Hansraj knew English?

**Sri Aurobindo:** If he knew Hansraj's name, it was not difficult to know other things.

**Satyendra:** Yes. That didn't strike me.

11 February 1940

(*Ibid.*, pp. 435-36)

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*In trying to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, Paul Brunton in his book, A Search in Secret Egypt, says, "That the Sphinx represents something divine or someone divine is suggested by the hieroglyph inscriptions on the walls of the Upper Egyptian temples, as at Edfu, where a god is pictured as changing himself into a lion with a human head in order to vanquish Set, the Egyptian Satan . . . If the force of a lion and the intelligence of man mingled their symbolisms in this crouching body, there was yet something neither bestial nor human in it, something beyond and above these, something divine!" He says there was some supernatural element in this stone being.*

*Did the Egyptians or Atlanteans have the same conception or believe in the same evolutionary Avatarhood and hence the statue?*

Maybe. But the Sphinx is rather the symbol of the whole evolution from subconscious to the superconscious Light.

*He further asks whether the Pyramids are "vast and vain monuments" or are they reared merely to hold one Pharaoh's mummified flesh?*

It is usually supposed by occultists to be a symbolic-scientific monument in which were performed some secret Egyptian Mysteries.

(Nirodbaran, *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2, pp. 673-74)

\* \* \*

*Ramana Maharshi seems to agree to some extent with your views. He seems to believe in Grace and takes the position that the Real Self is in the heart, something akin to the psychic being. That means he is less of a Shankara Advaitin.*

According to Brunton's description of the sadhana he (Brunton) practised under the Maharshi's instructions, it is the Overself one has to seek within, but he describes the Overself in a way that is at once the Psychic Being, the Atman and the Ishwara. So it is a little difficult to know what is the exact reading.

25 January 1936

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*I quote the following remarks of Ramana Maharshi as recorded by Paul Brunton: "All human beings are ever wanting happiness, untainted with sorrow. They want to grasp a happiness which will not come to an end. The instinct is a true one."<sup>1</sup>*

All? It is far too sweeping a generalisation. If he had said that is one very strong strain in human nature it could be accepted. But mark that it is in human physical consciousness only. The human vital tends rather to reject a happiness untainted by sorrow and to find it a monotonous, boring condition. Even if it accepts it, after a time it kicks over the traces and goes to some new painful or risky adventure.

*"Man's real nature is happiness. Happiness is inborn in the true self. His search for happiness is an unconscious search for his true self. The true self is imperishable; therefore, when a man finds it, he finds a happiness which does not come to an end" [pp. 157-58].*

The true Self is quite a different proposition. But what it has is not happiness but something more.

*"Even they [the wicked and the criminal] sin because they are trying to find the self's happiness in every sin which they commit. This striving is instinctive in man, but they do not know that they are really seeking their true selves, and so they try these wicked ways first as a means to happiness" [p. 158].*

Who is this "they"? I fear it is a very summary and misleading criminal psychology. To say that a Paris crook or apache steals, swindles, murders for the happiness of stealing, swindling, murdering is a little startling. He does it for quite other reasons. He does it as his *métier* just as you do your doctor's work. Do you really do your doctor's work because of the happiness you find in it?

*People will not seek a sorrowless, untainted, everlasting happiness, even if shown the way — because they will consider it beyond their power to attain, or so it seems to me.*

1. Paul Brunton, *A Search in Secret India* (London: Rider & Company, [1934] 1943), p. 157.

It is also with many because they prefer the joy mixed with sorrow, মানুষের হাসিকান্না, and consider your everlasting happiness an everlasting bore.

*About the criminals, I don't obviously include those types who are born with a criminal instinct: idiots and imbeciles.*

Why not? If your generalisation is good for all, it must be good for them also.

*Ramana Maharshi also says that if you "meditate for an hour or two every day, you can then carry on with your duties. If you meditate in the right manner . . ."*

A very important qualification.

*"then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in the midst of your work. It is as though there were two ways of expressing the same idea; the same line which you take in meditation will be expressed in your activities." The result will be a gradual change of attitude towards people, events and objects. "Your actions will tend to follow your meditations of their own accord" [p. 156].*

If the meditation brings poise, peace, a concentrated condition or even a pressure or influence, that *can* go on in the work, provided one does not throw it away by a relaxed or dispersed state of consciousness. That was why the Mother wanted people not only to be concentrated at pranam or meditation but to remain silent and absorb or assimilate afterwards and also to avoid things that relax or disperse or dissipate too much — precisely for this reason that so the effects of what she put on them might continue and the change of attitude the Maharshi speaks of will take place. But I am afraid most of the sadhaks have never understood or practised anything of the kind — they could not appreciate or understand her directions.

*Of course, he adds that setting apart time for meditation is for spiritual novices. You too wrote to me to meditate at least half an hour a day, if only to bring a greater concentration in the work.*

It does bring the effects of meditation into work if one gives it a chance.

*You know that meditations are not always successful.*

You forget that with numbers of people they are successful.

*Even if they were, how does this affect the whole day's work?*

It doesn't, if one does not take care that it should do so — if one takes care, it can.

*Is it something like charging a battery which goes on inducing an automatic current?*

It is not exactly automatic. It can be easily spoiled or left to sink into the subconscious or otherwise wasted. But with simple and steady practice and persistence it has the effect the Maharshi speaks of — he assumes, I suppose, such a practice. I am afraid your meditation is hardly simple or steady — too much *kasrat* and fighting with yourself.

*Ramana Maharshi seems a real Maharshi.*

He is more of a Yogi than a Rishi, it seems to me. The happiness theory does not impress me, — it is as old as the mountains but not so solid. But he knows a lot about Yoga.

9 February 1936

\*

*Ramana Maharshi has seen the truth. Can he not be called a Rishi?*

He has experienced certain eternal truths by process of Yoga — I don't think it is by Rishilike intuition or illumination, nor has he the mantra.

10 February 1936

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*I recently have read of some of Ramana Maharshi's disciples, who have the power of vision to a greater degree than X. But it seems that the beings they see do not come and help them in their difficulties. Usually these beings show them certain things which strengthen their faith; but their difficulties remain. It is they or their guru who have to solve them.*

It is quite usual at a certain stage of the sadhana for people who have the faculty to see or hear the Devata of their worship and to receive constant directions from him or her with regard either to action or to sadhana. Defects and difficulties may remain, but that does not prevent the direct guidance from being a fact. The necessity of a Guru in such cases is to see that it is the right experience, the right voice or vision — for it is possible for a false guidance to come as it did with *Y* and *Z*.

*Moreover, Maharshi dissuaded his disciples from cultivating this power of vision, since it had nothing to do with the realisation of the self.*

Maharshi is very much of a Vedantist. He does not believe in what we believe or in the descent etc. At the same time he himself has had experiences in which the Mother interfered in a visible, even material form and prevented him from doing what he intended to do.

7 July 1936

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*It is evident that my ideas about visions and views on occult things were poor and ignorant from the very beginning. They became all the more ignorant when I read that the Maharshi, whom you have called a great man and one who “lives always in the light” and therefore in the truth consciousness, discouraged his disciples from using their occult gifts.*

Because he is a great man does it follow that everything he thinks or says is right? or because he lives in the light, does it follow that his light is absolute and complete? The “Truth-Consciousness” is a phrase I use for the supermind. Maharshi is not in the supermind. He may be and is in a true Consciousness, but that is a different matter.

*They were not misusing their gifts, rather they were making spiritual progress through them.*

He discouraged his disciples because his aim was the realisation of the inner Self and intuition — in other words the fullness of the spiritual Mind — visions and voices belong to the inner occult sense, therefore he did not want them to lay stress on it. I also discourage some from having any dealing with visions and voices because I see that they are being misled or in danger of being misled by false visions and false voices. That does not mean that visions and voices have no value.

9 July 1936

\*

*If the true being behind the usual emotional heart is the psychic, how is it that Ramana Maharshi says, and all the Upanishads too say, that in the core of the heart is the Self, the Atman? Maharshi says the place of the Self is not in the centre of the chest but two fingers to the right — whereas the psychic is located in the middle.*

The Upanishads do not say that about the Atman — what they say about the Atman is that it is in all and all is in it, it is everywhere and all this universe is the Atman. What they speak of as situated in the deeper inner heart is the Purusha in the heart or Antaratman.<sup>2</sup> This is in fact what we call the psychic being, *caitya puruṣa*.

The heart spoken of by the Upanishads corresponds with the physical cardiac centre; it is the *hṛtpadma* of the Tantriks. As a subtle centre, *cakra*, it is supposed to have its apex on the spine and to broaden out in front. Exactly where in this area one or another feels it does not matter much; to feel it there and be guided by it is the main thing. I cannot say what the Maharshi has realised — but what Brunton describes in his book as the Self is certainly this Purusha Antaratma but concerned more with *mukti* and a liberated action than with transformation of the nature. What the psychic realisation does bring is a psychic change of the nature purifying it and turning it altogether towards the Divine. After that or along with it comes the realisation of the cosmic Self. It is these two things that the old Yogas encompassed and through them they passed to Moksha, Nirvana or the departure into some kind of celestial transcendence. The Yoga practised here includes both liberation and transcendence, but it takes liberation or even a certain Nirvana, if that comes, as a first step and not as the last step of its siddhi. Whatever exit to or towards the Transcendent it achieves is an ascent accompanied by a descent of the power, light, consciousness that has been achieved and it is by such descents that is to be achieved the spiritual and supramental transformation here. This possibility does not seem to be admitted in the Maharshi's thought, — he considers the Descent as superfluous and logically impossible. "The Divine is here, from where will He descend?" is his argument. But the Divine is everywhere, he is above as well as within, he has many habitats, many strings to his bow of Power, there are many levels of his dynamic Consciousness and each has its own light and force. He is not confined to his position in the heart or to the single cord of the psycho-spiritual realisation. He has also his supramental station above the heart-centre and mind-centres and can descend from there if He wants to do so.

3 March 1937

\*

*I am giving below the best brief account by Paul Brunton of the Maharshi's technique of discovering what Brunton calls the Overself. It occurs in the book named A Message from Arunachala:*

"When the mind is deeply engaged in a train of thought, it tends to become unconscious of external surroundings as concentration deepens. When this condition is carried to a profound extent, then the mind becomes one-pointed. If,

2. *aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo antarātmā.*

at this degree, the subject of the meditation could be somehow dropped, the ensuing vacuum would swiftly cause the hidden world of man's soul to arise and fill it. In that apparent emptiness he would become aware of a new visitant, his Overself. Such is the essential principle behind this process of self-knowing. . . .

“It [*the Maharshi's method*] consists in taking as the subject of meditation the inquiry, ‘*Who Am I?*’ The mind must centre itself upon this single question, pressing deeply inward in the effort to discover the elusive inhabitant of the body. If the concentration is complete and the persistence undiminished; if the inquiry is conducted in the correct manner; if the person is really sincere; then an extraordinary thing will happen. The mental current of self-questioning, the attempt to ferret out what one really is, the watching of one's thoughts in the earlier part of the process, ultimately pins all thinking down to the single thought of personal existence. ‘I’ is the first thought sprayed up by the spring of life's being, but it is also the last. As this final thought is held in the focus of attention and questioned in a particular way, it suddenly disappears and the Overself takes its place, overwhelming both questioner and question in its divine stillness.”<sup>3</sup>

*What do you think, from this, the Overself of the Maharshi is? Is it the Antaratman leading to or widening into the Cosmic Self or is it the silent Self of the Jnanis, the traditional Atman, realised directly?*

[*Sri Aurobindo did not immediately answer this question, posed on 4 March 1937. The correspondent sent two reminders, to which Sri Aurobindo answered as follows on 6 and 7 March:*]

I had started answering your questions but it took on too long a development and I could not finish it — I don't suppose I shall find time.

In the first place I do not want to go farther into the question of the Maharshi's realisation which does not really concern us. As I have said comparisons are of no use; each path has its own aim and direction and method and the truth of one does not invalidate the truth of the other. The Divine (or if you like, the Self) has many aspects and can be realised in many ways — to dwell upon those differences is irrelevant and without use.

Transformation is a word that I have brought in myself (like supermind) to express certain spiritual concepts and spiritual facts of the integral Yoga. People are now taking them up and using them in senses which have nothing to do with the significance which I put into them. Purification of the nature by the “influence” of the Spirit is not what I mean by transformation; purification is only part of a psychic

3. Paul Brunton, *A Message from Arunachala* (London: Rider & Co., n.d. [1936]), pp. 205-07.



change or a psycho-spiritual change — the word besides has many senses and is very often given a moral or ethical meaning which is foreign to my purpose. What I mean by the spiritual transformation is something dynamic (not merely liberation of the self, or realisation of the One which can very well be attained without any descent). It is a putting on of the spiritual consciousness dynamic as well as static in every part of the being down to the subconscious. That cannot be done by the influence of the Self leaving the consciousness fundamentally as it is with only purification, enlightenment of the mind and heart and quiescence of the vital. It means a bringing down of a Divine Consciousness static and dynamic into all these parts and the entire replacement of the present consciousness by that. This we find unveiled and unmixed above mind, life and body and not in mind, life and body. It is a matter of the undeniable experience of many that this can descend and it is my experience that nothing short of its *full* descent can thoroughly remove the veil and mixture and effect the full spiritual transformation. No metaphysical or logical reasoning in the void as to what the Atman “must” do or can do or needs or needs not to do is relevant here or of any value. I may add that transformation is not the central object of other paths as it is of this Yoga — only so much purification and change is demanded by them as will lead to liberation and the beyond-life. The influence of the Atman can no doubt do that — a full descent of a new consciousness into the whole nature from top to bottom to transform life here is not needed at all for the spiritual escape from life.

6 March 1937

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Sundays are no better than other days. A number of people always choose it for long letters demanding replies. But apart from that to write what you demand of me would mean a volume, not a letter — especially as these are matters of which people know a great deal less than nothing and would either understand nothing or misunderstand everything. Some day I suppose I shall write something, but the supramental won't bear talking of now. Something about the spiritual transformation might be possible and I may finish the letter on that point<sup>4</sup> — if I find leisure, but that is doubtful.

7 March 1937

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4. The “letter” referred to here is presumably the one on pages 36-37, which Sri Aurobindo wrote below the date 6 March 1937. He apparently had not finished writing it when he wrote this note dated (Sunday) 7 March 1937. — Ed.

The methods described in the account are the well-established methods of Jnanayoga<sup>5</sup> — (1) one-pointed concentration followed by thought-suspension, (2) the method of distinguishing or finding out the true self by separating it from mind, life, body (this I have seen described by him more at length in another book) and coming to the pure I behind; this also can disappear into the Impersonal Self. The usual result is a merging in the Atman or Brahman — which is what one would suppose is meant by the Overself, for it is that which is the real Overself. This Brahman or Atman is everywhere, all is in it, it is in all, but it is in all not as an individual being in each but is the same in all — as the Ether is in all. When the merging into the Overself is complete, there is no ego, or distinguishable I, or any formed separative person or personality. All is *ekākāra* — an indivisible and indistinguishable Oneness either free from all formation or carrying all formations in it without being affected — for one can realise it in either way. There is a realisation in which all beings are moving in the one Self and this Self is there stable in all beings; there is another more complete and thoroughgoing in which not only is it so but all are vividly realised as the Self, the Brahman, the Divine. In the former, it is possible to dismiss all beings as creations of Maya, leaving the one Self alone as true — in the other it is easier to regard them as real manifestations of the Self, not as illusions. But one can also regard all beings as souls, independent realities in an eternal Nature dependent upon the One Divine. These are the characteristic realisations of the Overself familiar to the Vedanta. But on the other hand you say that this Overself is realised by the Maharshi as lodged in the heart-centre, and it is described by Brunton as something concealed which when it manifests appears as the real Thinker, source of all action, but now guiding thought and action in the Truth. Now the first description applies to the Purusha in the heart, described by the Gita as the Ishwara situated in the heart and by the Upanishads as the Purusha Antaratma; the second could apply also to the mental Purusha, *manomayaḥ prāṇaśarīra netā* of the Upanishads, the mental Being or Purusha who leads the life and the body. So your question is one which on the data I cannot easily answer. His Overself may be a combination of all these experiences, without any clear distinction being made or thought necessary between the various aspects. There are a thousand ways of approaching and realising the Divine and each way has its own experiences which have their own truth and stand really on a basis, one in essence but complex in aspects, common to all, but not expressed in the same way by all. There is not much use in discussing these variations; the important thing is to follow one's own way well and thoroughly. In this Yoga, one can realise the Psychic Being as a portion of the Divine seated in the heart with the Divine supporting it there — this psychic being takes charge of the sadhana and turns the whole being to the Truth and the Divine, with results in the mind, the vital,

5. This is Sri Aurobindo's reply to the correspondent's question of 4 March 1937 [see pp. 35-36], containing Paul Brunton's account of Ramana Maharshi's methods. — Ed.

the physical consciousness which I need not go into here, — that is a first transformation. We realise it next as the one Self, Brahman, Divine, first *above* the body, life, mind and not only within the heart supporting them — above and free and unattached as the static Self but also extended in wideness through the world as the silent Self in all and dynamic too as the active cosmic Divine Being and Power, Ishwara-Shakti, containing the world and pervading it as well as transcending it, manifesting all cosmic aspects. But, what is most important for us, is that it manifests as a transcending Light, Knowledge, Power, Purity, Peace, Ananda of which we become aware above and which descends into the being and progressively replaces the ordinary consciousness by its own movements — that is the second transformation. We realise also the consciousness itself as moving upward, ascending through many planes physical, vital, mental, overmental to the supramental and Ananda planes. This is nothing new; it is stated in the Taittiriya Upanishad that there are five Purushas, the physical, the vital, the mental, the Truth Purusha (supramental) and the Bliss Purusha; it says that one has to draw the physical self up into the vital, the vital into the mental, the mental into the Truth Self, the Truth Self into the Bliss Self and so attain perfection. But in this Yoga we become aware not only of this taking up but of a pouring down of the powers of the higher Self, so that there comes in the possibility of a descent of the Supramental Self and nature to dominate and change our present nature and turn it from nature of Ignorance into nature of Truth-Knowledge (and through the supramental into nature of Ananda) — this is the third or supramental transformation. It does not always go in this order, for with many the spiritual descent begins first in an imperfect way before the psychic is in front and in charge, but the psychic development has to be attained before a perfect and unhampered spiritual descent can take place, and the last or supramental change is impossible so long as the two first have not become full and complete. That's the whole matter, put as briefly as possible.

