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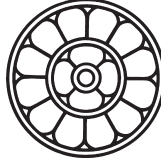
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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THE WAYS OF THE SPIRIT [2]

Aroused from Matter's sleep when Nature strove
 Into the half lights of the embodied mind
 She left not all imprisonment behind
But trailed an ever lengthening chain, and the love

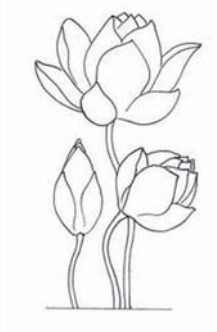
Of shadows and half lustres went with her.
 In timid mood were shaped our instruments;
 Horizon and surface barriered thought and sense,
Forbidden to look too high, too deep to peer.

An algebra of signs, a scheme of sense,
 A symbol language without depth or wings,
 A power to handle deftly outward things
Are our scant earnings of intelligence.

Yet towards a greater Nature paths she keeps
Threading the grandeur of her climbing steps.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 598)



EXPERIENCES AND REALISATIONS IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA

PART ONE

THE PLACE OF EXPERIENCES IN THE PRACTICE OF YOGA

SECTION ONE: THE NATURE AND VALUE OF EXPERIENCES

Chapter One: Experiences and Realisations

The Difference between Experience and Realisation

EXPERIENCE is a word that covers almost all the happenings in Yoga; only when something gets settled, then it is no longer an experience but part of the siddhi. E.g. peace when it comes and goes is an experience — when it is settled and goes no more it is a siddhi. Realisation is different — it is when something for which you are aspiring becomes real to you. E.g. you have the idea of the Divine in all, but it is only an idea, a belief; when you feel or see the Divine in all, it becomes a realisation.

*

Experience of Truth is an isolated or repeated descent of the Truth into the consciousness or ascent of the consciousness into it. Realisation is when the Truth becomes a settled part of the consciousness.

*

An experience of a truth in the substance of mind, in the vital or the physical, wherever it may be, is the beginning of realisation. When I experience peace, I begin to realise what it is. Repetition of the experience leads to a fuller and more permanent realisation. When it is settled anywhere, that is the full realisation of it in that plane or in that part of the being.

*

Your going up to a higher plane is an experience — the descent of the higher plane into you, if temporary, is an experience.

If you become fully aware of the nature of the higher plane and if that becomes part of your consciousness, it is a realisation.

These are the two words usually used, realisation and experience.

*

There is a fundamental realisation in which one can say, “I have now realised the Divine” and there is no longer any anxiety or straining after something unachieved. But after that even there is a development of this consciousness of realisation into which more and more of the Divine Truth comes into the fundamental experience.

The Yogi and the Sadhak

The Yogi is one who is already established in realisation — the sadhak is one who is getting or still trying to get realisation.

*

A sadhaka is one who is doing sadhana to attain union with the divine consciousness. A Yogi is one who is already living in some kind of oneness with the Divine, not in the ordinary consciousness.

Subordinate and Great Experiences

One who lives in the spiritual consciousness is a spiritual man, just as one who lives in thinking mind is an intellectual man. The spiritual consciousness is that in which you realise the Divine, the Self, the cosmic oneness as the constant living contact with these things. I do not know what you mean by abnormal experiences. There are many abnormal experiences that are not spiritual. There are two kinds of experiences: (1) subordinate things (like visions etc.) that help to open or build up or furnish a new (Yogic) consciousness; (2) the great experiences of Self, Peace, Light, Ananda, etc., also the perception of a deeper knowledge which shows us the truths of Soul and Nature and of the aspects of the Divine. This class of experiences are the beginning of realisation and it is when they settle and become part of the consciousness that realisation is complete.

*

One develops by spiritual knowledge and experience which comes from above the mind or one develops by psychic perception and experience which comes from within — these are the two main things. But it is also necessary to grow by inner mental and

vital experiences and visions and dream experiences play a large part here. One thing may predominate in one sadhak, others in another; each develops according to his nature.