March 1937

(CWSA 35, pp. 166-77)

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*I was reading in Paul Brunton's A Search in Secret India about certain yogis that he met. I don't find anything new in them. They just repeat the old yogas, and the old yogas stopped short at self-realisation, which is not a very difficult stage.*

Wonderful! The realisation of the Self which includes the liberation from ego, the consciousness of the One in all, the established and consummated transcendence out of the universal Ignorance, the fixity of the consciousness in the union with the Highest, the Infinite and Eternal is not anything worth doing or recommending to

anybody — is “not a very difficult stage”!

Nothing new? Why should there be anything new? The object of spiritual seeking is to find out what is eternally true, not what is new in Time.

From where did you get this singular attitude towards the old Yogas and Yogis? Is the wisdom of the Vedanta and Tantra a small and trifling thing? Have then the sadhaks of this Asram attained to self-realisation and are they liberated Jivan-muktas free from ego and ignorance? If not, why then do you say “it is not a very difficult stage” “their goal is not high” “Is it such a long process?”

I have said that this Yoga was “new” because it aims at a change in this world and not only beyond it and at a supramental realisation. But how does that justify a superior contempt for the spiritual realisation which is as much the aim of this Yoga as of any other?

*What I fail to comprehend is how they spend their whole lives in the pursuit of self-realisation. Is it such a long process?*

It is not a long process? The whole life and several lives more are often not enough to achieve it. Ramakrishna’s guru took 30 years to arrive and even then he was not satisfied that he had realised it.

*I also read that some yogis like “the sage who never speaks” remain in samadhi day and night, coming out of it only occasionally for food. What do they do in such a long samadhi, since their goal is not so high?*

Do? why should he want to do anything if he was in the eternal peace or Ananda or union with the Divine? If a man is spiritual and has gone beyond the vital and mind, he does not need to be always “doing” something. The self or spirit has the joy of its own existence. It is free to do nothing and free to do everything — but not because it is bound to action and unable to exist without it.

*Still harder is it to understand how a self-realised yogi can help others. For self-realisation does not grant such powers.*

Do you think that self-realisation is a tamasic state — a complete incapacity and inertia?

13 April 1936

(*Ibid.*, pp. 302-03)

\* \* \*

*Paul Brunton in his book A Search in Secret Egypt repeatedly speaks of Atlantis. I always thought that belief in Atlantis was only an imagination of the Theosophists. Is there any truth in the belief?*

Atlantis is not an imagination. Plato heard of this submerged continent from Egyptian sources and geologists are also agreed that such a submersion was one of the great facts of earth history.

22 June 1936

(CWSA 27, p. 520)

\* \* \*

If you try to apply everything you read, there will be no end to your new beginnings. One can stop thinking by rejecting the thoughts and in the silence discover oneself. One can do it by letting the thoughts run down while one detaches oneself from them. There are a number of other ways. This one related in Brunton's book seems to me the Adwaita-jnani method of separating oneself from body, vital, mind, by *viveka*, discrimination, "I am not the body, I am not the life, I am not the mind" till he gets to the self, separate from mind, life and body. That also is one way of doing it. There is also the separation of Purusha from Prakriti till one becomes the witness only and feels separate from all the activities as the Witness Consciousness. There are other methods also.

(CWSA 29, p. 302)

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According to Brunton's description of the sadhana he (Brunton) practised under the Maharshi's instructions,<sup>6</sup> it is the Overself one has to seek within, but he describes the Overself in a way that is at once the Psychic Being, the Atman and the Ishwara. So it is a little difficult to know what is the exact reading.

(*Ibid.*, p. 496)

SRI AUROBINDO

6. *The correspondent sent to Sri Aurobindo two paragraphs from Paul Brunton's book A Message from Arunachala (London: Rider & Co., n.d. [1936], pp. 205-07). — Ed.*

## **‘THOU SHINEST RESPLENDENT IN ALL THINGS!’**

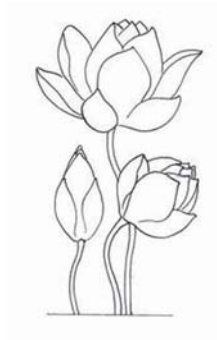
**May 10, 1914**

It is Thy sweet joy, O Lord, that fills my heart; it is Thy silent peace that reigns over my mind. All is repose, force, concentration, light and serenity; and all this is without any limit, without any division; is it only the earth or rather the whole universe that lives in me, I do not know; but it is Thou, O Lord, who dwellest in this consciousness and givest it life; it is Thou who seest, knowest, actest. It is Thou alone whom I see everywhere, or rather there is no longer any “I”, all is one and this Oneness is Thou.

Glory to Thee, O Lord, Master of the world, Thou shinest resplendent in all things!

THE MOTHER

*(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 138)*



## “MYSTIC MOTHER” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

This sonnet found its seed in the note I sent Mother this noon. The idea is perhaps a little complicated but the expression is simple enough, I hope. Do you find the lines any good?

Seeing You walk our little ways, they wonder  
That I who scorn the common loves of life  
Should kneel to You in absolute surrender,  
Deeming Your visible perfection wife

Unto my spirit's immortality.  
They think I have changed one weakness for another,  
Because they mark not the new birth of me —  
This body which by You, the Mystic Mother,

Has now become a child of my vast soul!  
Loving your feet's earth-visitation, I  
Find each heart-throb miraculously flower  
Out of the unplumbable God-mystery  
Behind dark clay; and hour by dreamful hour  
Upbears that fragrance like an aureole.

*[Amal's questions regarding the last two lines:]*

1. Is this “s” ungrammatical?
2. Do you think there would be any gain in putting “hour by dreamful hour” within commas and making “Upbears” refer to “I” in line 2 of the sestet?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

1. No.
2. Yes, that is better.

Exceedingly good. . . . The octet here is adequateness raised to inevitability except the fourth and fifth lines in which the effective undergoes the same transformation. In the sestet on the other hand it is the illumined style that becomes inevitable.

17 September 1934

[*The last two lines of the sestet now read:*

Behind dark clay; and, hour by dreamful hour,  
Upbear that fragrance like an aureole.]

AMAL KIRAN  
(K. D. SETHNA)

[*Amal's Note:*]

*Pardon my writing to you, Mother, without any specific reason; but I felt like telling you that you are my darling. In spite of my thousand and three imperfections, this one sense remains in me — that you are my mother, that I am born from your heart. It is the only truth I seem to have realised in all these six years. A very unfortunate thing, perhaps, that I have realised no other truth; but I thank you very much that I have been enabled to feel this much at least.*

**Sri Aurobindo:** It is an excellent foundation for the other Truths that are to come — for they all result from it.

**The Mother:** My blessings are always with you.

17 September 1934



Pardon my writing to you, Mother, without any specific reason; but I felt like telling you that you are my darling. In spite of my thousand and three imperfections, this one sense remains in me — that you are my mother, that I am born from your heart. It is the only truth I seem to have realised in all these six years. A very important thing, perhaps, that I have realised no other truth; but I thank you very much that I have been enabled to feel this much at least.

This an excellent foundation for the  
 other truths that are to come — for they all  
 result from it

St Paul  
 17/9/34.

My blessings are always with you



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

*(Continued from the issue of December 2014)*

## **Chapter: XXXIX**

### **Trekkers of a Different Path — Dark and Dangerous (3)**

People talk about political assassinations as defeating its own end, but that is nonsense; it is just the shock needed to convince selfish rulers that selfishness has its limits of imprudence. It is like that other fiction that England never yields to threats. My experience is that when England has her face well-slapped, she apologises, not before.

Lyne Stevens to W. S. Blunt<sup>1</sup>

They regarded themselves in a state of war against the British, and defended their action on the ground that being situated as they were, they had no means of waging war openly. It is only one stage removed from the guerrilla warfare which is condoned by civilised society. . . . (They may argue) to kill a few officials or to rob a few houses is not more sinful than destroying thousands by modern arms or bombing cities in a modern warfare. It is merely an age-long convention which tolerates inhuman cruelty on a massive scale in the name of an open war but staggers at one-millionth of it if the conduct of military operations does not fulfil our conventional notions of what a war should be or the conditions it would fulfil.

R. C. Majumdar<sup>2</sup>

The impatient young men of Bengal took to the path of individual heroism and revolutionary terrorism — a term we use without any pejorative meaning and for want of a different term. This was primarily because they could find no other way of expressing their patriotism.

Bipan Chandra<sup>3</sup>

Violence is the recognised way in England of getting political reforms. . . . To what else have politicians yielded?

Annie Besant<sup>4</sup>

Among the several fiery patriots of the time who remain more or less unsung by historians is Manoranjan Guha Thakurta (1858-1919). Hailing from Barisal and a successful trader in mica he spent much of his income in helping the revolutionaries. Sri Aurobindo once described him as his personal friend.<sup>5</sup>

He used to edit a Bengali daily entitled *Navasakti*, priced at one paisa or sixty-fourth part of a rupee a copy, in order to bring the ideals of nationalism within the popular reach, but repeated harassment by the police and the colonial court and lack of patronage drove him towards taking a decision to close down the publication. Abinash Bhattacharya, then Sri Aurobindo's de facto secretary, records:

When I heard that the respected Manoranjan Guha Thakurta had decided to close down the Daily *Navasakti*, I asked Aurobindo if he would permit me to persuade Manoranjan Babu to hand over its management to me. He accorded his permission with joy.<sup>6</sup>

Manoranjan Guha Thakurta received the proposal with great happiness and a sense of relief. He even gave Abinash money enough — about four thousand rupees — to run the paper. The newspaper carried an announcement — in what became its last issue — about Abinash Bhattacharya taking over its management. Handbills too were widely distributed assuring the readers that the paper would resume publication after a fortnight's break.

The first three clauses of the "Memorandum of *Navasakti*" as was found in the Alipore Trial records, translated from Bengali by an official translator of the High Court, read:

1. The *Navasakti* will be given over to the hand of a Committee.
2. Sreejukta Arabindo Ghose Mahasay will nominate the said Committee.
3. The *Navasakti* and the press of the *Sakti* with all its belongings be made over to the hands of the said Committee.<sup>7</sup>

Abinash Bhattacharya kept himself busy reorganising the affairs of the *Navasakti*. He was confident of bringing it out on time, with Sri Aurobindo as its editor. Alas, that was not to be!

The building at 48 Grey Street housing the *Navasakti* had two flats. The one facing the road housed the newspaper's office and the printing press. The other one was allotted to Sri Aurobindo who shifted there from his residence at 23 Scotts Lane, along with Mrinalini Devi and Sarojini Devi on the 28<sup>th</sup> or the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 1908. Abinash Chakravarty and Sailen Bose were the other residents of the building. But what happened at Muzaffarpore, Bihar, on the 30<sup>th</sup> evening, once again changed the course of events in their lives — this time in an unexpected and radical way.

Meanwhile the wrath of the revolutionaries against the Presidency Magistrate

Douglas Kingsford, notorious for his aggressive attitude towards any anti-colonial activity, had reached a boiling point. An attempt was made on his life in a highly original way — at least in the Indian context — by making a hole in a voluminous book and placing there an empty box filled with picric acid and delivering it, well-packed, at his residence through a courier. It could have exploded the moment its receiver would have tried to open it. Kingsford received it all right, but put the parcel in his shelf unopened. It lay there till one of the arrested revolutionaries revealed its deadly nature. It was then traced and the chief explosive expert of the Government, one M. Williams, diagnosed it to be a terribly dangerous death-trap.<sup>8</sup>

The Government had been feeling nervous about Kingsford's safety and he was transferred from Calcutta as the District and Sessions Judge of Muzaffarpore on March 28, 1908.

It was decided upon by the leaders that Kingsford must die and for this reason his track should be followed wherever he might go. Two young men were selected for the purpose and sent to Muzaffarpore with the necessary weapons for the purpose.<sup>9</sup>

Of the two young men selected for the purpose the readers have had a few glimpses of Prafulla Chaki in the previous chapter. Born in December 1888, he was an inspired revolutionary since his early teens. He studied at a National School at Rangpur. He founded a club for physical culture with the local young men and worked as a volunteer during the conference of the Nationalists at Rangpur in 1907. But unknown to his family and friends he was in secret contact with Barindra Kumar's group and became an inmate of the Muraripukur Gardens probably in early 1908.

The other young man in the mission to Muzaffarpore was Khudiram Bose, born in December 1889 in a village in the district of Medinipur. An orphan, he was brought up by his elder sister and studied in schools at Tamluk and Medinipur. It was at Medinipur that he came in contact with Satyen Bose, a nephew of Rishi Rajnarayan Bose and a staunch revolutionary.

In February 1906 there was an agricultural and industrial exhibition at Medinipur. Satyen Bose entrusted Khudiram with the task of distributing a booklet entitled *Sonar Bangla* that was a strong indictment of the British rule. The Administration branded it seditious. A policeman who went to catch Khudiram was assaulted by the boy who was a gymnast and lathi-player. Satyen told those who were dragging the boy towards the Police Station that he was the Deputy Collector's son! Satyen being a clerk at the Collector's office, his statement was enough to scare the police and the boy bolted away. Before long the police realised that they had been bluffed. Khudiram was arrested and tried for sedition — what was probably the first ever trial on that account. A number of legal luminaries of the city argued in Khudiram's defence. He was acquitted primarily because he was a minor. But Satyen was

dismissed from his job for having misled the police.<sup>10</sup> He did not care, but that is a different matter.

The youth of the town took Khudiram in a procession in Barrister K. B. Dutt's phaeton, themselves pulling and pushing the carriage. Sri Aurobindo happened to be on a visit to the town. Khudiram met him, probably courtesy Satyen Bose.

Sometime later when Khudiram fell seriously ill and those around him were sceptical of his surviving the crisis, he announced to them confidently that since he had been blessed by Sri Aurobindo, "no ordinary illness could bring about his death".<sup>11</sup>

It is likely that Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram had never met before. That is how the revolutionaries acted: nobody needed to know more than what the work assigned to him demanded so that there was no possibility of anyone exposing a plot or the identity of a collaborator through a bit of unguarded talk. Prafulla Chaki was given a new name for this specific mission: Dinesh Chandra Ray.

There are numerous accounts of their adventure that failed. But they do not differ from one another on any vital issue. The following one, however, can be accepted as quite authentic, even in details. The original text has been shortened to some extent:

Commissioned with their task Dinesh Chandra Ray and Khudiram Bose reached Muzaffarpore at the end of the third week of April 1908 and put up in a room at a Dharmashala . . .

The two young heroes waited for a week for a suitable opportunity. Kingsford did not move out of his quarters and go anywhere except to the Courts. They once visited the place but desisted from taking any action because their action could involve a large number of people.

On April 30 1908 the two friends reached the place in front of Kingsford's house at about 8 P.M. and kept waiting under a tree.

Mr. and Mrs. Kingsford and Mrs. and Miss Kennedy had been playing bridge at the club. At about 8.30 P.M. they left for home in two separate open carriages both very similar in appearance and each drawn by a single horse. The house of Kingsford was situated very close to the club and Kennedys' a mile away.

The vehicle of the Kennedys preceded their friends' Victoria by a few seconds. As it drew level to the entrance gate of Kingsford's, Dinesh and Khudiram sprang from under the line of tall trees and Khudiram ran towards the carriage and threw the bomb with full force at the carriage.

The sound of the explosion startled the town. Both Mrs. and Miss Kennedy and the *syce* were seriously injured. The carriage was shattered. Miss Kennedy died within a few minutes of the explosion and Mrs. Kennedy a little later.<sup>12</sup>

The two victims were the wife and daughter of one Pingle Kennedy, Advocate.

At Samastipur Prafulla Chaki boarded a train which had as his co-passenger one Sub-Inspector of Police named Nandalal Banerjee travelling while on leave from service. There was excited discussion among the passengers regarding the explosion at Muzaffarpore which naturally had its affect on Prafulla Chaki's face — particularly the news that Kingsford had escaped the attack while two innocent ladies had fallen victim to it. Prafulla's reflex reaction must have aroused the plain-clothed policeman's suspicion. He talked to him pretending to be a well-wisher and grew almost sure of his involvement in the episode. He managed to enrol the assistance of some policemen at Mokameh Ghat station where Prafulla had alighted for boarding another train for Howrah and tried to capture him. Prafulla toppled the policemen and wriggled out of their hold and ran. But, reaching the end of the platform he realised the futility of his effort and shot at the pursuer closest to him. The bullet missed his target and a hefty policeman grabbed him and tried to snatch away his Browning pistol. Prafulla flattened the fellow and before the other pursuers could reach him shot himself dead. His last words in Bengali, directed towards Nandalal Banerjee, were probably, "How could you betray me, being a Bengalee yourself?" The idealist was under the impression that most of the Bengalees of the time were sympathetic towards the revolutionaries. That was more or less true, but here was a man for whom Prafulla's capture was too big an opportunity to be missed so far as his career was concerned.

This happened at 6 P.M. on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 1908. The police severed Prafulla's head from his body and in a container filled with spirit sent it to Kolkata for identification.

(Nandalal received an award of a thousand rupees, but did not enjoy his elevated status in the police set-up for long; six months later he was shot dead in broad daylight on a Kolkata street by two of Prafulla's compatriots who could never be caught.)

Khudiram, barefooted, walked overnight to Waini station at a distance of about forty kilometres, hungry and thirsty. He bought and munched some parched rice at a roadside shop and was about to drink a glass of water when he was confronted by the police. He tried to take out a revolver from his coat pocket, but was taken hold of before he could do that.

Khudiram was brought back to Muzaffarpore by the evening train; the station was densely crowded by people anxious to have a look at him. His appearance did not betray the slightest sign of agitation or fear. He was calm and collected and even had a cheerful look, but without any trace of bravado. As he seated himself in the carriage for the Police Station he shouted *Bande Mataram*.<sup>13</sup>

Sri Aurobindo was at the *Bande Mataram* office when Shyam Sundar Chakra-

varty handed over to him a telegram from Muzaffarpore carrying the news of the incident. He also read in *The Empire*, a British-owned newspaper, details of the episode. Even though the Commissioner of Police claimed that he knew the people behind it and that they would be soon arrested, Sri Aurobindo did not suspect that he himself was the Government's prime suspect.<sup>14</sup> He was in no hurry to return to his new residence at Grey Street.

But Abinash Bhattacharya was feeling restless. That very evening he had allowed his friends to deposit in their house five rifles and five bags of cartridges. The information he had gathered while intentionally roaming around the Lal Bazar Police Station was ominous enough. He was anxiously waiting for Sri Aurobindo who came back at 10 P.M. Abinash passed on his intelligence to him and his suspicion that they could very well be arrested the very next day. Sri Aurobindo advised him to rush to the Gardens and ask Barindra Kumar to remove not only whatever was in his residence but also all the dangerous stuff that the young men had treasured in their abode at the Gardens. Abinash returned from the Gardens with six boys who took away the materials stored there.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the inmates of the Gardens too were by then feeling the urgency for removing them.

Sri Aurobindo had no idea that the higher administration had conjured up in their vision a fearful image of him. Even a fortnight after Sri Aurobindo's arrest that was to take place the next day, E. A. Gait, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal wrote to the Home Secretary, Government of India:

Of Arabinda's connection with the secret society we have little direct evidence, the reason being that, here as in the case of the editorship of the paper, he has been careful to avoid doing anything which would enable any charge to be proved against him. There is, however, no real doubt about his being intimately connected with it . . . The Lieutenant-Governor has no doubt whatever on this point, nor has he any doubt that his is the master mind at the back of the whole extremist campaign in Bengal . . . The conviction of other persons concerned would be of no avail if Arabinda was set free; for in that case he would lose no time in starting a fresh conspiracy and the work now done would be altogether in vain . . . In the interest of peace and good Government, it is absolutely necessary that this man should be removed from the political arena.<sup>16</sup>

It is to be noted that though the people and the newspapers regretted the death of two European ladies, Khudiram and Prafulla Chaki became symbols of a resurgent India's freedom-loving youth ready to die for the Motherland. They became household names and songs by unknown composers, on Khudiram in particular, were sung even by those begging alms. Barring the Anglo-Indian press, practically all the newspapers praised the boys and urged upon the Government to take stock of its own conduct vis-à-vis the irrepressible and justified nationalistic sentiment

vibrantly felt throughout the nation.

*The Amrita Bazar Patrika* commented on the treatment meted out to the dead body of Prafulla Chaki:

When the cruel news was flashed in the papers that the head of the deceased had been severed from his body and preserved in spirit, people were literally stunned with horror. Verily, we could not make out what the paternal Government will gain by this unseemly act, when photos of identification had already been taken. The bodies even of enemies are respected by all civilised nations. The revolting decapitation of the corpse reminds one of the treatment which the Committee of Public Safety, during the French Revolution, meted out to the dead body of Valaze, one of the Gerondists who did away with himself with a poniard, just after the sentence of death was passed on him. The President decreed in ghastly words that the warm corpse of Valaze would be carried to the prison, conveyed in the same cart with the accomplices to the scaffold, interred with them.<sup>17</sup>

At the Gardens the atmosphere was tense, but it seems the inmates simply did not care to be as careful as they ought to have been. This is how Nolini Kanta Gupta recollects the night before the fateful dawn:

For some time past almost all of us had been noticing one thing. Whenever we went out on whatever business, for shopping or to visit people, somebody seemed to be following us, from a little distance no doubt, but it was clear enough that we were being watched. When we stopped, he too would stop; if we tarried a little, he too kept himself occupied on some pretext or other. We talked about this among ourselves and made the great discovery that this must be what they called spying, and that we must henceforth take extra precautions. So far, we had never had this kind of trouble. Ours had been a secret society only in name, for the whole thing was out in the open. Anybody could enter the Gardens from anywhere at any time and move about the place, for it was all open compound without any fencing or walls. That is why on the morning of our arrest, a couple of boys from the neighbourhood also found themselves under arrest along with us. In piteous tones they implored the policemen, "We are innocent, sirs; we came here only for a morning stroll." The poor innocents!

The evening before our arrest, it was already getting dark and we were thinking of retiring for the night, when some voices came to our ears in a rather peculiar way, and lanterns were seen moving about in the dark. "Who are you? What do you do here?" the voices said. We did our best to give evasive replies. "Very well, then, we come again tomorrow morning and will know more about it." With these words, the strangers seemed to make their



exit. Were these warning voices? In spite of our dull wits, we could understand at least this much that things were now getting rather serious and that we must take our precautions. The first thing we decided upon was that we should leave the place before daybreak and disperse. Upen told us later that he had wanted us to disperse immediately and make no further delay. But that was obviously not to be, for it was destined that we should pass through the experience of jail. Nevertheless, we did start doing something at once; that was to remove all traces, by burning or hiding away or whatever other means, of anything that might raise a suspicion against us. The very first thing that came to our heads was this. There were two or three rifles in the house where Sri Aurobindo lived. They were in the custody of Abinash (Abinash Bhattacharya) who lived with him and looked after Sri Aurobindo's affairs. Those rifles must be removed at once, they could on no account be left there. Had the police found them on Sri Aurobindo's premises, it might have been more difficult to secure his release. The rifles were brought back, they were packed in two boxes bound with iron hoops, together with the few revolvers we had and all the materials for the making of bombs, and hidden away underground. Next, getting hold of all our papers that might contain names and addresses and plans, we set fire to them. This went on far into the night. We could not however burn up everything. . . .

We went to bed after doing away with all we could, in the hope that we might run away by daybreak. But the running away did not materialise. In the early hours of the morning, — it was not yet light, — we were awakened by an eerie sort of noise. We sat up in bed. But what was all this going on? Shadowy forms were moving about the place, there was a clatter and a creaking of boots. Suddenly out of the dark silence, a conversation arose:

“You are under arrest. Your name?”

“Barindra Kumar Ghose.”

“Arabinda Ghose?”

“No, Barindra Kumar Ghose.”

“Well, we'll see.”

The next thing I knew was a hand clapping on my shoulders.

“Come,” said a voice.

Several people have expressed great surprise at this facile surrender on our part, as though we were goody-goody boys innocent as lambs.

Why, it has been asked, did we not give them fight and take a few lives before we surrendered? But our aims were of another kind, our path, our very policy was of another character. Our goal was not to die a martyr's death. We wanted to be soldiers. The martyr is happy if he can give up his life. But the duty of the soldier is not to give his life but to take the lives of others. The soldier seeks the maximum protection for himself, he goes under cover, and he seeks to kill as many of the enemy as he can. He does not think it enough

that he should only sacrifice himself. No doubt there comes a time when it is no longer possible to find a shelter or go under cover, it may not even be desirable. Then one throws off one's masks, one comes out in the open and acts in the way so vividly described in these lines of Rabindranath:

*There began a scramble  
As to who should be the first to give up his life;  
That was the only hurry.*

Or else, the way the Light Brigade of England acted at Balaclava in the Crimean War:

*Into the jaws of Death,  
Into the Mouth of Hell,  
Rode the six hundred.*<sup>18</sup>

Now we turn to the reminiscences of yet another inmate of the Gardens, Upendranath Banerjee:

A day, yes, it is a day that has stuck to my memory like a burr. . . . All the long long day we had tramped up and down, and returned to the gardens at evening. Weary, hungry, tired to only within a few inches of death, I would not have run away to save my life even if it came to that. Others were knocked up to the same tune. But still hunger must be satisfied, and as I have told, we were our own cooks. So the younger lot began to do the cooking, while we, the big older fellows, stretched ourselves and let our imagination loose into the rosy mists of the future. But Fate overtook us. The pot in which the rice was boiling cracked and the contents were scattered about. The boys broke out in a roar of laughter. I saw the hand of Fate clearly, and crushing my hunger went to bed. But Barindra had an energy that never flagged. As there was no fuel he burnt newspaper and made a fire to boil the rice once again. At about eleven o'clock, a friend of ours dropped in to say that the Police had been thinking of honouring us with a visit and that we should shift the venue. It was a fair warning; but nobody seemed disposed to move out unless he was dragged off by the legs. So it was decided that each would clear off the first thing on the following morning. Yet Barindra took a party of boys and buried in the earth the few rifles and bombs that lay about. The clock showed twelve when we finally retired to our beds.

It might be four o'clock towards daybreak. Heat and mosquitoes had made a hell of a night for me, and I was tossing about on the bed in all restlessness when the sound of footfalls on the stairs came to my ears. A few minutes, and then there was a sharp knock on the door. Barindra started up and opened

the doors to be questioned by an unknown English voice, "Your name?" Barin gave his name. The mighty visitor blurted out his orders, "Here, you, get hold of this chap."

Evidently the first chapter of the history of Indian Independence was closed at that point. But hope can die only with the spark of life. The Police were arresting all they could lay hands on in the room that was still dark. "Now or Never" thought I, and stole out at the other door into the adjoining verandah. The gardens teemed with the Police force, and I saw a perfect forest of red turbans. The thought of a broken window in the kitchen room flashed across my mind like a lightning. It was possible to jump out of that into the streets. I at once bolted for it; but when I looked out of it, lo! the enemy was there in his grim superciliousness. Fate is certainly a wholehogger; she allows no ways of escape when she closes in on a man. Disappointed, I stole back into the verandah, and thence into a small lumber room leading away from it. The room was full of useless, broken timber, and had been a secure home of rats and cockroaches. At a window, a piece of worn out gunny hang like a screen. I concealed myself behind it and watched the movements of the enemy through a number of chinks. The night seemed to be as long as Eternity.

But at last the crows cawed and one or two nightingales might have also burst into a ridiculous frolic of a song. The sky greyed in the east, and the faint light of daybreak revealed to me the entire gardens as one red patch. The coloured turbans of the Police were seen everywhere, in every blessed nook and corner. Some European sergeants were bustling about with big whips in their hands, and some coachmen of the neighbourhood called in as witnesses to the search, were following with unspeakable humility at the heels of a gigantic person who might be an Inspector. Our men were seated by twos, under a big mango tree by the side of the tank. They had been all handcuffed; and Ullaskar seemed to be solving some academical problem which, as I knew later on, was the exact weight of flesh the gigantic Inspector was carrying about.

The morning wore on. Five, six, seven, — the clock gave the strokes and indicated the tediously crippling gait of time. I kept my post behind the screen like an Indian lady of the harem, and was hoping that the enemy would overlook me. But hopes are like reeds against the decree of fate. The huge bulk of the Inspector marched up the verandah and burst the doors open. It was such a tense moment. I squeezed my nose to stop breathing which might have a sound. But what a long nose the police have been blessed with! The Inspector came on straight to where I stood and brusquely drew aside the screen that had yet saved me from dishonourable violence. Then eyes met eyes, and there were sweet exchanges of amorous glances! What a love shone in the light of those two pairs of eyes! The Inspector gave out an ecstatic "hurrah" like a second Alexander triumphing over a new glorious conquest. Four of his men at once

rushed in, and carried me to the spot where the boys had been sitting. A man came on to put handcuffs on me at the bidding of the Inspector, and I looked up to the face of the man. True as wax, I found in him the ex-bearer of our *Bande Mataram* office, who had served me tea many a time. He cast down his eyes as he put the handcuffs.

Meanwhile the search had dug up the bombs and rifles buried overnight. The police began to torture the boys for fresh information and more secrets. This was too much for Barindra who brought the matter to the notice of the Inspector-General, Mr. Plowden. The latter laughed and remarked, "You must not expect too much from us."<sup>19</sup>

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

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## WHERE NONE HAVE GONE

1926 was a watershed for the Integral Yoga. All that preceded it pointed toward the event on November 24<sup>th</sup> of that year which Sri Aurobindo later described as “the descent of Krishna into the physical”. All that followed was a working out of the implications of this descent. What descended, he explained in 1935, was “the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually bringing, the descent of Supermind and Ananda”.<sup>1</sup> The distinction between overmind and supermind is crucial for understanding what this means. Yet it would be almost a year after the event before the word “overmind” appeared in Sri Aurobindo’s diary and a few more years before he mentioned it to even his closest disciples. He had entered untrodden territory and was mapping it as he went.

If terms such as overmind and supermind sound like mumbo-jumbo to the uninitiated, that does not diminish the significance of what they represent. The discoveries made around the same time in physics by Heisenberg, Schrödinger and others are equally incomprehensible to the layperson. But the fact remains that the human mind and spirit were making radical breakthroughs in all fields and on all levels. The quantum revolution shattered previous assumptions about the material world. Its appearance of solidity and even its so-called laws turned out to be illusions. Matter, as Sri Aurobindo put it in his poem ‘The Inconscient’, was now revealed to consist of

waves of forces that running circling  
Leap by discontinuous starts through Nowhere,  
Strangely born in quanta of causeless Matter  
Wombed out of Nihil. . . .<sup>2</sup>

While scientists were revising our concept of Matter along lines reminiscent of Hindu images of a dancing god or goddess, Sri Aurobindo was venturing into unexplored ranges of consciousness and opening up the prospect of a new relationship between Matter and Spirit. He himself compared his work to that of a physicist, writing in 1935: “like a very Einstein I have got the mathematical formula of the whole affair (unintelligible as in his case to anybody but myself) and am working it out figure by figure.”<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not people understood what happened on 24 November 1926, it had tangible enough consequences for the life of the community that had been forming around Sri Aurobindo and would soon come to be known as his Ashram. The most visible result was the fact that he himself withdrew into seclusion to forge ahead with the next phase of his work, entrusting the direct guidance of his disciples

to the Mother. The end of 1926 also marked the beginning of a new period in his writings. After several years of almost complete literary silence following the abrupt cessation of the *Arya* in January 1921, he took up the pen again.

The first published result, *The Mother*, appeared in 1928. Many other writings would remain buried in Sri Aurobindo's notebooks for years. For some time he resumed his diary, the *Record of Yoga*. He took up *Savitri* where he had left off. He revised some of the major works that had come out in the *Arya*. He began to correspond with the sadhaks of the Ashram, who no longer had face-to-face contact with him except on special darshan days a few times a year. This was soon keeping him up all night, ultimately producing several volumes of letters. In the 1930s he also wrote a number of short poems. Some of them he published at the time and a few in the following decade, while most were left to be collected and brought out after his passing.

In many ways the most important of these poems was 'A God's Labour', written in 1935-36 and published in 1946 in *Poems Past and Present*. It is in a sense Sri Aurobindo's most autobiographical poem. He disguised the self-referential content of his epic *Savitri* in the form of "A Legend and a Symbol". In his shorter poems, on the other hand, he often recounted his spiritual experiences in the first person. These included a number of experiences and realisations — such as that of Nirvana — which he had had long before the time of writing, in some cases as far back as his days in Baroda. A variety of experiences related to the spiritualisation of consciousness in the Integral Yoga were also put into poetic form. But there was another dimension of Sri Aurobindo's inner life that was rarely reflected in the first-person poems. It occasionally leaked out in his correspondence, as when a disciple wrote to him in 1937: "Night and day you are soaring and soaring." He replied:

Romantic one! I am not soaring and soaring — I am digging and digging.<sup>4</sup>

Spiritual experiences were not an end in themselves on this path. When the same disciple mentioned having heard that Sri Aurobindo was "now trying more for transformation of nature than for experience", he commented: "Because without transformation of nature, the blessed experience is something like a gold crown on a pig's head — won't do. Picturesque perhaps, but —"<sup>5</sup>

'A God's Labour' describes the work that had to be done to bring about this transformation of nature. Its subject is not the ecstatic soaring of poems such as 'The Blue Bird', but the toil of "digging":

I have been digging deep and long  
 Mid a horror of filth and mire  
 A bed for the golden river's song,  
 A home for the deathless fire.<sup>6</sup>

A plunge into the abyss, with all the consequences so vividly depicted in the poem, had become necessary for reasons connected with the seemingly abstract distinction between overmind and supermind. To understand why the Yoga took this turn, we must go back to the realisation of 24 November 1926 and its sequel.

On 27 January 1927, Sri Aurobindo recorded in his diary a “vertiginous rapidity of progress in many directions”. At the same time, he noted certain formidable obstacles. Though he minimised their capacity to impede his advance, the “Four Matter Powers” — as he called them in an entry two days later — were aspects of cosmic existence that could not be lightly dismissed:

The attack of obscurity, resistance of the universal inconscience, refusal of the universal inertia, obstruction and conservatism of the material negation are beginning to lessen and even where they persist and intervene, cannot resist the progress. The past effects may still continue for a time, the future is not theirs.

He went on to list these obstacles again, in a different order, using symbols that occur in ‘A God’s Labour’ as well as in *Savitri* and elsewhere:

The four Powers that resisted now appear more clearly, — the Dragon of the nether foundations who preserves the old Law intact till the will of the Supreme is manifested, the Sphinx of the eternal questioning, the Night of the eternal negation, the Rock (stone Purusha, inert Shiva) of the eternal inertia. Still they are there, but a first victory has been assured against them.<sup>7</sup>

In retrospect, after his tremendous realisation two months earlier, Sri Aurobindo would seem to have underestimated at first the strength of the opposing forces. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he had not yet seen clearly the limitations of the overmind. In the *Record of Yoga* he did not explicitly distinguish overmind from supermind until 29 October 1927. By the time he revised *The Life Divine* for the first edition, published in 1939-40, he was insisting on the limits of what the overmind could accomplish:

In the terrestrial evolution itself the overmind descent would not be able to transform wholly the Inconscience; all that it could do would be to transform in each man it touched the whole conscious being, inner and outer, personal and universally impersonal, into its own stuff and impose that upon the Ignorance illumining it into cosmic truth and knowledge. But a basis of Nescience would remain; it would be as if a sun and its system were to shine out in an original darkness of Space and illumine everything as far as its rays could reach so that all that dwelt in the light would feel as if no darkness were there at all in their

experience of existence. But outside that sphere or expanse of experience the original darkness would still be there and, since all things are possible in an overmind structure, could reinvade the island of light created within its empire.<sup>8</sup>

A few pages later, acknowledging the occult truth behind the “self-protective law of blind imperative Necessity” in the Inconscient — which only the supramental Force can entirely cancel, because “with it enters an opposite and luminous imperative Necessity which underlies all things” — Sri Aurobindo explains:

A transformation of human nature can only be achieved when the substance of the being is so steeped in the spiritual principle that all its movements are a spontaneous dynamism and a harmonised process of the spirit. But even when the higher powers and their intensities enter into the substance of the Inconscience, they are met by this blind opposing Necessity and are subjected to this circumscribing and diminishing law of the nescient substance.

He goes on to enumerate four aspects of the Inconscient’s opposition to the higher powers:

It opposes them with its strong titles of an established and inexorable Law, meets always the claim of life with the law of death, the demand of Light with the need of a relief of shadow and a background of darkness, the sovereignty and freedom and dynamism of the spirit with its own force of adjustment by limitation, demarcation by incapacity, foundation of energy on the repose of an original Inertia.<sup>9</sup>

Here we have again the “Four Matter Powers” which Sri Aurobindo had observed back in January 1927. The “established and inexorable Law” is evidently what is enforced by “the Dragon of the nether foundations” mentioned in the *Record of Yoga*, “who preserves the old Law intact till the will of the Supreme is manifested”. Death reabsorbs life into the “eternal negation” represented in the same diary entry by Night. The “need of a relief of shadow” is imposed by “the Sphinx of the eternal questioning”, called in *Savitri* the “grey-hued riddling nether shadow-Sphinx”.<sup>10</sup> The “repose of an original Inertia” in the sentence in *The Life Divine* corresponds to what Sri Aurobindo symbolised in the *Record* by “the Rock (stone Purusha, inert Shiva)”.