Feelings as Experiences

There is no law that a feeling cannot be an experience; experiences are of all kinds and take all forms in the consciousness. When the consciousness undergoes, sees or feels anything spiritual or psychic or even occult, that is an experience — in the technical Yogic sense, for there are of course all sorts of experiences that are not of that character. Feelings themselves are of many kinds. The word feeling is often used for an emotion, and there can be psychic or spiritual emotions which are numbered among Yogic experiences, such as a wave of shuddha bhakti or the rising of love towards the Divine. A feeling also means a perception of something felt — a perception in the vital or psychic or in the essential substance of the consciousness. I find even often a mental perception when it is very vivid described as a feeling. If you exclude all these feelings and kindred ones and say that they are feelings, not experiences, then there is very little room left for experiences at all. Feeling and vision are the main forms of spiritual experience. One sees and feels the Brahman everywhere; one feels a force enter or go out from one; one feels or sees the presence of the Divine within or around one; one feels or sees the descent of light; one feels the descent of peace or Ananda. Kick all that out on the ground that it is only a feeling and you make a clean sweep of most of the things that we call experience. Again we feel a change in the substance of the consciousness or the state of consciousness. We feel ourselves spreading in wideness and the body only as a small thing in the wideness (this can be seen also); we feel the heart-consciousness becoming wide instead of narrow, soft instead of hard, illumined instead of obscure, the head-consciousness also, the vital, even the physical; we feel thousands of things of all kinds and why are we not to call them experiences? Of course it is an inner sight, an inner feeling, subtle feeling, not material like the feeling of a cold wind or a stone or any other object, but as the inner consciousness deepens it is not less vivid or concrete, it is even more so.

In this case what you felt was not an emotion, though something emotional came with it. You felt a condition in the very substance or consciousness — a softness, a plasticity, even a velvety softness, an ineffable plasticity. Any fellow who knows anything about Yoga would immediately say, “What a fine experience”, — a very clear psychic and spiritual experience.

Love, Joy and Experience

Your supposition [*that one cannot love the Divine until one experiences him*] conflicts with the experience of many sadhaks. I think Ramakrishna indicated somewhere that the love and joy and ardour of seeking was much more intense than that of fulfilment. I don't agree, but that shows at least that intense love is possible before realisation.

*

My point is that there have been hundreds of Bhaktas who have the love and seeking without any concrete experience, with only a mental conception or emotional belief in the Divine to support them. The whole point is that it is untrue to say that one must have a decisive or concrete experience before one can have love for the Divine. It is contrary to the facts and the quite ordinary facts of the spiritual experience.

*

The ordinary Bhakta is not a lion heart. The lion hearts get experiences comparatively soon but the ordinary Bhakta has often to feed on his own love or yearning for years and years — and he does it.

*

I really do not know what kind of joy you want. All experiences are not accompanied by joy. Interest is another matter.

Imagined Experiences

When one is living in the physical mind, the only way to escape from it is by imagination. Incidentally, that is why poetry and art etc. have so strong a hold. But these imaginations are often really shadows of supraphysical experience and once the barrier of the physical mind is broken or even swung a little open, there come the experiences themselves if the temperament is favourable. Hence are born visions and other such phenomena — all those that are miscalled psychic phenomena.

*

Even imagined experiences (honestly imagined) can help to mental realisation and mental realisation can be a step to total realisation.

Mental Knowledge and Spiritual Experience

These disadvantages of mental knowledge no doubt exist.¹ But I doubt whether anybody could mentally simulate to himself the experience of the One everywhere or the downflow of peace. He might mistake a first mental realisation for the deeper spiritual one or think the descent was in his physical when it was in his mental influencing the body through the mental sheath of the subtle body — but those who have no mental knowledge can also make these mistakes. The disadvantage of the one who does not know mentally is that he gets the experience without understanding it and this may be a hindrance or at least retardatory to development while he would not get so easily out of a mistake as one more mentally enlightened.

*

Usually they [*persons without mental knowledge of the Self*] feel first through the psychic centre by union with the Mother and do not call it the Self — or else they simply feel a wideness and peace in the head or in the heart. Previous mental knowledge is not indispensable. I have seen in more cases than one sadhaks getting the Brahman realisation and asking “what is this?” — describing it with great vividness and exactness but without any of the known terms.