‘A God’s Labour’, written between the *Record of Yoga* and *The Life Divine*, deals with these very difficulties in the process of transformation. The symbolism of the night, the stone, the Sphinx and the Dragon recurs there:



I have laboured and suffered in Matter's night  
 To bring the fire to man;  
 But the hate of hell and human spite  
 Are my meed since the world began. . . .

A voice cried, "Go where none have gone!  
 Dig deeper, deeper yet  
 Till thou reach the grim foundation stone  
 And knock at the keyless gate."

I saw that a falsehood was planted deep  
 At the very root of things  
 Where the grey Sphinx guards God's riddle sleep  
 On the Dragon's outspread wings.<sup>11</sup>

Undeterred by the seeming impossibility of his task, Sri Aurobindo proceeded to plumb "the nether mysteries" as he had previously scaled the supernal heights. Near the end of the poem he declares:

He who I am was with me still;  
 All veils are breaking now.  
 I have heard His voice and borne His will  
 On my vast untroubled brow.<sup>12</sup>

But Sri Aurobindo's strength had another support besides his inner union with the Divine. For even on the human plane, his was not an entirely solitary labour. He acknowledged this more openly in early manuscripts of the poem than in the final version. In the first draft, the stanza just quoted reads differently:

He who I am is with me still  
 As She is in thee who art thou.  
 I hear His voice and I bear His will  
 On my vast untroubled brow.

A cancelled version of the same stanza begins:

He who I am is with me now  
 And thou walkest close by my side. . . .

Another stanza read, before revision:

My gaping wounds are a thousand and one  
 For the iron Lords assail;  
 But I have you here for companion  
 And my spirit's quenchless will.<sup>13</sup>

These drafts suggest a dimension of the poem that is less apparent in its published form. They enhance the credibility of a report of the Mother's reaction to 'A God's Labour'. Udar recalled:

The Mother told us how when She first read that poem She went to Sri Aurobindo and said: "Lord, what have you done? In your poem 'A God's Labour' you have exposed all my secrets to the whole world!" The Mother explained how this poem was specially written about Her.<sup>14</sup>

At first sight this is a surprising comment. The secrets that Sri Aurobindo exposed to the world by publishing the poem appear to be those of his own inner work. But he was not doing the work alone. By all his accounts, it was as much the Mother's work as his and would not have been possible without her. She underwent similar ordeals. K. R. S. Iyengar pointed out parallels between 'A God's Labour' and the Mother's prayer of 24 November 1931 which begins:

O my Lord, my sweet Master, for the accomplishment of Thy work I have sunk down into the unfathomable depths of Matter, I have touched with my finger the horror of the falsehood and the inconscience, I have reached the seat of oblivion and a supreme obscurity.<sup>15</sup>

'A God's Labour' seems to have been originally addressed to the Mother ("thee" or "you") in a very personal form which was perhaps not meant for publication. It contained testimony to her role in Sri Aurobindo's work that was unique in his poetry. As revised, its connection with the Mother is no longer so obvious. However, "our heavens" and "our light" in the third stanza are evidently what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother together had been trying to plant on the recalcitrant earth:

But too bright were our heavens, too far away,  
 Too frail their ethereal stuff;  
 Too splendid and sudden our light could not stay;  
 The roots were not deep enough.

The poem is still addressed to "you" in the opening stanza:

I have gathered my dreams in a silver air  
 Between the gold and the blue  
 And wrapped them softly and left them there,  
 My jewelled dreams of you.

The closing stanza refers again to “you”:

I shall leave my dreams in their argent air,  
 For in a raiment of gold and blue  
 There shall move on the earth embodied and fair  
 The living truth of you.<sup>16</sup>

If we take “you” to be the Mother, we can read this as a poetic statement of a truth on which Sri Aurobindo insisted:

The Mother comes in order to bring down the supramental and it is the descent which makes her full manifestation here possible.<sup>17</sup>

RICHARD HARTZ

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2. *Collected Poems*, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 672.
3. *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, p. 344.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 364.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 362.
6. *Collected Poems*, p. 534.
7. *Record of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 11, p. 1261.
8. *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 22, p. 988.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 997.
10. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, p. 336.
11. *Collected Poems*, pp. 534, 536.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 537.
13. Unpublished manuscript in Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives.
14. *Mother India*, February 1977, p. 105.
15. *Prayers and Meditations*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 1, p. 381. See K. R. Srinavasa Iyengar, *On The Mother: The Chronicle of a Manifestation and a Ministry* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 1994), pp. 346-48.
16. *Collected Poems*, pp. 534, 538.
17. *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*, CWSA, Vol. 32, p. 34.

# ABRAHAM LINCOLN — NOBLE AND RESOLUTE

(Continued from the issue of November 2014)

## 6. Lincoln's depression, naïvety and shyness with women

LINCOLN suffered from persistent depression and mood swings which friends and colleagues found strange and distressing. His face would become so despondent, his eyes so full of anguish that it would hurt just to look at him. Then abruptly he would join in the conversation and joke, his cloudy face lighting up. When Joshua Speed first met the young Lincoln, he was mystified with Lincoln's sadness and said: "I never saw so gloomy and melancholy a face in my life." But Speed liked this gangling tall man and invited Lincoln to stay with him. Lincoln's laconic reply was, "Well, Speed, I'm moved."<sup>1</sup> Artist Francis Bicknell Carpenter, who during Lincoln's Presidency made a portrait of him, observed, "Mr. Lincoln had the saddest face I ever attempted to paint."<sup>2</sup>

Reporter Horace White noted that Lincoln's face was "so overspread with sadness" yet, when he began to speak "this expression of sorrow dropped from him instantly. His face lighted up with a winning smile, and where I had a moment before seen only leaden sorrow I now beheld keen intelligence, genuine kindness of heart, and the promise of true friendship." Another contemporary observed that though Lincoln's appearance was odd people were captivated because of "his winning manner, his ready good humour, and his unaffected kindness and gentleness."<sup>3</sup>

In August 1835 his best (and only) lady friend, Ann Rutledge, to whom he was very close, died. As with the earlier premature deaths of his mother and sister, it was a great personal tragedy and he sank into a deep depression. It was an intense period of anguish and took him a long time to recover. He had lost the three women he was closest to, his mother, sister and now Ann.

Once, in 1853 when he was brooding on the Slavery issue, his friends went to bed leaving him alone at the fireplace, staring intently at the flames. The next morning he was still there, melancholically watching the ashes and charred logs.<sup>4</sup> During his subsequent Presidency he would often get lost in himself, broodingly stare through the windows of his White House office, haunted by the uncertainties of war. Paradoxically, Lincoln's Achilles' heel of chronic depression compelled him to endure

1. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 45.

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

3. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 6.

4. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 107.

extreme mental pain and agony thus possibly building an inner resilience. During his law career and the Presidency Lincoln's depression diminished to a certain sadness or despondency. And Presidential aide John Hay observed that despondency was more an aberration rather than the rule. His subsequent undertaking of enormous responsibility and strain during the war — that would have broken a lesser man — despite his handicap, reflects his strong will and steely determination that he had largely developed in adversity. It is no wonder he is credited to have said (as also Napoleon), "The word impossible is in the dictionary of fools."<sup>5</sup>

Lincoln had a charming simplicity about him. He was unassuming, shy and reserved and avoided young women, feeling awkward and self-conscious. As his political and legal friends later observed, he was successful in all phases of life but one, his romantic life, for he was not aware of or taught etiquette when dealing with women.

Despite his awkwardness Lincoln had a deep respect for women. On the practice of denying political rights to white females he declared during the Civil War: "I have never studied the art of paying compliments to women; but I must say that if all that has been said by orators and poets since the creation of the world in praise of women were applied to the women of America, it would not do them justice for their conduct during this war. I will close by saying, God bless the women of America!"<sup>6</sup>

In 1837 he courted a lady called Mary Owens but then wrote to her that he had thought over his promise to wed her and decided to offer her the option of breaking off the relationship, if she so desired. After all he was poor and if they married she would have to live in unaccustomed poverty. He himself would be happier with her than be alone but his first priority was that Mary should be happy and he did not want that she should suffer due to economic hardships. He then again wrote her a letter. The letter reflects his sincerity and innocence. The letter also offers an interesting insight into Lincoln's utter selflessness:

I want in all cases to do right and most particularly so, in all cases with women. I want, at this particular time, more than any thing else, to do right with you . . . you can now drop the subject, dismiss your thoughts (if you ever had any) from me forever, and leave this letter unanswered, without calling forth one accusing murmur from me. And I will even go further, and say, that if it will add any thing to your comfort, or peace of mind, to do so, it is my sincere wish that you should. . . . What I do wish is, that our further acquaintance shall depend upon yourself. If such further acquaintance would contribute nothing to your happiness, I am sure it would not to mine. If you feel yourself in any degree bound to me, I am now willing to release you, provided you wish it; while, on

5. Website: [www.greatmenquotations.blogspot.in](http://www.greatmenquotations.blogspot.in)

6. *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* edited by Roy P. Basler, Vol. VII, p. 254.

the other hand, I am willing, and even anxious to bind you faster, if I can be convinced that it will, in any considerable degree, add to your happiness. This, indeed, is the whole question with me. Nothing would make me more miserable than to believe you miserable — nothing more happy, than to know you were so.<sup>7</sup>

Despite Lincoln's concern Mary Owens was so offended and disillusioned with this letter that she forthwith terminated her relationship with Lincoln. Decades later she wrote to Herndon that he "was deficient in those little links which make up the chains of a woman's happiness".

In 1840 Lincoln started courting Mary Ann Todd, a witty and vivacious young lady from a very distinguished family. They decided to marry but Mary's family strongly objected and they had to call off the marriage. Due to the rejection and the feeling of inferiority about his lack of family respectability, Lincoln fell into a deep depression and was ineffective in fulfilling his professional duties for a few months. By now the whole town knew that Lincoln had a nervous breakdown. In a letter to a friend he confessed his utter hopelessness: "I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth. Whether I shall ever be better I can not tell; I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better."<sup>8</sup> It took Lincoln some months to overcome this suicidal depression.

A couple of years later, Lincoln and Mary started meeting again, secretly. Mary wrote anonymous satirical articles in a journal on a Democrat politician, and Lincoln perhaps assisted in a small way. The Democrat was incensed at the ridicule and approached the editor of the journal to ascertain the author of the articles. Lincoln gallantly tried to cover up for Mary and took responsibility for her actions. The matter had reached boiling point with the Democrat challenging Lincoln to a duel. Lincoln could not back out of the challenge lest it compromised his honour. On the day when the opponents met for the duel, good sense prevailed, the seconds and friends intervened at the last minute to reconcile their differences. Lincoln was embarrassed about the incident and he never talked about it. Yet it was an important lesson in maturity for he learnt never to hurt or embarrass people. The incident brought Mary closer to him for she thought him to be very chivalrous for having covered up for her. Her admiration went a long way in restoring Lincoln's self-esteem. They secretly decided to get married. Mary's family finally relented but Mary's father never fully approved of Lincoln. In his presence, Lincoln always felt he had to prove himself. Although Mary later proved to be impulsive and at times hysterical Lincoln supported and remained loyal to her for the rest of his life caring

7. Website: [www.americanpresidents.org](http://www.americanpresidents.org)

8. Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 57.

for her in times of distress. Mary admired him and depended on him totally.

Mary later noted that Lincoln was “the kindest — most tender and loving husband and father in the world. . . . Said to me always when I asked him for any thing — you know what you want — go and get it. He never asked me if it was necessary.” He was a gentle and indulgent father who took the boys for walks, played with them and brought them to his office when he worked. While Herndon believed that he was too indulgent — as the boys scattered papers and stacks of books, and left the office in shambles — Lincoln believed that children should be allowed to grow up without strict rules and restrictions. Mary recalled his saying: “It is my pleasure that my children are free — happy and unrestrained by parental tyranny. Love is the chain whereby to lock a child to its parent.”<sup>9</sup>

## 7. Lincoln’s legal and political career

In New Salem Lincoln became so popular that his friends thought he ought to get into politics, a subject that interested him most. Coming from an underprivileged and undistinguished family Lincoln sought a wider acceptance in society, and politics had the potential to give him recognition and self-advancement in his career. So in 1832, aged 23, with the backing of his friends, Lincoln decided to run for political office in the Illinois state legislature and gave his first political speech: “Gentlemen, Fellow-Citizens: I presume you all know who I am. I am humble Abraham Lincoln. I have been solicited by my friends to become a candidate for the Legislature. My politics can be briefly stated. I am in favour of the Internal Improvement System, and a high Protective Tariff. These are my sentiments and political principles. If elected, I will be thankful. If defeated, it will be all the same.”<sup>10</sup>

Though he lost the election it was an impressive succinct debut speech — characterised by his reticence. Also for a new settler to compete for office with no family connections or wealth was a substantial achievement. Despite these handicaps it was Lincoln’s innate belief in himself and awareness of his exceptional intellectual abilities that gave him the self-confidence to have ambitions for a leadership role. Coming from a very undistinguished poor family, being deficient in formal education and having had an uneventful, bleak, lonely childhood Lincoln’s dream was to prove himself worthy, to be held in great regard and to earn the respect of people and make a mark in society. During this first bid for public office, he said: “I have no other [ambition] so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem. How far I shall succeed in gratifying this ambition, is yet to be developed.”<sup>11</sup>

9. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 106.

10. *Lincoln’s Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, p. 63.

11. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 87.

Lincoln was finally elected to the Illinois House of Representatives in August 1834. Out of sheer personal regard his friends forcefully canvassed for him, resulting in his success. Indeed, at key moments in his life, his friends rallied around him. He understood how to accept as well as give friendship. In order to further his political career Lincoln was advised to become a lawyer but he hesitated because of his lack of education. Formerly, he used to visit the courthouses, fascinated with lawyers cross-examining witnesses and trying to persuade the juries. He read the Statutes and studied the Constitution for he observed lawyers frequently referring to them. His first political victory gave him the confidence to take up law although politics was his first love. Further, practise of law would give him a steady income and a professional status, so with a single-minded zeal he taught himself law; he was entirely self-taught, whilst most students read under an accomplished attorney. What he lacked in guidance and facility, he made up for with deep concentration, phenomenal memory and lucid reasoning. He read and reread his books until he fully understood them.

He joined a law firm at Springfield, a far larger town, and so after a six-year stay he left New Salem. In 1837 the Illinois Supreme Court enrolled Lincoln as a lawyer, entirely self-made. He had never entered a college or an academy building until he acquired his license to practise law. He became a talented young lawyer holding his own against the best lawyers. In 1840 he appeared for his first case in the Illinois Supreme Court, the most prestigious court in the state where finally he fought 243 cases and won most of them thanks to his scrupulous preparation and his logical, forceful arguments. He commanded great respect from his fellow lawyers and gained status as a lawyer's lawyer. However, he belittled his own achievements and abilities.

Lincoln studied history and scrutinised newspapers and journals to synthesise the various divergent political viewpoints. In his opinion, the American Declaration of Independence contained the highest political truths and showed Europe that people could govern themselves without hereditary monarchs and aristocracies. He honed his political skills by studying great orators, especially admiring how great truths had been splendidly told. His oratory and literary skills were noticed and he rose rapidly in the Whig party — the major political party, second only to the Democratic party. By now he was drafting bills and resolutions for the Whig party for no other party man could write so lucidly.

In 1843 he set his political sights on the United States Congress and when his party rival, Mr. Hardin, insulted him by accusing him of dirty politics and manoeuvring, Lincoln responded with decency and dignity by not denouncing or mocking him but instead appealed to his good sense. This typical Lincoln trademark of treating his political opponents with civility continued throughout his career.

In 1844 he decided to run his own firm and chose a junior, Mr. William Herndon as a partner. Mary detested Herndon and objected to the partnership but Lincoln's



magnanimity never allowed personal issues to interfere in his profession. To Mary's chagrin, he was generous to Herndon by splitting fifty percent of the firm's income with his younger associate. Lincoln's choice of Herndon seemed strange to many in Springfield and in the bar. Mr. Herndon could not understand, when Lincoln one day darted up the office stairs, and said: "Herndon, should you like to be my partner?" "Don't laugh at me, Mr. Lincoln," was Herndon's response. When Lincoln insisted, Herndon finally said: "Mr. Lincoln you know I am too young, and I have no standing and no money; but if you are in earnest, there is nothing in this world that would make me so happy." Nothing more was said till the papers were brought to Herndon to sign.<sup>12</sup>

Herndon was not always well received by fellow lawyers. "Herndon was a man that Lincoln picked up," recalled Fellow Springfield attorney Milton Hay, "He [Herndon] was a poor, forlorn fellow who got on the right side of Lincoln, and that was one of Lincoln's abounding traits, that if any person moved his sympathies he would go to their relief. It was Herndon's poverty and hard luck that made Lincoln take to him."<sup>13</sup> Herndon was always faithful, affectionate and respectful to Lincoln. When Herndon's drinking sprees caused public embarrassment, he wrote, "Lincoln invariably refrained from joining in the popular denunciation, which, though not unmerited, was so frequently heaped upon me. He never chided, never censured, never criticised my conduct."<sup>14</sup>

Lincoln was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives (Congress), a giant step in his political career, and was sworn in in 1847 leaving Herndon in full charge of the practice. Yet, Herndon tried to protect Lincoln's legal and political interests at all times.

Lincoln opposed the American expansionist policy of incursion into Mexico during the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-48). Clearly, on a matter of principle, he had ruined his chances for re-election by opposing the Mexican War. To some, that was heroic; to others, suicidal. Herndon knew that Lincoln was always truthful and scrupulous, but wanted to caution Lincoln that his principled stand would be detrimental to his political career. He later wrote about Lincoln's selflessness for the cause of justice:

In 1847-49 I saw that Lincoln would ruin himself about the Mexican War, and his opposition to it, and . . . I tried to prevent Lincoln's destruction . . . but his sense of justice and his courage made him speak, utter his thoughts, as to the war with Mexico. Lincoln and I had many hot disputes in our office, and yet those disputes were friendly ones. He was never insulting nor dictatorial to

12. See Rufus Rockwell Wilson, editor, *Intimate Memories of Lincoln*, p. 419.

13. Rufus Rockwell Wilson, editor, *Intimate Memories of Lincoln*, pp. 46-47.

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

me. No politician in America can vote and live if he opposes war in which the spread eagle is concerned, America. When Lincoln returned home from Congress in 1849, he was a politically dead and buried man; he wanted to run for Congress again, but it was no use to try.<sup>15</sup>

After his tenure in Congress, Lincoln resumed his law business. Herndon loved Lincoln. During their long association he never had a grievance against him and spoke of him as being the most compassionate and charitable man he ever knew.

In 1850, Lincoln's four-year old son Eddie died. The tragedy was unbearable. Mary had a breakdown and he had to bear the additional burden of caring for her.

In the 1850's Lincoln was one of the most sought-after lawyers, defending people of all classes, treating them equally, irrespective of their economic condition or social status. Once he accepted a legal case, he would be very conscientious and meticulously prepare to represent his client. At the outset he would advise his clients to settle their differences out of court — to the detriment of his own commercial interest — but if arbitration was the only course open he was scrupulous in determining a fair fee. He made his money in the legal practice by sheer hard work, on the volume of his practice and not by high legal fees that a top attorney like him could have charged. He was the only lawyer to take the trouble to ride the entire circuit — a mobile court covering a large judicial domain to cater to people in remote areas. His legal practice gave him an understanding into human psychology, making his mind more open. He never compromised with his integrity — remarkable for a man in the legal profession.

In June 1858 he was nominated by his party to fill a vacancy as United States Senator. Lincoln's response was his acclaimed "House Divided" speech where he felt that the ideals of freedom for all and the institution of slavery could not coexist under one roof. The speech launched his campaign for the Senate seat against Democrat Stephen A. Douglas, leading to the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858. This is considered the most famous Senate contest in American history. When Douglas learned of Lincoln's nomination, he apprehensively remarked: "I shall have my hands full. He is the strong man of the party — full of wit, facts, dates — and the best stump speaker, with his droll ways and dry jokes, in the West. He is as honest as he is shrewd."<sup>16</sup>

The famous Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 — there were seven in all — drew the interest of the entire nation. Douglas, nicknamed the "Little Giant", was a formidable and an intimidating rival. He was a sitting Senator and turned his excellent oratorical talents into discrediting Lincoln. Citing Lincoln's "House Divided" speech, he accused Lincoln of advocating Civil War. Lincoln refuted Douglas's assertion

15. Website: [www.mrlincolnandfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnandfriends.org) (Emanuel Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln*, p. 172)

16. Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 145.

that the United States was “made by the white man, for the benefit of the white man, to be administered by white men.” He went on to say: “. . . let us discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man — this race and that race and the other race being inferior, and therefore they must be placed in an inferior position — discarding our standard that we have left us. Let us discard all these things, and unite as one people throughout this land, until we shall once more stand up declaring that all men are created equal.”<sup>17</sup>

Douglas responded stating, “This Chicago doctrine of Lincoln’s — declaring that the negro and the white man are made equal by the Declaration of Independence and by Divine Providence — is a monstrous heresy.”<sup>18</sup>

Both men knew that anyone who declared equality for blacks would not be elected, for more than two-thirds of Illinois voters had approved a constitutional amendment to exclude even free Blacks from the state. Douglas found a ready audience by denouncing Lincoln for his suggestion to declare “all men are created equal”. The Republicans advised Lincoln to back away from his call for equality, and he acceded to it. Yet, in the last debate on October 15, 1858, Lincoln lucidly explained how exploitation, of which slavery was one, has dogged history:

It is the eternal struggle between these two principles — right and wrong — throughout the world. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time; and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity, and the other the divine right of kings. It is the same principle in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit that says, “You toil and work and earn bread, and I’ll eat it.” No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labour, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle.<sup>19</sup>

During his campaign, someone referred to him as “old Mr. Lincoln” and when asked how he felt about it, he quipped, “Oh, they have been at that trick many years. They commenced it when I was scarcely thirty.”<sup>20</sup> During the debates, politician Carl Schurz observed a certain dignity in Lincoln even whilst fending a foe: “There was, however, in all he said, a tone of earnest truthfulness, of elevated, noble sentiment, and of kindly sympathy, which added greatly to the strength of his argument, and became, as in the course of his speech he touched upon the moral

17. *Abraham Lincoln*, Stephen Arnold Douglas, Rodney O. Davis, Douglas L. Wilson, Knox College (Galesburg, Ill). Lincoln Studies Center, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, p. 230.

18. James Lander, *Lincoln & Darwin: shared visions of race, science, and religion*, p. 118.

19. Website: [www.harper.org](http://www.harper.org)

20. Don Edward Fehrenbacher, Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 467.

side of the question in debate, powerfully impressive. Even when attacking his opponent with keen satire or invective, which, coming from any other speaker, would have sounded bitter and cruel, there was still a certain something in his utterance making his hearers feel that those thrusts came from a reluctant heart, and that he would much rather have treated his foe as a friend.”<sup>21</sup>

Lincoln lost the election to Douglas but his fine speeches were a landmark in political history. Lincoln expressed concern that some of his Republican colleagues might not have supported him fully in winning the race but he harboured no grudges.

Lincoln’s celebrated debates with Douglas led to an invitation to address the Republicans of New York City at the Copper Union Hall in February 1860. New York wanted to see the man who had taken on the “Little Giant”. When Lincoln began his speech a spectator observed that he was disappointed with his appearance and he said “Mr. Cheerman” instead of “Mr. Chairman” and employed many other words with an old-fashioned pronunciation which would never go down well with a New Yorker. But once Lincoln got into the subject his face lightened up and his personality transformed and people were cheering this wonderful man. The observer concluded by stating: “When he reached a climax, the thunders of applause were terrific. It was a great speech. When I came out of the hall my face was glowing with excitement and my frame all aquiver. A friend, with his eyes aglow, asked me what I thought of Abe Lincoln, the rail-splitter. I said, ‘He’s the greatest man since St. Paul.’ And I think so yet.”<sup>22</sup>

On this New York visit, Lincoln also visited a neighbourhood, perhaps the city’s most crime-prone locality; the Superintendent of the Sabbath School narrates:

One Sunday morning I saw a tall, remarkable-looking man enter the room and take a seat among us. He listened with fixed attention to our exercises, and his countenance expressed such genuine interest that I approached him and suggested that he might be willing to say something to the children. He accepted the invitation with evident pleasure, and coming forward began a simple address, which at once fascinated every little hearer and hushed the room into silence. His language was strikingly beautiful, and his tones musical with intense feeling. The little faces would droop into sad conviction when he uttered sentences of warning, and would brighten into sunshine as he spoke cheerful words of promise. Once or twice he attempted to close his remarks, but the imperative shout of, “Go on! Oh, do go on!” would compel him to resume.

As I looked upon the gaunt and sinewy frame of the stranger, and marked his powerful head and determined features, now touched into softness by the impressions of the moment, I felt an irrepressible curiosity to learn something

21. Thomas F. Pendel, *Thirty-Six Years in the White House*, pp. 25-26.

22. *Lincoln’s Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, p. 31.

more about him, and while he was quietly leaving the room, I begged the man to tell me his name. He replied: “It is Abraham Lincoln, from Illinois.”<sup>23</sup>

## 8. Lincoln nominated as Republican Presidential candidate

Lincoln’s debates with Douglas and his success at the Copper Union address in New York made him a prospective Republican candidate for Presidency. Several Republicans asked, “Who is this Lincoln we read about in the papers, who ran Douglas such a fine race?” When a colleague told Lincoln that he was a serious Presidential contender, he lightly brushed it aside. When he received a letter suggesting that he should stand for Presidency, he diffidently said: “I must, in candour, say I do not think myself fit for the Presidency. I certainly am flattered, and gratified, and some partial friends think of me in that connection; but I really think it best for our cause that no concerted effort, such as you suggest, should be made.”<sup>24</sup> In response to a Republican about his future as a President, he repeated: “I do not think myself fit for the Presidency.”<sup>25</sup>

In April 1860, impressed by Lincoln’s oratory and writing skills, the Republicans rallied around him for the Presidency. Besides he had wonderful interpersonal skills, able to put people at ease, regardless of age. He met acquaintances with warmth and humour and was an engaging conversationalist. Journalist William O. Stoddard recalled meeting Lincoln in 1859, “He greeted me cordially as though we had known each other for a long time. There was no strangeness about him. He knew men on the instant. In a minute he had me not only interested but somewhat astonished.”<sup>26</sup>

Despite his initial reservations Lincoln assented to the Republican nomination race for President. There were three other Republican candidates who were selected for the nomination and they came from distinguished or privileged families with a far higher education and vaster administrative experience than Lincoln. Further, two of them had been both eminent Senators and Governors — whilst Lincoln had merely one stint as a Congressman — and had guided the anti-slavery stand. With such formidable contenders Lincoln had only an outside chance of winning the Republican nomination for Presidency. In comparison to the others he hardly had a national reputation. Lincoln’s forte was his committed campaign team, a group of life-long friends who were willing to make great sacrifices for him. His sensitive and empathetic nature allowed him to sense what the electorate thought and felt and this allowed him to accordingly guide the managers of his campaign team. Further,

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

24. Timothy Good, *Lincoln for President: an underdog’s path to the 1860 Republican nomination*, p. 27.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Website: [www.mrlincolnandfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnandfriends.org) (Michael Burlingame, editor, *Dispatches from Lincoln’s White House: The Anonymous Civil War Journalism of Presidential Secretary W. O. Stoddard*, pp. xx-xxi).

his civil and moderate approach did not arouse, unlike his contenders, any enemies. Though Lincoln was ambitious, he did not allow it to affect his kindness and open-heartedness, treating supporters and rivals equally. He was free from pettiness and malice and this helped him forge friendships with previous rivals who defeated or hurt him. A politician in those days made his impact on the masses with his oratory and Lincoln's speeches had power, clarity and moral strength, as well as making an impact on the journalists. To the surprise of all, the relatively inexperienced Lincoln won the Republican nomination. Years later, the foremost contestant, William H Seward, when asked why a relatively unknown like Lincoln won, said: "The leader of a political party in a country like ours is so exposed that his enemies become as numerous and formidable as his friends." Abraham Lincoln, by contrast, "comparatively unknown, had not to contend with the animosities generally marshalled against a leader."<sup>27</sup> Further, Lincoln conducted his campaign with utmost civility towards his opponents. Attorney Joseph Gillespie said that Mr. Lincoln "never manifested any bitter hatred towards his enemies. It was enough for him in a controversy to get the better of his adversary in argument without descending to personal abuse."<sup>28</sup> However, Lincoln's meticulous organisation, people-skills, oratory and guidance of his campaign team during the nomination race surpassed those of his rivals and were instrumental for his astonishing and unexpected victory.

Prior to being nominated he was persuaded by his friend Jesse Fell to write a short autobiography. He wrote a letter to Fell about himself with a note which said: "There is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me." The letter was plain and straightforward and reflects the difficult circumstances that he grew up in:

. . . My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families — second families, perhaps I should say. My mother . . . died in my tenth year.

My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age; and he grew up, literally [sic] without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals, still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called; but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin, writin, and cipherin" to the Rule of Three. If a straggler supposed to understand latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizzard [sic]. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course when I came of age I did not know much. Still somehow, I could read, write, and cipher to the Rule of Three; but that

27. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 253.

28. Website: [www.mrlincolnanfriends.org](http://www.mrlincolnanfriends.org) (David Chambers Mearns, *Largely Lincoln*, p. 93)

was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

I was raised to farm work, which I continued till I was twenty-two. At twenty-one I came to Illinois, and passed the first year in Macon County. Then I got to New-Salem, where I remained a year as a sort of Clerk in a store. Then came the Black-Hawk war; and I was elected a Captain of Volunteers — a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since. . . .<sup>29</sup>

Years later he related to his Secretary of State, William Seward, the distressing poverty he faced till his youth and how he earned his first dollar when he transported two gentlemen and their two trunks on a boat to a steamer and each of them threw a silver half a dollar on to the floor of the boat: “I could scarcely believe my eyes when I picked up the money. Gentlemen, you may think it was a very little thing, and in these days it seems to be a trifle; but it was a most important incident in my life. I could scarcely credit that I, a poor boy, had earned a dollar. The world seemed wider and fairer before me. I was a more hopeful and confident being from that time.”<sup>30</sup>

On being nominated, a wary Southerner came to meet Lincoln to ascertain his views on Southerners. A resident of Springfield relates this story:

He called on Mr. Lincoln, talked freely with him, and heard the President-elect express his sentiments and intentions. He learned that Mr. Lincoln entertained none but the kindest feelings towards the people of the South, and that he would protect the South in her just rights.

He had a long conversation, and went away delighted. He left the office of Mr. Lincoln in company with a friend, who communicated this to us, and when outside the door he remarked, while the tears stole down his furrowed cheeks: ‘Oh! If the people of the South could hear what I have heard, they would love and not hate Mr. Lincoln. I will tell my friends at home; but,’ he added sorrowfully, ‘they will not believe me.’ He said that he did wish that every man in the South could be personally acquainted with Mr. Lincoln.<sup>31</sup>

## 9. Lincoln elected President — anxious days as President-elect

By midnight of election day, 6 November 1860, through the benefits of the telegraph, Lincoln knew he would be the next President. Later he told friends and supporters

29. Website: [www.teachingamericanhistory.org](http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org)

30. *Lincoln's Stories and Speeches*, Edited by Edward Frank Allen, p. 15.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

who had worked to get him elected, “Well, boys, your troubles are over now, but mine have just begun.”<sup>32</sup> Certain Southern states had said that if a Republican got elected, they would secede from the Union. The Republicans opposed the expansion of slavery into other territories but affirmed the right of each state to control existing slavery within its own borders. Most Southerners felt threatened by a Republican government. Lincoln was facing a crisis on how to keep his country united and not break up into two.

The other problem he faced was the internal party conflict between the Conciliators and the Hardliners (Radicals). The former believed that by compromising, the slave states would not secede and continue to remain in the Union, while the latter felt that compromising would embolden the Southerners and the only way out was to use military force. Lincoln had to find a balance between these two extreme factions. He would not compromise with his integrity and reiterated that non-expansion of slavery would be an indispensable requisite. He told one visitor that he would rather be hung dead before he would buy or beg a peaceful inauguration. He did not want to be the aggressor and provoke war, he would conciliate but was adamant in his position: “Let there be no compromise on the question of extending slavery. If there be all our labour is lost, and, ere long, must be done again . . . stand firm. The tug has to come, and better now, than anytime hereafter.”<sup>33</sup> Further if slavery extended to new territories, Lincoln feared that the South might even invade Mexico or Cuba. It was Lincoln’s iron hand that steadied some wavering Republicans.

By now it was suspected that every department in Washington contained rebellious army officers who could well shift arms from arsenals in the North to the Southern regions. The border states of Maryland and Virginia, where slavery existed, were geographically in close proximity to the Union capital of Washington and if the Southerners could convince them to secede, then defenceless Washington would be vulnerable to capture, thus the Southerners could control the symbols of government, the seals and treaties, the treasuries and the apparent right to control the army and the navy. The situation was extremely tense and on December 20, 1860, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union. South Carolina had three federal forts and wanted to capture these forts, thus acting as a base to give resistance to the government. The President-elect immediately sent a message to General Scott to be prepared at the Presidential inauguration “to either hold, or retake the forts, as the case may require”.<sup>34</sup>

Lincoln then embarked on a long journey by horse carriage in biting cold to meet his stepmother. He had affectionately spoken of her being his best friend and reflected on the sad condition of his home and the cheerful and positive influence

32. Chester G. Hearn, *Lincoln, The Cabinet and the Generals*, p. 24.

33. Abraham Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings 1859-65*, p. 190.

34. Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, Vol. 1, p. 755.



she had on the family. When they met, he hugged her with tears in his eyes. They spent the day together, sometimes holding hands, and when he departed she gave him an emotional farewell embrace, worried about his safety and said that she may not see him again.

Back in Springfield, Lincoln went to his law office to meet his partner Herndon. They reminisced over their sixteen long years of association. Herndon recalls:

In the afternoon of his last day in Springfield he came down to our office. . . . Presently he inquired, "Billy," — he always called me by that name, — "how long have we been together?" "Over sixteen years," I answered. "We've never had a cross word during all that time, have we?" To which I returned a vehement, "No, indeed we have not." It was at this last interview in Springfield that he told me of the efforts that had been made by other lawyers to supplant in the partnership with him. He insisted that such men were weak creatures, who, to use his own language, "hoped to secure a law practice by hanging to his coat-tail." . . . but before leaving he made the strange request that the sign-board which swung on its rusty hinges at the foot of the stairway should remain. "Let it hang there undisturbed," he said, with a significant lowering of his voice. "Give our clients to understand that the election of a President makes no change in the firm of Lincoln and Herndon. If I live I'm coming back some time, and then we'll go right on practising law as if nothing had ever happened." He lingered for a moment as if to take a last look at the old quarters, and then passed through the door into the narrow hallway.<sup>35</sup>

On the morning of February 11, 1861, he took the train from Springfield for the inauguration of his Presidency at Washington. More than a thousand devoted friends and supporters came to the station to bid him a warm farewell. He shook hands with all his friends. He got so emotional that he could hardly speak. Finally he said: "My friends — No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington . . . I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell."<sup>36</sup>

During and after the speech there were many, including Lincoln, with moist eyes and as he finally entered the railway car, an emotional 'three cheers' rang the air. Sculptor Thomas D. Jones recalled: "The tearful eye, the tremulous lips and

35. William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Life of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 389-390.

36. Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. 4, p. 190.

inaudible words was a scene never to be forgotten. When the crowd had passed him, I stepped up to say goodbye. He gave me both his hands — no words after that.”<sup>37</sup>

Even his detractors were drawn to him. The *New York Herald*, a newspaper not known for its warmth towards the President-elect reported on his train journey to Washington: “Putting prejudice aside, no one can see Mr. Lincoln without recognising in him a man of immense power and force of character and natural talent. He seems so sincere, so conscientious, so simple hearted, that no one can help liking him and esteeming any disparagement of his ability or desire to do right, as a personal insult.”<sup>38</sup>

The twelve-day train trip would take him through major cities of the East. Lincoln, aware of the danger he faced on his journey, dissuaded his wife from travelling with him. During the trip there was no sign of self-elation of being the President-elect; rather he was alone and sad, aware of the perilous situation of the country. The luxurious Presidential train carriage with fine furniture, curtains and carpet failed to lighten his mood. Later, he got over his despondency and his geniality and good humour came to the forefront, to the relief of his accompanying entourage. People were curious to see him and at each stop, cheering crowds came out to greet him. Even in small towns he spoke a few words to those who had gathered. Conscious that the Union was headed for a deep crisis he sent a clear message to the friendly crowds, the Union was to be preserved.