Just after writing this I read a letter from a sadhika in which she writes, “I see that my head is becoming very quiet, pure, luminous, universal, *viśvamaya*.” Well, that is the beginning of the realisation of the universal Brahman-Self in the mind, but if I put it to her in that language she would understand nothing.

*

Mental realisation is useful at the beginning and prepares spiritual experience.

It [*book-knowledge*] can help too at the beginning — but also it can hinder. It depends on the sadhak.

*

You have to learn by experience. Mental information (badly understood, as it always is without experience) might rather hamper than help. In fact there is no fixed mental knowledge for these things, which vary infinitely. You must learn to go beyond the hankering for mental information and open to the true way of knowledge.

*

1. *The correspondent suggested that a mere mental knowledge of spiritual experience might lead one to concoct an experience through imagination or to exaggerate an experience by adding something to it mentally or to doubt an experience, thinking it might be a mental formation. — Ed.*

All the experiences [*of the Theosophists*] are mental except with a very few. Wordsworth's experience also was mental. Mental experiences are of course a good preparation, but to stop there leaves one far away from the real thing.

*

Yes, if one has thought much of one kind of realisation and absorbed the idea deeply — then it is quite natural that the spiritual experience of it should be one of the first to come.

Mental Realisation and Spiritual Realisation

It [*mental realisation of the Divine*] is a certain kind of living cognition — of which there are two parts — the living perception in thought rising as far as intuition or revelation, the vivid mental feeling and reproduction of what is thus known in the substance of mind. Thus the One in all is felt, seen, realised by the mind by a sort of inner mental sense. The spiritual realisation is more concrete than that — one has the Knowledge by a kind of identity in one's very substance.

*

A mental or vital sense of oneness has not the same essentiality or the same effect as a spiritual realisation of oneness — just as the mental perception of the Divine is not the same thing as the spiritual realisation. The consciousness of one plane is different from the consciousness of another. Spiritual and psychic love are different from mental, vital or physical love — so with everything else. So too with the perception of oneness and its effects. That is why the different planes have their importance; otherwise their existence would have no meaning.

*

You have to know by experience. The mental perception and mental realisation are different from each other — the first is only an idea, in the second the mind in its very substance reflects or reproduces the truth. The spiritual experience is more than the mental — it is in the very substance of the being that the experience takes place.

*

But if you have that [*peace, calm, silence, wideness*] when you concentrate, it is a true spiritual realisation — that which accompanies or prepares the experience of the Atman. It is not merely a mental realisation.

Spiritual Experience as Substantial Experience

Your feeling [*of spiritual experience as a “substance”*] is quite correct. All spiritual experience is a substantial experience — consciousness, Ananda even are felt as something substantial. It is also true that it is felt so by something deeper than mind; it is the mind that turns concrete realities into abstractions.

*

Yes, so long as the attitude is mental it is insecure because it is something imposed on the nature — a mental direction and control. But with the spiritual experience what begins is a change in the stuff of the consciousness itself and by that, as it proceeds to settle and confirm itself, begins naturally what we call the transformation of the nature.

*

The phrase [*“stuff of consciousness”*] simply means “substance of consciousness”, the consciousness in itself.

As the Yogic experience develops, consciousness is felt as something quite concrete in which there are movements and formations which are what we call thoughts, feelings etc.

* * *

Chapter Two: The Value of Experiences

Experience and Development of Consciousness

It is only by persistent experience and development of consciousness that the veil of Ignorance can be entirely dispelled.

*

An experience is an unmistakable thing and must be given its proper value. The mind may exaggerate in thinking about it, but that does not deprive it of its value.

*

Trances and experiences have their value. There is no question of less or more important — each thing has its place.

*

It is not a question of giving an equal value to everything you do, but of recognising the value of all the different elements of the sadhana. No such rule can be made as that trances are of little value or that experiences are of inferior importance any more than it can be said that work is of no or inferior importance.

*

Your experience is the beginning of the fundamental and decisive realisation which carries the consciousness out of the limited mental into the true spiritual vision and experience in which all is one and all is the Divine. It is this constant and living experience that is the true foundation of spiritual life. There can be no doubt about its truth and value, for it is evidently something living and dynamic and goes beyond a mental realisation. It may add to itself in future different aspects, but the essential fundamental realisation you now have. When this is permanent, one can be said to have passed out of the twilight of the mind into the light of the Spirit.