Throughout the journey, the President-elect was careful not to suggest anything that would antagonise the Southerners. By now the whole lower tier of southern states (consisting of Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas) had followed South Carolina in seceding from the Union and formed themselves into the Confederate States of America. This was a big blow to Lincoln. The Confederates had taken possession of federal property within their borders, including forts, arsenals, and offices. Efforts on the part of the departing President James Buchanan to get Congress to resolve the conflict through compromise amendments had failed. The closer Lincoln got to Washington, larger the crisis loomed. En route, on 22 February, a plot to assassinate Lincoln in Baltimore was discovered. Leaving the Presidential train in Harrisburg he was spirited aboard a special single-car train, where he lay low for a dark ride through the city of Baltimore, with a soft hat pulled low on his face as a disguise and a derringer-wielding friend keeping guard. He finally arrived in Washington on February 23.<sup>39</sup>

On his arrival Lincoln met a Peace Convention comprising members of both South and North in the hope a compromise could be worked out between them.

37. Rufus Rockwell Wilson, editor, *Lincoln Among His Friends: A Sheaf of Intimate Memories*, p. 266.

38. William E. Barton, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. I, p. 471.

39. See website: [www.whitehousehistory.org](http://www.whitehousehistory.org)

One of the delegates, Lucius Chittenden called upon Lincoln. He could not imagine how Lincoln, who had travelled for ten days and “just escaped a conspiracy against his life,” could face a gathering in which so many were openly hostile. Yet Lincoln’s “wonderful vivacity surprised every spectator,” Chittenden marvelled.<sup>40</sup>

His days as a President-elect were so tense that he later confessed that he would have been willing to reduce his own life span by “a period of years” equal to the anxious months separating his election and the inauguration.<sup>41</sup>

*(To be continued)*

GAUTAM MALAKER

40. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 315.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 294.

*For those who are afraid of a word:*

*This is what we mean by “Divine”: all the knowledge we have to acquire, all the power we have to obtain, all the love we have to become, all the perfection we have to achieve, all the harmonious and progressive poise we have to manifest in light and joy, all the new and unknown splendours that have to be realised.*

*The Mother*

*(Words of the Mother – II, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 14, p. 17)*

## TRANSFORMING THE ‘ANIMAL ASSOCIATION INTO A COMMUNITY OF THE GODS’: A MEMORABLE COLLECTION<sup>1</sup>

ONE of the pioneers in Sri Aurobindo Studies, late Professor Madhusudan Reddy was more than an outstanding scholar. Versatile in many fields, he has left behind a rich legacy as a disciple, mentor and institution builder. On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Institute of Human Study (the institution was named by the Mother; She remains its permanent President) which he founded, some of the best writings of Prof. Reddy have now been edited and published by the joint efforts of Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research [S.A.C.A.R], Pondicherry, and the Institute of Human Study [I.H.S.] Hyderabad. Compiled from different sources, earlier published by Prof. Reddy, the new collections, including the present one under review, present the thought and writings for a new audience. Although the editors have not mentioned the manner in which they went about carrying out their task, we can rightly surmise the two criteria that must have mattered the most to them in carrying out their task are: the power of expression/articulation and the relevance of the texts to our times.

Among the collections that have been admirably compiled, packaged, edited and produced with attractive new covers, the volume: *Science, Spirituality and Culture: An Evolutionary Perspective*, clearly stands out. In fact, the three themes that have been flagged on the title of this gem of a book epitomise some of the most crucial issues of our times. Divided into two distinct parts, the book takes us on a fascinating journey of discovery by an adventurous mind. The perspectives in the realm of science and spirituality very often come from the domain of philosophy. And yet, Professor Reddy constantly eschews the abstract and abstruse language of metaphysics of Locke, Kant, Hegel or Spinoza, preferring instead a style typical of lyrical poetry. Expressions very often are aphoristic or epigrammatic in character and reveal the working of an illumined mind that can apprehend complex thoughts in moments of epiphany.

It has a well written foreword; Shruti Bidwaikar and Ananda Reddy underline the central and long-standing conflict between Science and Religion/Spirituality. Can there ever be a bridge linking the two, to reconcile and harmonise the divergent world views between Matter and the Spirit? To find an answer to this conundrum, Madhusudan Reddy proposes not the existing binary, but the science-spirituality

1. *Science, Spirituality and Culture: An Evolutionary Perspective* [Selected Works of Madhusudan Reddy] ed. Shruti Bidwaikar and Ananda Reddy, Hyderabad: Institute of Human Study, 2014.

continuum. As the editors explain, quantum mechanics, according to Prof. Reddy, can be the harbinger of a dynamic spirituality. Prof. Reddy writes eloquently:

Modern Physics comes close to identifying spirit; it points the presence of a 'driver' in the complex structure of the maternal atom. 'Particles' which are mathematical points also should have 'drivers' but point-like particles are not structures. . . .

The editors add: "This driver precisely is the God, Shiva or Higher consciousness. An atom thus becomes the body and Shiva the character." For Prof. Reddy, spirit and matter are essentially the same, beyond the sense-governed dichotomy; they are inviolably inseparable and integrated. In the cosmic consciousness, we see the simultaneous truth of unity and that of multiplicity. We need to see the reality of matter-energy-consciousness, manifest as a triad. The sense of separation unfortunately recurs because of the 'divisive effectuation of the mind'. Science is defined as knowledge of the physical world whereas spiritual philosophy rests on the power of intuition and inner experience.

What then is dynamic spirituality? 'Spirituality', Sri Aurobindo explains, 'is in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being'; whereas mind, [in Prof. Reddy's words], incapable of 'effecting any worthwhile change, is the constant and recalcitrant character of human life'. Just as the 'ape-kind' harbours the potential of the human, so also the human self contains within himself the seeds of the Superman. The spiritual aim in life believes in the ideals of free self-rule and perpetual progress. There is no necessary contradiction between spiritual life and the so-called ordinary life. 'Spiritual revolution', Prof. Reddy argues, 'springs from a direct and intuitive vision of reality'. It 'moves from the relative to the Absolute from the finite to the Infinite', 'from division to oneness'. Man is a 'transitional being', a 'middle term of the ascension'.

Next, Prof. Reddy offers an exposition on Science. His chapter on Quantum Physics and Consciousness is a fascinating study of the relationship between Science and Spirituality. He takes us systematically through the scientific ideas of Newton, Planck, Bohr, Einstein and Heisenberg and concludes that 'modern physics comes close to identifying spirit'.

The subsequent chapters: 'Beyond Credal Religions' and 'Spirituality: A Perennial Quest for New Light and New Life' affirm the fact that 'we need the rebirth of the soul of the earth itself, and a new form and a new embodiment of the spirit so that it can insist much more perfectly and integrally than it has done before in India, Egypt and China'. A general and widespread spiritual awakening will ensure 'a luminous mutuality, perceptive freedom, harmony, peace and unity'.

The chapter, 'Appreciation of values: A Comparative Study', possibly based on an address in America, highlights the uniqueness of the American cultural, political

and philosophical experience in terms of values. The American values of freedom, brotherhood, justice and human dignity, argues Prof. Reddy, need to be synthesised with the Indian approach that lays emphasis on the importance of inner life. The coming together of East and West, namely America and India, he maintains, will be salutary for the World's future and help prevent the threat of mutual destruction.

'History as the Divine fulfilment', and 'Understanding Meta-History' are two of the chapters I liked the most. Written in an inspired manner, the two essays cogently review the progress made by humanity across cultures, and brilliantly conclude that 'our destiny may be the conversion of an original animal association into a community of the gods'.

Unlike the Jewish or the Christian notion of time which is linear, Prof. Reddy bases himself on the Aurobindonean view and declares that 'historical time is a moving spectrum of manifesting consciousnesses'. Similarly, it is correct to suggest that 'any attempt to explain secular history religiously, or, to, understand revealed religions in terms of secular events is also not of any proven relevance'.

Prof. Reddy is at his best here. The notion of the divine call and man's response is to be seen essentially in the evolutionary context. In a language manifestly poetic, he says that history is truly like a 'parable' manifesting its truth in the evolving consciousness of the race. This is the only way enduring civilisation and cultures could be created. He considers the ideas of the major philosophies of the world including Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Spinoza, Fichte, Goethe, Schiller, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and maintains that the ethical world view of the Western tradition needs to be surpassed in the light of the best understanding the East.

The last two chapters 'The Anthem of Human Unity' and 'The Need for a Civilisation of New Consciousness' sum up the major arguments advanced in the individual chapters. Professor Reddy concludes his discussion by stating:

What we require is a dynamic 'theory' of the future — a deeper and an integral understanding of the evolutionary process of Nature as contrasted with the exclusively mental explanation of human development.

*Science, Spirituality and Culture* is a well-edited volume of essays for contemporary readers. Compiled with love and care, the articles have been brought together following an underlying rationale. Some repetitions in terms of ideas and issues can perhaps be avoided in the future editions. On the whole, the volume embodies some of the finest thoughts and expressions of late Professor Madhusudan Reddy and serves as a fitting tribute to his memory.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

## ON SRI AUROBINDO'S POEM 'A GOD'S LABOUR'

THE poem opens as if at the end of the journey —

“I have gathered my dreams in a silver air”. This idea of ‘dreams’ and ‘silver’ comes back again at the end of the poem; in the very last stanza we read — “I shall leave my dreams in their argent air . . .”

Let us not forget that these ‘dreams’ are a true vision of the future and convey to us the work already done by the spiritual seeker Sri Aurobindo who had experienced the descent into realms that normally we are quite unconscious of.

The common man, if he has dreams during his sleep, if they are not reflections of his everyday life, may sometimes get in touch with other worlds than the material. We may dream of places we have never seen before but which exist on the physical plane — like the Mother who had already seen while living in Paris beautiful scenery which she thought were from other planes of consciousness, but when she went to Japan in 1916 she saw that these were truly there in the physical world! We may see people we have never met before and see them in life later on — like Sri Aurobindo who had seen Ramaswami Iyengar before he came to Sri Aurobindo when he had been sent by people in Calcutta on a secret mission during the days of the Freedom struggle (actually, he had come with some funds to help Sri Aurobindo out in Pondicherry, the capital of French India, in those days). Sri Aurobindo has said, “I saw him not as he was then, but as he became after three years’ stay with me”, in Pondicherry.

But, the word ‘dreams’ here in this poem suggests ‘vision’, ‘perception’ and even ‘experience’ in another world, not a vague thing seen while asleep! It is the knowledge of an individual who has delved in his meditation into these other worlds which do exist and had gone to planes of consciousness where different forces are at work. We may recall here Sri Aurobindo’s early years in French India (1910 to 1912) when the British C.I.D. people never noticed who was coming in or going out of his residence! We have been told that he used occult power for the first time to influence outer circumstances and to cure one of his followers suffering from influenza. . . . That is how his knowledge of the occult worlds increased and it shows that there are many powers at work and sometimes an individual with enough knowledge of occultism can command them — as in the instance of the pelting of stones in the Guest House on François Martin street.

In this beautiful poem ‘A God’s Labour’, Sri Aurobindo gives a clear picture of what he had to go through to pave the way for the future — the work of preparing the way for a new humanity where people would be able to conquer their lower propensities and live in a consciousness remade in the light of the ideal. This was made possible by him as he had hewn the way through that ‘mire’.

He who would bring the heavens here  
Must descend himself into clay . . .

Much later, in his last gift to humanity, the epic poem *Savitri* he has said,

Himself he knew and why his soul had gone  
Into earth's passionate obscurity  
To share the labour of an errant Power  
Which by division hopes to find the One. (Bk. III, canto 3)

He also understood that if he built the connecting link between the ideal and the actual, he would be making it possible for others to climb beyond the present condition of servitude to Ignorance. And he saw

Two beings he was, one wide and free above,  
One struggling, bound, intense, its portion here.  
A tie between them still could bridge two worlds . . .  
(Bk. III, canto 3)

His inner faith and will could link the two and thus create a harmonious whole which would only then have the power to conquer adverse suggestions and transform that which in man was unwilling to let his own luminous self change his outer habitual ways. He, as a human, had to go into these unseen regions and open the darkness to the possibility of receiving the conscious push towards a truer way of existence. When the child learns to read and write, we are preparing him / her to understand what others have written to express their ideas. The unused cells of the brain become active and create the possibility of a rich and varied thinking, the innate potentialities are released. In the poem, he says

And the burden of earthly nature bear  
And tread the dolorous way.

The way is 'dolorous' because it is difficult, new, and not understood by others. We have been told that Sri Aurobindo, in Baroda (1892), was always preoccupied with his inner life. His companion Dinendranath says,

One could see that he was living the life of the *Gita*, not at all attached to external gains and ties.

We know that each time he changed his way of life for another way, he was doing it for the sake of the nation, for humanity, for the Divine.



In one of his letters he has said,

You do not know what we have taken ourselves through, but, because we have done that and I have risen above, I know that I can guide any Tom, Dick or Harry if he wants to change his way of life . . .

That is the 'burden' and the 'earthly nature'. . . Let us not miss the word 'if' in that statement.

This poem has thirty-one quatrains with alternate rhyming lines, the first and the third lines have four feet (four stresses), the second and the fourth lines have three feet (three stresses). The whole an unusual use of the trochee, a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one (opposite of the iamb). The theme flows naturally from one phase to another, from the descriptive to the dramatic as the journey goes on: his hope of joining the two worlds, his descent into the commonplace; the opposition of both the intelligent and the ignorant worlds; the revolt; the falsehood; the convictions that could not be changed. But against all odds he has done his work:

Heaven's fire is lit in the breast of the earth  
And the undying suns here burn;  
Through a wonder cleft in the bounds of birth  
The incarnate spirits yearn

Like flames to the kingdoms of Truth and Bliss . . .

Once this was achieved, it became possible to envision a world devoid of falsehood and its clinging to its habitual prejudices. It opens the way to a truer approach to life full of light and happiness. The poet could see the future world coming together in its vision of perfect organisation of humanity as a whole.

It is like Paradise on earth, the vision of the Vedic Rishis come true in a more complex form

Clarioning darkness's end.

The general tone of the poem is very simple because it is like an epistle. It is addressed to someone unknown to us who, as the poem suggests, will continue the work that has already been done by him in the unseen worlds and establish the reign of Truth on the material plane. That is why the sweetness of the expression is so simple and so straightforward. When he has spoken of all that has been done, he has said so beautifully:

And wrapped them softly and left them there,  
My jewelled dreams of you. . . .

The word ‘wrapped’ is rather unusual. This work that has been done cannot be understood by the human mind, because this conquest of the Unconscious is not known to anyone, not seen by anyone. But it has been really done and is protected in such a way that only the one who will make it effective in Life, the Executrix who will make it possible for others to rise above the ordinary, will understand and be able to bring that Light into the various aspects of the human world. Her understanding and power over the occult will surpass all human imagination but foreseen by the poet. So he says ‘my jewelled dreams of you’.

He then explains his most unusual ‘dream’, that which has been the very centre of their spiritual and occult action in the world. The words used are very expressive ‘rainbow bridge’, ‘marrying the soil to the sky’, ‘dancing planet midge’, ‘moods’. The connection between the skies and the lower reaches of the earth was never tried by earlier seekers. It was a new venture, a new adventure of Consciousness, which was trying to bring down a light belonging to the higher regions into the ordinary movements of thought, emotion or sensation. There is a resistance in man’s nature, it loves to remain attached to its ordinary habitual ways — that is why the words ‘soil’ and ‘sky’ are so effective. The adjective ‘dancing’ for planet Earth seems to be pejorative, as if its whirling round itself and round the sun through the centuries might turn out to have no meaning after all. The unexpected use of a derivative ‘midge’ from ‘midget’ is really strikingly audacious. Then again, to find that Infinity could have ‘moods’ makes us think and grow wider beyond our circle of comprehension; the ‘moods’ of Infinity is a strange perception. The term ‘infinity’ could be seen from different angles — in the mental world, in the variety of expressions in life, or even in the scenic beauty of the sky and sea. . . . But, here, it is something that touches the essential content of the collective consciousness, never seen before in its totality.

The difficulty that had to be faced was enormous and the experience was still at a personal level. The heights of Thought and Self could not be communicated to the world around as

The roots were not deep enough. . . .

a deeper and more fundamental base for the whole had to be reached.

The fourth stanza explains clearly the journey to be undertaken, the discovery of the very meaning of Creation, the purpose of life on earth:

He who would bring the heavens here  
 Must descend himself into clay  
 And the burden of earthly nature bear  
 And tread the dolorous way.

In Sri Aurobindo's epic, *Savitri*, Aswapati says to the Goddess:

Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task . . . (Book IV, canto 2)

Here the poet says that the way is 'dolorous', a word that hurts you even as you read it. But that is what he will show through the rest of the poem — how satisfied man is with what he is and does not understand the need for change, unwilling to live in his own heights. We are so accustomed to the repetitive movement of light and darkness, of aspiration and falling back into old habits; how can we imagine living constantly in the Awareness that we have reached in ourselves? And yet

In moments when the inner lamps are lit  
 And the life's cherished guests are left outside,  
 Our spirit sits alone and speaks to its gulfs.  
 A wider consciousness opens then its doors . . . (Book I, canto 4)

In *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo describes this going into the Inconscient as an adventure where nothing but the Light of his Soul was there to guide the traveller. We shall open a parenthesis here. Those of us who are familiar with Sri Aurobindo's play, *Rodogune*, will remember a similar movement where the hero wants to sort out things and says,

Leave me awhile,  
 Thoas, for I must sit alone tonight  
 My soul and I . . . (Rodogune, Act IV, scene 4)

After the first four stanzas of the poem, the poet explains the purpose with which he has done the work, almost as if against his own personal aspiration and attainment. He says

Coercing my godhead I have come down

so, this descent is after discovering his own true summit.

We associate this line immediately with the sonnet 'Godhead' where he describes his experience of the inner Presence in Baroda.

And suddenly felt, exceeding Nature's grooves,  
In me, enveloping me the body of Him.

Above my head a mighty head was seen,  
A face with the calm of immortality  
And an omnipotent gaze that held the scene  
In the vast circle of its sovereignty.

(*Collected Poems*, p. 607)

With that knowledge of the Self, he had ventured into the Unknown, but it was not easy to join his vision of Truth with the habitual approach to Life in the world of Matter. How to lead an ordinary human life in terms of the deeper Self one knows oneself to be! That effort brings to the surface tremendous difficulties specially when it has to be communicated to and lived by others too. It is well-nigh impossible to expect such a change in one's attitude in life. For man wants to remain invariably what he is. We cannot accept the fact that a change in our outlook will not abolish the person we think we are. We limit ourselves to the one who lives and meets people. We are almost afraid of being alone for, in that seclusion we are bound to see different personalities within our single self; no one is made of one piece.

Alone, the word is life endured and known  
It is the stillness where our spirits walk  
And all but our inmost faith is o'erthrown . . . (Siegfried Sassoon)

Or, as Shelley puts it —

Life or the world, or whatever we call that which we are and feel, is an astonishing thing. The mist of familiarity obscures from us the wonder of our being. The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of the intellectual philosophy, is that of unity. Nothing exists but as it is perceived. The difference is merely nominal between these two classes of thought, which are vulgarly distinguished by the names of ideas and of external objects. Pursuing the same thread of reasoning, the existence of distinct individual minds, similar to that which is employed in now questioning its own nature, is likewise found to be a delusion. The words *I, you, they* are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind.

Armed with that knowledge of the world of men, he ventures into this work knowing that it is something that is being done for the whole of humanity. So, he says

Coercing my godhead I have come down  
 Here on the sordid earth,  
 Ignorant, labouring, human grown  
 Twixt the gates of death and birth.

When he says

I have been digging deep and long

for us who know about his letters on his past lives, we cannot but take it in a broader sense of life after life.

The golden river, the giver of purity and goodwill, has been brought down in the legends as the Ganges flowing down the matted locks of Siva, and, spoken of by Sri Ramakrishna as a true liberator. Yet, as the Paramahansa explained, when you are in its waters, you are pure, but, the bad elements in your nature are waiting to pounce back upon you as soon as you come out of its sacred touch. In the phrase 'the golden river's song' the word 'song' is very suggestive and so is the word 'home'. They combine beautifully the material with the psychological for 'song' represents on the one hand the soft sound of the river and on the other, the inner harmony created through our aspiration and effort. The word 'home' seems to imply that the deathless fire is within us!

In the ancient Chinese philosophy of Taoism it is

Who can make sense of a world like cloudy water? Left alone and still, it becomes clear. Should this stillness be maintained? Moving hastily will surely cloud it again. How then can one move and not become clouded? Accept Tao and achieve (act) without being selfish; being unselfish one endures the world's wear, and needs no change of pace.

In the following stanza (stanza seven), we recall the legend of Prometheus who was the first to bring 'fire' to man, but here, 'the deathless fire' refers to the light of the Eternal. That alone can deliver us from all our troubles and confusion between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, between right action and the not right one, elements in us which push us towards an external effectiveness without reaching out to the same result from within. But, a personal effort is required for rejecting the base attitudes from one's thoughts and feelings. These are referred to here as 'filth and mire'. This 'deathless fire' is the eternal symbol of the truth hidden in the heart of man, the 'mystic fire' which has been invoked since the Age of the Vedas as the one and only way to increase in us the working of the true principle of our being.

O Strength, we have sought thee with our adoration, bring hither the God-Mind bright and dear in his happy chariots for our increasing.

*(The Secret of the Veda, p. 409)*

The difference that such an inner change brings about in the human persona is not understood, so, he says

the hate of hell and human spite  
Are my meed since the world began.

These last words ‘since the world began’ seem to be too confident a statement for the human mind! But the Mother has referred to Sri Aurobindo’s work as the upward march of evolution. And she says that this effort had always been supported by her in one form or another. In her story of Creation the Mother has told us that as the Consciousness projected out of the Supreme and reached the lower worlds, the positive forces became their opposites — Knowledge became Ignorance, Truth turned into Falsehood, Love and Life had to become Hate and Death.

‘Hate and spite’ (stanza seven) are aspects of the resistance of the crude unrefined nature which is afraid of opening its closed barriers lest it lose its authority over man and be unable to influence his acts anymore. It does not accept the principle that its fulfilment lies in this transmutation of its inherent nature of indolence, self-assertion and rejection of any other higher way of being. That is why in the following stanza (stanza eight) the poet says that man is in love with his chains of dualities that make his world — virtue and sin, pleasure and pain, high and low, happiness and sorrow, and so on.

The Truth-force is like a disturbance to man, it comes in the way of the attitude he has established in himself; but it has to be allowed to work in him before he can act fruitfully in the world and be an instrument of the action of Truth in life. This combination of opposing voices is referred to as an Elf — ‘elf’ because these movements together are like a formation which behaves as an entity and takes an individual attitude towards life. It is ‘grey’, not luminous, not part of the person in communion with the soul.

The journey into their world is the next phase the poet has to face (stanza 10): a world of ‘darkness and strife’ best describes what is felt by the traveller in these worlds. ‘Dark’ because it is a movement of life unconscious of any harmonious aim, a confused world of feelings and efforts made by different people through the ages. These are conflicting emotions, so, the word ‘strife’ is used. Aspirations as expressed by authors and artists are like visions of a better world as imagined by man, ‘halfway gleams on this stumbling life’. . . although many such concepts are not mere imaginations, they are inspired by an eternal faith in a perfect life on earth as lived by the ancient Rishis who lived in the knowledge of a “luminous secrecy,

the mute profound of things" ('The Rishi').

In the next two stanzas (11, 12), he shows us how little man has learnt through the ages. The 'torches of hope' are lit by great personalities, great renovators, but their work has not been established fully for the whole. Here the descent into the very world that pushes men to action brings about a revolt — 'The Truth of truths', that is, the ultimate harmony between different visions of life men cannot understand. 'The Light of lights' is beyond their ultimate concept of what is to be known. They choose one idea or another as their aim in art, philosophy, or social reorganisation. Their scientific research denies the existence of a Consciousness beyond the material and fails to combine religion and science to reach a vision of the 'mornings of the future' and 'an age unborn' that goes beyond the highest perceived by man so far.

In the poem 'A God's Labour' we reach a point which is very difficult to understand as the poet is describing his own assessment of what has been done in the past and has to be re-done. Again and again the psychological difficulties to eliminate the wrong and protect the right has to be done by every individual who wants to achieve his best.

Each battle for ever is fought and refought  
Through vistas of fruitless lives.

In stanza fourteen, he re-affirms his mission to complete his journey so that lowest level of the material world is connected to the highest and beyond

I cannot rest till my task is done . . .

He describes in words what those who have no understanding at all of this new possibility say. Not only that — their disbelief turns into mockery and the words of Aswapati in *Savitri* come back to our mind 'Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task' as we read 'My gaping wounds are a thousand and one'. We remember the crown of thorns for Jesus Christ.

Unless the noise of these stray wilful impulses is quietened, nothing that is useful for creating in all that surrounds us an ambiance of aspiration for a greater world can be accomplished.

He has said very clearly in the poem 'Musa Spiritus' that this veil around the soul created by one's desires has to be rent.

Let the little troubled life-god within  
Cast his veils from the still soul,  
His tiger-stripes of virtue and sin,  
His clamour and glamour and thole and dole

(*Collected Poems*, p. 531)

In normal life, this ‘drama’ of our outer sensations is what we call life and our reactions to its constant reflection of all that is around us, that is what we call being alive. This includes the people and things, scenery and all that exists physically for us, and all that is sensed by us in the living matrix of our surroundings.

In order to be ready to start living our real life we have to control these superficialities and look into the exact point where we have to begin. In this new way of life one has to remain constantly in touch with the real person within and let the external things or activities take their place according to the need of the moment.

That represents one side of the collaboration in the Divine’s work in the world, the individual preparation, so as to be able to act in accordance with the indication received. That is why, in ‘Musa Spiritus’ he says,

All make tranquil, all make free . . .

In a calm and positive readiness we are able to follow the indication that is given without deforming it with our prejudices,

Let my heart-beats measure the footsteps of God  
As He comes from His timeless infinity  
To build in their rapture His burning abode.

Here the words ‘rapture’ and ‘burning’ have a special value in terms of the theme of the poem ‘A God’s Labour’. ‘Rapture’ does not imply full ecstasy here. It simply says that all the elements are quietly in their place and create the harmony on the basis of which his new way of living can be established.

The word ‘abode’ recalls the word ‘home’ in ‘home for the deathless fire’ in the sixth stanza, but, here, it seems to suggest a more stable base where he lives in a constantly progressive attitude that ‘burns’ in its flame all that is unwanted and relumes that which can enrich and serve the true purpose in life. On this firm basis well-established, he starts his journey beyond the Mind.

The next four stanzas (10, 11, 12, 13) describe his starting point which begins at the limit of all that has been done by the mind of man. In the Light of the Soul, this knowledge acquired by men in the quest of truth in every domain of life, gives the impression of being only a very small part of the Whole which remains veiled and has yet to be known. These are realms beyond our reach. Humanity has travelled through the centuries without grasping the secret of this constant renewal and reaching out to a knowledge leading to a fuller life, including all the elements of his human nature which have adapted themselves and turned towards the light of Truth. His quest for the undying Sun sees clearly the insufficiency of the earlier attempts to know the Truth. ‘Halfway gleams’, ‘stumbling life’, ‘little torches of hope’, ‘fragment of Truth’ are phrases which show poignantly what is amiss.



But, he forges ahead and finds that everything is dark around him, for no one has ever trod that path! He sees that everything — every weakness that had been conquered, every domain that had been acquired, has to be re-conquered by him more fully. Seekers of earlier ages had spent energy and time to recover again and again the same realisation in vain. . . .

The fourteenth stanza stands apart; we are given an idea of what he has suffered, but the aim of his journey remains the same and is re-defined.

The four stanzas that follow (15,16,17,18) describe in a dramatic way the opposition that the world-redeemer has to face — from 'both devils and men'. Specially remarkable is the tone in which the opposing voices of human beings are spoken of — it is a mixture of sorrow and surprise. For their words sound like a curse 'Thou shalt fall and thy work lie dead'. They are proud of being what they are and want to remain the same. 'Come, let us slay him' is their decision; but the traveller goes on, firm in his faith to conquer in favour of the 'nameless Immaculate'. The word 'nameless' suggests that which is beyond form and cannot be defined, not something that is inchoate.

Then comes the most unexpected turning point,

But the god is there in my mortal breast  
Who wrestles with error and fate . . .

With this faith in the support he always feels in the presence of the Inner Divinity, he accepts the challenge and opens a doorway never touched by anyone and enters the unexplored domains of the nether-world. He does not know what he will have to face for the ugliness that has to be destroyed or changed had never been seen. But he feels secure in the knowledge that this journey through the mire is God's own way of clearing the resistance and bringing out of it his own Presence and show that even in that negative element he is present.

What he sees in those worlds is described in a delicate way, simply by saying that everything was in the hands of the opposing forces! All the words refer to this state in a very picturesque way — 'planted deep', 'root', 'riddle', 'Dragon'. He had really reached a place where 'none have gone' and crossed the unknown borderline, 'the keyless gate'!

The problem to be solved led him to the very source of pain and sorrow and evil which had to be looked upon as distortions of a truth that hides behind their appearances. In two lines packed with suggestive words which reflect a whole vista of associations, — Egyptian, Indian, Far-eastern ('Sphinx', 'God's riddle sleep', 'Dragon's outspread wings') — we see the worldwide implication of this journey. This other dimension includes both the regions above the mind and the worlds below the subconscious. But, he speaks of 'plunging' into the unknown of the 'nether mysteries'. This tremendous courage held together by a total calm helped him to

keep going right through the whole journey which ends with joining of the two extremes.

Bringing the fires of the splendour of God  
Into the human abyss.

The last six stanzas rise in a crescendo to a very simple and quiet finale

I shall leave my dreams . . .

which brings us back to the beginning

I have gathered my dreams . . .

and, the whole shines like a jewel, somewhere in the heart of the World.

The ‘Chimera’s head’ and the ‘Dragon’s outspread wings’ cannot hide the Truth any more. The Way has been opened up to the aspiring human being who wants to live in total Light and Harmony.

But, the world grows towards its destined Goal, and the lines end in a beautiful melodious harmony — ‘in a raiment of gold and blue’ and the assurance that the ‘silver light’ shall suffuse the world of men is given to us in the lines

A little more and the new life’s doors  
Shall be carved in silver light  
With its aureate roof and mosaic floors  
In a great world bare and bright.

There are dreams which fade out, but there are dreams which remain fixed in ever-increasing wonder to be realised in a world of harmony and peaceful co-existence.

AMITA SEN

**Notes:**

1. All great minds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have tried to think of a world without conflict where racial differences or linguistic barriers will be overcome and, even geographical positions will not interfere with the feeling of oneness of the human being who is the same whatever his race and origin — some are evolved, others are less illumined but they all have a place in the world.

When Bernard Palissy burned the furniture of his house to make his furnace reach the right temperature, Mother has told us that everyone thought him to be mad. But, when he brought out of his furnace the brightened clay as porcelain, everyone praised him to the

skies. His conviction alone brought about the success of his undertaking like all those in human history who have tried to transmit and establish their conviction on to the physical world around them must have felt through the ages.

2. There are a few words which need a little explanation as they have been used symbolically in the poem. These are explained here in the sequence in which they appear in the text.

*Labour* — It has nothing to do with the effort that functions with difficulty causing much pain to the one who executes a plan in the material world of life. It corresponds to the concentrated action of forces that have been focused together on the goal to be achieved; here, to cut out spiritually a path in a region of consciousness where no one has ever been. It is always associated with work done with a special effort in the material plane. Here the effort is conscious but it is an action in planes other than the Mind or the World of the senses around us or even a concentrated meditation on an object of psychological interest. Here the meaning is close to the last one, but the action is not personal but collective and universal.

*Dreams* — This seems to correspond to a perception, a conviction of the poet, an intuitive knowledge that this vision will become a reality only by the action of the individual whose consciousness surpasses the human and who has the power to see and use the unseen forces acting in the world. Only such a mastery over the human and the material and the invisible can make this dream of a changed consciousness a reality. It represents the poet's vision of the future humanity and all the new possibilities that a transformed consciousness can physically achieve on earth.

*Silver* — It refers to a spiritual consciousness with no blemish. (The adjective 'argent' is used in the same sense.)

*Gold* — Symbol of total Truth-Consciousness existing in the Higher realms which manifests from time to time in the material plane; a plane of consciousness where the Truth-Consciousness reigns supreme.

*Blue* — Again, a colour, but not a blue on paper or canvas; but a blue as a light that is seen as an aura around the head or the body of spiritually evolved individuals. Blue is always associated with Sri Krishna and the shade is a blend with light violet — a blue with a tinge of red, the artist would say, not the cerulean or the marine blue, not even what is called the royal blue; the atmosphere of Sri Krishna's true world of bliss where all is peace and well-being. (It reminds me of one Sunday morning in the early 1950's when the Mother used to improvise on her pedal-organ for about half an hour. Once we had seen a projection of blue beyond her fingers on the reeds. That evening, she said that Krishna had played through her.)

*Wrapped* — Hidden away from the ordinary reach, covered in such a way that no one can see it.

*Jewelled dreams of you* — A refined and beautiful personality whose pure presence shines and radiates like a jewel. With these words right at the outset, the poet sets the tone of an epistle; this is constantly there in our minds all through the poem.

*You* — The person who will be instrumental in realising this dream in the world, on the material plane. It could be associated with the Mother who is the Executrix of the Supreme's Will in the world.

*Human grown* — A very striking phrase which shows that he has taken the form of a human being, but is conscious of his divinity.

*Matter's night* — It describes the darkness of the density of the atmosphere through which the poet has to travel in order to reach his final point of realisation. The word 'matter' with a capital 'M' means that it is the world of the dense physical plane that is being referred to and not just 'matter' as opposed to 'mind' or 'life'.

*Elf* — Represents a type of little creature among others who act in the world of men in a veiled way as if to help those who are in need and have the right attitude in life.

*Titan* — A giant of the type that harms the work and has extraordinary powers to move the action of forces in the world, usually coming in the way of good results.

*Chimera* — Imaginary creature representing an idea or a plan which cannot be made effective on the material plane.

*Sphinx* — A mythological creature who knows the future. We may recall here the story of the Greek king Oedipus who had to answer a question put by the guardian Sphinx before he was allowed to enter the city of Thebes. It is the well-known riddle, "Which animal walks on four feet in the morning, on two feet at noon and on three in the evening?" The answer is "Man".

*Dragon* — A fire-breathing, sharp-toothed monster in the form of a lizard or a snake; it stands for the principle of Evil in some cultures. It is supposed to be a guardian-genie uttering oracles from inside the earth.

*Outspread wings* — Suggests that the dragon, the principle of evil, is affecting the whole Creation as if from a point above it, not ingrained in it, as has been spoken of earlier in the poem itself, described as falsehood rooted deep in the recesses of the being.

*Goblin* — Little creature of the fairy world, similar to elves, but more mischievous.

*The Divine is indeed what you expect of Him in your deepest aspiration.*

*The Mother*

(*Words of the Mother – II*, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 14, p. 17)

## RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of October 2014)

### XIII

WE looked at the figure anaphora as used by Tennyson and in *Ecclesiastes*. Now, in the very first page of *Future Poetry* there is a sentence that has already been quoted:

. . . 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>

These examples that have been given up till now are all from discursive prose. Let us now look at his poetic prose:

. . . green and beautiful are the meadows where the children run and pluck the flowers, green and beautiful the pastures where the calm-eyed cattle graze, green and beautiful the cornfields ripening on the village bounds, but greener are the impenetrable thickets of Asan.<sup>2</sup>

This truncated sentence is from the story *The Golden Bird*. Where are the Joyces and the Lawrences now? The peak on which they stand is not as lonely as it might seem to be. If and when he wanted, our writer could write poetic prose with as much delicacy of touch as any of them. It is doubtful however, whether they would have been capable of “the calm-eyed cattle”. Hardy would have been able to put it in.

Epistrophe is the opposite of anaphora, repeating words or phrases at the end of successive clauses:

Reading maketh a full *man*, conference a ready *man*, writing an exact *man*.<sup>3</sup>

One example from our author will be enough:

If thou hast a *duty*, this is thy *duty*; if thou ask what shall be thy *aim*, let this be thy *aim*.<sup>4</sup>

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

2. *Collected Plays and Stories*, CWSA, Vols. 3-4, p. 997.

3. Selby, F. G. ed., *Bacon's Essays*, Macmillan, London, '71 rpt., p. 129.

4. *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 150.

This sentence is much longer and the second part of it has already been quoted to exemplify parison and anaphora. This one sentence has many figures of speech in it: polyptoton, epistrophe, parison, anaphora and, of course, tautology.

The figures based on association are the next to be taken up. Three figures have been listed within this group: Metonymy, Synecdoche and Transferred Epithet. The first two of these are somewhat confusing. In order to simplify the process, therefore, the basic differences between the two shall be pointed out first and then the necessary examples will be given.