What you have now to do is to allow the realisation to grow and develop. The necessary movements will probably come of themselves as these have come — provided you keep your will single and faithful towards this Light and Truth. Already it has brought you the guidance towards the next step, cessation of the flow of thought, the inner mind's silence. Once that is won, there is likely to come a settled peace, liberation, wideness. The sense of the need of simplicity and transparency is also a true movement and comes from the same inner guidance. That is necessary for the deepest inmost divine element within behind the mind, life and body to come forward fully in you — when it does you will be able to become aware of the inner guide within you and of a Force working for the full spiritual change. This simplicity comes by a separation from the manifold devious mental and vital movements which lead one in all directions — a quiet, a detachment in the heart which turns one singly towards the one Truth and the one Light till it takes up the whole being and the whole life.

Put your trust in the grace of the One and Divine which has already touched you and opened its door and rely on it for all that is to come.

The Importance of Small Beginnings

What I meant about the experiences was simply this that you have erected your own ideas about what you want from the Yoga and have always been measuring what began to come by that standard and because it was not according to expectation or up to that standard telling yourself after a moment, "It is nothing, it is nothing." That dissatisfaction laid you open at every step to a reaction or recoil which prevented any continuous development. The Yogin who has experience knows that the small beginnings are of the greatest importance and have to be cherished and allowed with great patience to develop. He knows for instance that the neutral quiet so dissatisfying to the vital eagerness of the sadhak is the first step towards the peace that passeth all understanding, the small current or thrill of inner delight the first trickling in of the ocean of Ananda, the play of lights or colours the key of the doors of the inner vision and experience, the descents that stiffen the body into a concentrated stillness the first touch of something at the end of which is the presence of the Divine. He is not impatient; he is rather careful not to disturb the evolution that is beginning. Certainly, some sadhaks have strong and decisive experiences at the beginning, but these are followed by a long labour in which there are many empty periods and many periods of struggle.

*

If you truly decide in all your consciousness to offer your being to the Divine to mould it as He wills, then most of your personal difficulty will disappear — I mean that which still remains, and there will be only the lesser difficulties of the transformation of the ordinary into the Yogic consciousness, normal to all sadhana. Your mental difficulty has been all along that you wanted to mould the sadhana and the reception of experience and the response of the Divine according to your own preconceived mental ideas and left no freedom to the Divine to act or manifest according to His own truth and reality and the need not of your mind and vital but of your soul and spirit. It is as if your vital were to present a coloured glass to the Divine and tell Him, "Now pour yourself into that and I will shut you up there and look at you through the colours", or, from the mental point of view, as if you were to offer a test-tube in a similar way and say, "Get in there and I will test you and see what you are." But the Divine is shy about such processes and His objections are not altogether unintelligible.

At any rate I am glad the experience has come back again — it has come as the result of your effort and mine for the last days and is practically a reminder that the door of entry into Yogic experience is still there and can open at the right touch. You taxed me the other day with making a mistake about your experience of breathing with the name in it and reproached me for drawing a big inference from a very small phenomenon — a thing, by the way, which the scientists are doing daily without the least objection from your reason. You had the same idea, I believe, about my acceptance

of your former experiences, this current and the descent of stillness in the body, as signs of the Yogi in you. But these ideas spring from an ignorance of the spiritual realm and its phenomena and only show the incapacity of the outer intellectual reason to play the role you want it to play, that of a supreme judge of spiritual truth and inner experience — a quite natural incapacity because it does not know even the A.B.C. of these things and it passes my comprehension how one can be a judge about a thing of which one knows nothing. I know that the “scientists” are continually doing it with supraphysical phenomena outside their province — those who never had a spiritual or occult experience laying down the law about occult phenomena and Yoga; but that does not make it any more reasonable or excusable. Any Yogi who knows something about pranayama or japa can tell you that the running of the name in the breath is not a small phenomenon but of great importance in these practices and, if it comes naturally, a sign that something in the inner being has done that kind of sadhana in the past. As for the current it is the familiar sign of a first touch of the higher consciousness flowing down in the form of a stream — like the “wave” of light of the scientist — to prepare its possession of mind, vital and physical in the body. So is the stillness and rigidity of the body in your former experience a sign of the same descent of the higher consciousness in its form or tendency of stillness and silence. It is a perfectly sound conclusion that one who gets these experiences at the beginning has the capacity of Yoga in him and can open, even if the opening is delayed by other movements belonging to his ordinary nature. These things are part of the science of Yoga, as familiar as the crucial experiences of physical Science are to the scientific seeker.

As for the impression of swooning, it is simply because you were not in sleep, as you imagined, but in a first condition of what is usually called *svapna samādhi*, dream trance. What you felt like swooning was only the tendency to go deeper in, into a more profound *svapna samādhi* or else into a *susupta* trance — the latter being what the word trance usually means in English, but it can be extended to the *svapna* kind also. To the outer mind this deep loss of the surface consciousness seems like a swoon, though it is really nothing of the kind — hence the impression. Many sadhaks here get at times or sometimes for a long period this deeper *svapna samādhi* in what began as sleep — with the result that a conscious sadhana goes on in their sleeping as in their waking hours. This is different from the dream experiences that one has on the vital or mental plane which are themselves not ordinary dreams but actual experiences on the mental, vital, psychic or subtle physical planes. You have had several dreams which were vital dream experiences, those in which you met the Mother, and recently you had one such contact on the mental plane which, for those who understand these things, means that the inner consciousness is preparing in the mind as well as in the vital, which is a great advance.

You will ask why these things take place either in sleep or in an indrawn meditation and not in the waking state. There is a twofold reason. First, that usually in Yoga these things begin in an indrawn state and not in the waking condition, — it is only if or

when the waking mind is ready that they come as readily in the waking state. Again in you the waking mind has been too active in its insistence on the ideas and operations of the outer consciousness to give the inner mind a chance to project itself into the waking state. But it is through the inner consciousness and primarily through the inner mind that these things come; so, if there is not a clear passage from the inner to the outer, it must be in the inner states that they first appear. If the waking mind is subject or surrendered to the inner consciousness and willing to become its instrument, then even from the beginning these openings can come through the waking consciousness. That again is a familiar law of the Yoga.

I may add that when you complain of the want of response, you are probably expecting immediately some kind of direct manifestation of the Divine which, as a rule though there are exceptions, comes only when previous experiences have prepared the consciousness so that it may feel, understand, recognise the response. Ordinarily the spiritual or divine consciousness comes first — what I have called the higher consciousness — the presence or manifestation comes afterwards. But this descent of the higher consciousness is really the touch or influx of the Divine itself, though not at first recognised by the lower nature.

*

“I will try again” is not sufficient; what is needed is to try always — steadily, with a heart free from despondency, as the Gita says, *anirvin̄nacetāsā* You speak of five and a half years as if it were a tremendous time for such an object, but a Yogi who is able in that time to change radically his nature and get the concrete decisive experience of the Divine would have to be considered as one of the rare gallopers of the spiritual Way. Nobody has ever said that the spiritual change was an easy thing; all spiritual seekers will say that it is difficult but supremely worth doing. If one’s desire for the Divine has become the master desire, then surely one can give one’s whole life to it without repining and not grudge the time, difficulty or labour.

Again you speak of your experiences as vague and dreamlike. In the first place the scorn of small experiences in the inner life is no part of wisdom, reason or common sense. It is in the beginning of the sadhana and for a long time the small experiences that come on each other and, if given their full value, prepare the field, build up a preparatory consciousness and one day break open the walls to big experiences. But if you despise them with the ambitious idea that you must have either the big experiences or nothing, it is not surprising that they come once in a blue moon and cannot do their work. Moreover, all your experiences were not small. There were some like the stilling descent of a Power in the body — what you used to call numbness — which anyone with spiritual knowledge would have recognised as a first strong step towards the opening of the consciousness to the higher Peace and Light. But it was not in the line of your expectations and you gave it no special value. As for vague and dreamlike,