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which a word is used for another that suggests it. This when we say “grey hairs should be respected” what we mean is that old people should be respected. Grey hairs suggest old age. There are several sub-divisions within this figure — nine, to be exact. But it is not necessary to go into detail, just one or two examples from our author will be given to illustrate their use.

Synecdoche is a figure in which a word is substituted for another that is closely related to it. Thus the sentence “Man does not live by bread alone” actually means that food by itself is not enough for a man. Bread is very closely related to food, in fact, it is itself a food. There are several sub-divisions within this figure as well — eight in fact. One or two examples will be given.

The difference between the two is this. In metonymy the substituted word merely *suggests* the actual word that is meant, but in synecdoche the two are integrally related. They dovetail into each other. For example, if a part of a thing is substituted for the whole or vice versa it is synecdoche, but if the effect is substituted for the cause or vice versa then it is metonymy. This explanation is not adequate enough but details will take too long. The sub-divisions in both go accordingly.

Let us have examples of metonymy — first from other writers and then from our author. First there are four lines of Shirley’s *Death the Leveller* which is the name given by Palgrave, though in the play naturally there is no name.

Sceptre and crown  
 Must tumble down  
 And in the dust be equal made  
 With the poor crooked scythe and spade.<sup>5</sup>

Sceptre and crown are both symbols of royalty, so we have the substitution of symbol for the thing symbolised. Scythe and spade are the instruments of peasants, so we have the substitution of the instrument for the agent. Both are examples of metonymy.

*The Hour of God* gives us truly wonderful examples of metonymy. On the very first page there is one:

5. Carpenter, F.I. ed., *English Lyrical Poetry: 1500-1700*, Blackie & Son Ltd, Lon, n.d, p. 225.

. . . because the lamp has not been kept trimmed for the welcome and the ears are sealed to the call.<sup>6</sup>

The lamp is a symbol for the soul, so it is a metonymy. If the lamp is taken as an instrument for lighting man's path, then too it is one.

In the second clause we have synecdoche because ears, which are concrete things, are substituted for the soul which is abstract. Substituting the concrete for the abstract or vice versa are two of the subdivisions of synecdoche. There is another figure here, to be explained later. A simpler example of synecdoche will now be given.

. . . we shall find, I think, if we look with other than English-trained eyes, that there is even in this rich and vigorous poetry abundant cause for the failure.<sup>7</sup>

Here the writer, when he says "eyes", means our whole attitude. So a part is substituted for the whole — a case of synecdoche.

The trouble is that there are several sub-divisions and there are other figures that resemble each other, but usually the differences are well enough marked not to result in confusion. The differences though could at times be rather subtle. An exploration of the sub-divisions would make the essay inordinately long.

*(To be continued)*

RATRI RAY

6. *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 146.

7. *The Future Poetry*, (1953 ed.), p. 61.

*The Divine is the perfection towards which we move.  
And if you like, I shall lead you to Him very willingly.  
Have confidence.*

*The Mother*

*(Words of the Mother – II, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 14, p. 17)*

# AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

*(Continued from the issue of November 2014)*

## 13. The Poet's Poet

It is amazing that as one draws near the magic age of eighty, the oft-heard comments are: "Oh, age! It just went off my head" or "These days I keep forgetting things". At the same time I am intrigued that some happenings remain engraved in the memory as on granite. Spenser is one of them: how quite a few of my classmates and I looked absolutely foolish one day during our graduation studies.

We had been working on Edmund Spenser's poetry and our Professor had been waxing eloquent on how Spenser marked the bridge between Chaucer and Shakespeare and how he was not only a great poet but inspired others to write poetry. He has been called "the poet's poet" for many reasons and one could say he taught poets to adventure in new pathways, whether it was the subject matter or prosody. We heard the Professor eagerly, took down notes with feverish anxiety, and made sure we marked the passages as "imp.", "v.imp." and "v.v.imp."— (after all, each and every one of us was aiming for a first-class-first!)

The concluding week of the quarter was the poetry test. We came to the Hall and received the question paper with prayerful humility. We had to answer two of the three questions. We set to work. The first question was to summarise the story of Britomart. There was one on Chaucer's 'Nun's Priest's Tale'. A favourite of mine, of course. I proceeded to the third. "Dryden as a Poet's Poet". Oh, Professor is becoming forgetful these days, I thought. He has typed 'Dryden' for 'Spenser'. I simply proceeded to write on Spenser as the Poet's Poet. Between Britomart and the poet's poet, I had filled a sumptuous number of sheets; all my classmates had done so too. The day was over.

The very next day, after taking attendance, the Professor quietly remarked: "I never knew I had such a set of asses put together." We looked horrified as he proceeded to assure us that he had indeed meant Dryden. "He was also a great poet, couldn't you try to place him in the history of English poetry? Must you be so devoid of imagination, you who are studying Spenser?" It was a lesson for a lifetime. I am glad the experience did not put me off Edmund Spenser.

This may have been due to the Poet's Poet being held in high regard by Sri Aurobindo who rates him next only to Shakespeare. The Bard of Avon has plentiful "beauty of poetic expression" but it is Spenser who presents "this beauty in its fullest abundance":



*The Faerie Queene* is indeed a poem of unfailing imaginative charm and its two opening cantos are exquisite in execution; there is a stream of liquid harmony, of curiously opulent, yet finely tempered description, of fluid poetical phrase and minutely seen image. For these are Spenser's constant gifts, the native form of his genius which displays more of descriptive vision than of any larger creative power or narrative force. An inspired idea is worked out; a little too much lost in detail and in the diffusion of a wealthy prolixity, it still holds well together its rather difficult and entangling burden of symbols and forms and achieves in the end some accomplished totality of fine poetic effect.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Aurobindo has a good deal to criticise too. Indeed, even the most dedicated Spenser enthusiast will not be able to go through the entire epic (even in its unfinished form) without taking breaks now and then. But Sri Aurobindo finds that this was probably the first sustained attempt "a great interpretation by image and symbol, not here of the religious or spiritual, but of the ethical meaning of human life."<sup>2</sup> This shows how vast and in-depth reading lay behind the epic he wrote, *Savitri*, which is subtitled, "A legend and a symbol". He found in Spenser's work inspirations from Dante and Ariosto and of course, Hellenism, "the virtues to be figured in typical human beings; but he has dressed it up with the obvious and trivial mediaeval ingenuity of the allegory."<sup>3</sup>

Edmund Spenser was born in 1552 and was a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth I. Several interesting legends make their rounds about them. She may not have read his poetry but certainly admired his presence as a great poet of her times and even granted him an annual pension of one hundred pounds. His admiration for the Queen was boundless and readers recognised their Queen in the Fairy Queen presiding over the table of her Knights.

Spenser seems to have enjoyed fine tuning the language he had received from the Old and Middle English poets. There is a rare artistic embroidery of words in his verses. His first major work, *The Shepherd's Calender* (1579) for instance, is an amazingly realistic yet poetic testament of rural life where Nature rules supreme and the flora and fauna live in harmony. He uses archaic spellings deliberately and that gives the poem a medieval charm. The poem is about how the shepherd Colin Clout spends the twelve months of a year. Each canto deals with one month. Let us have a breeze of April, though the archaic spelling does create a mystery where there is none. The shepherd Thenot is speaking to another shepherd, Hobbinoll:

Tell me good Hobbinoll, what garres thee greete?<sup>4</sup>  
What? hath some Wolfe thy tender Lambes ytorne?

1. *The Future Poetry*, CWSA Vol. 26, pp. 83-84.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

4. Gars thee greete: makes you shed tears and mourn.

Or is thy Bagpype broke, that soundes so sweete?  
 Or art thou of thy loued lasse forlorne?  
 Or bene thine eyes attempted to the yeare,  
 Quenching the gasping furrowes thirst with rayne?

Like April shoure, so stremes the trickling teares  
 Adowne thy cheeke, to quenche thye thirstye payne.

Spenser has also written a clutch of elegies on the death of Sir Philip Sidney titled *Astrophel*. Love, heavenly love, and beauty, heavenly beauty are some of the subjects he has chosen for his individual poems. It is not easy to read him with ease because of the archaic spellings but nowadays reader-friendly editions have come. Here is the opening of his 'Hymn of Heavenly Beauty' indicating the desire to rise above the mere carnal or the physical to higher states of consciousness:

Rapt with the rage of mine own ravish'd thought,  
 Through contemplation of those goodly sights,  
 And glorious images in heaven wrought,  
 Whose wondrous beauty, breathing sweet delights  
 Do kindle love in high-conceited sprights;  
 I fain to tell the things that I behold,  
 But feel my wits to fail, and tongue to fold.

Spenser was also a noted sonneteer as we have seen in an earlier essay. His major claim to fame, however, rests on his epic, *The Faerie Queene*. The long poem (left unfinished) was Spenser's way of celebrating the Tudor dynasty in general and Elizabeth I in particular. No wonder great poets like Milton and Dryden who came after him had unqualified praise for him as Spenser had shown them the way to take up the structuring of epic poems. William Wordsworth even spoke of

Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven  
 With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace

when describing *The Faerie Queene*. Chivalry, romance and the spread of creative imagination flying in the regions of fancy mark the epic.

Written in what has come to be known as the Spenserian stanza, the author presents 'virtues' in the characters of the Arthurian legends. Spenser had planned to write twenty-four Books, each Book dedicated to one virtue. Twelve of the virtues are spoken of as private and twelve as public. Even 'Magnificence' is projected as a virtue. He could complete only seven, among them Justice, Courtesy, Temperance and Holiness. I have myself remained an admirer of Book III as the virtue dealt with

here is chastity, and that has a distant affinity with the legend of Savitri. In both Britomart and Savitri, one comes across a one-pointed faith in tapasya and chastity.

Britomart is the very personification of the quality of chastity. Her story is simply told. Here is a sample of Spenserian English, and how he hails Queen Elizabeth herself as a figure of Chastity:

It falles me here to write of Chastity,  
That fairest vertue, farre aboue the rest;  
For which what needs me fetch from Faery  
Forreine ensamples, it to haue exprest?  
Sith it is shrined in my Soueraines<sup>5</sup> brest,  
And form'd so liuely in each perfect part  
That to all Ladies, which haue it profest,  
Need but behold the pourtraict of her hart,  
If pourtrayd it might be by any liuing art.

There are some things which can never be adequately expressed through words or painting or sculpture. Chastity is one such virtue, just as philosophy is a concept that cannot be imprisoned by art. Yet, the poet says, he would try to personify chastity in Britomart. Young and pretty, Britomart is the daughter of King Ryence of South Wales. He had been gifted with a magic mirror by Merlin and the looking-glass could reveal “whatever thing the world contained, between heaven and earth, provided it had to do with the person who looked into it.”<sup>6</sup> One day Britomart went into her father’s private room. She saw the mirror and out of curiosity, tried to see herself in it. She could not. She now wondered and thought whether she could see her future in it. Spenser’s narrative goes thus:

Then, remembering the strange power it was said to possess, she tried to think of some interesting thing that concerned herself, and thus she wondered what husband fortune would allot to her. Immediately there was presented to her eyes the picture of a gallant Knight, clad in complete armour. His face, under the uplifted visor of the helmet, showed forth like the sun, to terrify his foes and make glad his friends. His heroic grace and noble bearing added to the grandeur of his figure. His crest was a crouching hound, and all his armour seemed of an antique fashion, but was wonderfully massive and stout, and fretted all round with gold; written on it in ancient lettering were the words — “Achilles arms, which Artegall did win.” On his shield he bore the device of a little crowned ermine on an azure field.

5. Sovereign. A reference to Queen Elizabeth I.

6. Translations from *The Faerie Queene* used in this essay are by Mary Macleod.

From this moment onwards, Britomart could not think of any other person as her husband. From the magician Merlin she learns about her future husband. He was a powerful knight, Sir Artegall, the Knight of Justice. He lived in the land of the Fairy Queen. A great warrior, he had a great future as well. Britomart decides to find him. She sets out on this quest accompanied by her nurse. Both are dressed as men. Britomart is able to defeat many heroic knights in her quest. She has several adventures too and we get to see personifications of qualities like Fear, Grief, Spite and Cruelty. Finally there is a big tournament in which Britomart vanquishes all the contending Knights but is unable to fight against Artegall whom she recognises as the face she had seen in the magic mirror. Since Artegall also loves her, all is well.

Such is the Spenserian tale in which Britomart, symbolising chastity, has to wear a man's dress to pierce through the veils of male superiority and convince herself that of all the knights she has met, it is Artegall alone who will be the right man for her. Indeed, she had not thought of anyone else as her husband since the day she had seen his face on Merlin's magic mirror. Thus she is shown to us as symbolising chastity.

Naturally, our mind turns to Savitri when reading about this remarkable heroine who personifies chastity. Both of them go in search of their life's companions and once the choice has been made, never look back again. Britomart's struggles take place in the tantalising world of allegory. She goes in search of Artegall which places her in very difficult positions and often she has to fight other knights. But no one recognises her to be a woman in a man's disguise. She even walks through fire unscathed to rescue the Lady Amoretta. When the lady's husband draws back, Britomart goes forward:

“No, indeed,” said Britomart, “for it would be a shameful thing to abandon a noble enterprise at the mere sight of peril, without even venturing. Rather let us try the last chance than give up our purpose out of fear.”

So saying, resolved to try her utmost, she threw her shield in front of her face, and, holding the point of her sword straight in front of her, she advanced to the fire. The flames immediately gave way, and parted on either side, so that she walked through without hindrance.

In her adventures in search of Artegall, Britomart remains unafraid of storms, earthquakes and a horrible smell of smoke and sulphur all of which are meant to discourage her. We naturally remember the beginnings of Savitri's yoga. She comes across an ebony gate to enter into the inner countries. She gives it a push so it would open:

The living portal groaned with sullen hinge:  
Heavily reluctant it complained inert

Against the tyranny of the spirit's touch.  
 A formidable voice cried from within:  
 "Back, creature of earth, lest tortured and torn thou die."  
 A dreadful murmur rose like a dim sea;  
 The Serpent of the threshold hissing rose,  
 A fatal guardian hood with monstrous coils,  
 The hounds of darkness growled with jaws agape,  
 And trolls and gnomes and goblins scowled and stared  
 And wild beast roarings thrilled the blood with fear  
 And menace muttered in a dangerous tongue.<sup>7</sup>

For Britomart who is unafraid and intent on her quest, the scene changes to music and joyous greeting and welcome. A number of persons come to meet her, like Fancy and Desire: there is also Hope, "a handsome maid, with a cheerful expression and lovely to see. She was lightly arrayed in silken samite, and her fair locks were woven up with gold." Britomart even meets Ate, the Mother of Strife.

Savitri too meets three soul-forces as the Mother of Sorrows, the Mother of Might and the Mother of Light. There is perfect architectonics in presenting these figures, not dispersed thoughts as in Spenser. A one-pointed concentration is invested in each of the three Mothers:

A moon-bright face in a sombre cloud of hair,  
 A Woman sat in a pale lustrous robe.  
 A rugged and ragged soil was her bare seat,  
 Beneath her feet a sharp and wounding stone.  
 A divine pity on the peaks of the world,  
 A spirit touched by the grief of all that lives,  
 She looked out far and saw from inner mind  
 This questionable world of outward things,  
 Of false appearances and plausible shapes,  
 This dubious cosmos stretched in the ignorant Void,  
 The pangs of earth, the toil and speed of the stars  
 And the difficult birth and dolorous end of life.<sup>8</sup>

As we juxtapose the legend of Britomart and Sri Aurobindo's version of the Savitri story, we understand why Sri Aurobindo had written as he did about Spenser's poem. He seems to say, what a jumbled hold-all! No crystallisation anywhere!

7. *Savitri*, p. 489.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 503.

The turn of the allegory must be at once ethical, ecclesiastical and political in one fell complexity; his witch of Faery-land embodies Falsehood, the Roman Catholic Church and Mary Queen of Scots in an irritating and impossible jumble. The subject of a poem of this kind has to be the struggle of the powers of good and evil, but the human figures through whom it works out to its issues, cannot be merely the good or the evil, this or that virtue or vice; they should stand for them as their expressive opportunity of life, not merely as their allegorical body. Spenser, a great poet, is not blind to this elementary condition; but his tangled skein of allegory continually hampers the sounder conception, and the interpretative narration works itself out through the maze of its distracting elements which we are obliged to accept, not for their own interest or living force and appeal, but for the beauty of the poetic expression and description to which they give occasion.<sup>9</sup>

Ah, the “beauty of the poetic expression”, again. So we get to be content with the interesting legend of Britomart. If in *Savitri* the struggle is crystallised into a battle between Savitri and Death in symbol realms, in the tale of Britomart it is spread around as a series of fights in the great Tournament proclaimed by Sir Satyrane. There is an involved series of jousts to gain the Golden Girdle and Britomart simply dazzles and is described as “a peerless image of perfection”.

Finally Artegall and Britomart meet in combat. He is not able to proceed to attack her when her visor falls off and he confronts a beautiful face, “his powerless arm, benumbed with secret fear, shrunk back from his revengeful purpose, and his cruel sword fell from his slack fingers to the ground”, while her enchanted spear loses its action too. Mutual recognition leads to great joy. As the wise Glauce puts it, “for lovers’ happiness is reached by the path of sorrow” bringing to a happy conclusion Britomart’s quest.

Sri Aurobindo has adventured in spiritual realms to posit the union of loving hearts in his Satyavan and Savitri. He makes a departure from the Mahabharata legend when he shows Savitri and Satyavan falling in love before the sorrow of Death tries to intervene. Nevertheless, like Britomart, Savitri had chosen once and will not choose again and goes in quest of a power that could nullify the threatening power of Death which seems indestructible to the human eye. If Britomart’s adventures in allegory-land play a see-saw game with reality and imagination, Savitri’s tapasya and struggle with Death raise the poem to the spiritual plane to assure us how much a mortal can achieve by tapping the sources above the mental plane of consciousness. This is why we gain but a brittle satisfaction from the ‘Legend of Britomartis, or of Chastitie’ while we hold up *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* as a guide for human transformation that would gain for man a life divine upon earth:

9. *The Future Poetry*, CWSA Vol. 26, p. 85.

All that now passes lived immortal there  
 In the proud beauty and fine harmony  
 Of Matter plastic to spiritual light.  
 Its ordered hours proclaimed the eternal Law;  
 Vision reposed on a safety of deathless forms;  
 Time was Eternity's transparent robe.<sup>10</sup>

*(To be continued)*

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

10. *Savitri*, p. 329.

*Every being carries within him the Divine Inhabitant; and although no being in the whole universe is as weak as man, none is as divine as he.*

*The Mother*

*(Words of the Mother – II, CWM 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Vol. 14, p. 17)*



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