you feel it so because you are looking at them and at everything that happens in you from the standpoint of the outward physical mind and intellect which can take only physical things as real and important and vivid and to it inward phenomena are something unreal, vague and truthless. The spiritual experience does not even despise dreams and visions; it is known to it that many of these things are not dreams at all but experiences on an inner plane and if the experiences of the inner planes which lead to the opening of the inner self into the outer so as to influence and change it are not accepted, the experiences of the subtle consciousness and the trance consciousness, how is the waking consciousness to expand out of the narrow prison of the body and the body-mind and the senses? For, to the physical mind untouched by the inner awakened consciousness, even the experience of the cosmic consciousness or the Eternal Self might very well seem merely subjective and unconvincing. It would think, "Curious, no doubt, rather interesting, but very subjective, don't you think? Hallucinations, yes?" The first business of the spiritual seeker is to get away from the outward mind's outlook and to look at inward phenomena with an inward mind to which they soon become powerful and stimulating realities. If one does that, then one begins to see that there is here a wide field of truth and knowledge, in which one can move from discovery to discovery to reach the supreme discovery of all. But the outer physical mind, if it has any ideas about the Divine and spirituality at all, has only hasty *a priori* ideas miles away from the solid ground of inner truth and experience.

I have not left myself time to deal with other matters at any length. You speak of the Divine's stern demands and hard conditions — but what severe demands and iron conditions you are laying on the Divine! You practically say to Him, "I will doubt and deny you at every step, but you must fill me with your unmistakable Presence; I will be full of gloom and despair whenever I think of you or the Yoga, but you must flood my gloom with your rapturous irresistible Ananda; I will meet you only with my outer physical mind and consciousness, but you must give me in that the Power that will transform rapidly my whole nature." Well, I don't say that the Divine won't or can't do it, but if such a miracle is to be worked, you must give Him some time and just a millionth part of a chance.

*

There is no reason certainly for despair. The bliss always comes in drops at first, or a broken trickle. You have to go on cheerfully and in full confidence, till there is the cascade.

* * *

Chapter Three: Inner Experience and Outer Life

Subjective Experience and the Objective Existence

Experiences on the mental and vital and subtle physical planes or thought formations and vital formations are often represented as if they were concrete external happenings; true experiences are in the same way distorted by mental and vital accretions and additions. One of the first needs in our Yoga is a discrimination and a psychic tact distinguishing the false from the true, putting each thing in its place and giving it its true value or absence of value, not carried away by the excitement of the mind or the vital being.

*

What do you mean by true? You have a subjective experience belonging to a higher plane of consciousness; when you descend you come down with it into the material and the whole of existence is seen by you in the terms of that consciousness — just as when a man sees the vision of the Divine everywhere, he sees all down to the material world as the Divine.

*

It happens so in the sadhak's own subjective consciousness [*that the Divine is seen everywhere and there is no sorrow or suffering in the world*]. Of course it does not mean that the whole world becomes like that in everybody's consciousness.

If your experience were objective, then that would mean that the whole world had changed, everybody became conscious, no sorrow or suffering anywhere. Needless to say, the material world has not changed objectively in that way. Only in your own consciousness, subjectively, you see the Divine everywhere, all disharmony disappears, sorrow and suffering become impossible for the time at least — that is a subjective experience.

*

It depends on what you mean by subjective and objective. Knowledge and Ignorance are in their nature subjective. But from the personal point of view, the Force of Ignorance may manifest as something objective, outside oneself so that even when one has knowledge for oneself one cannot remove the envioning Ignorance. If that is so, Ignorance is not merely a subjective force in oneself, it is there in the world.

*

It seems to have been a series of experiences of the different bhavas of bhakti and it came for experience only — or for a manifold development of the bhakti. These of course are purely subjective experiences meant to educate the consciousness and have no definitive value for the actual manifestation. It is merely for subjective experience and knowledge.

*

Subjective does not mean false. It only means that the Truth is experienced within but it has not yet taken hold of the dynamic relations with the outside existence. It is an inner experience of the cosmic consciousness and the overmind knowledge that you have.

*

The cosmic consciousness, the overmind knowledge and experience is an inner knowledge — but its effect is subjective. As long as one lives in it, one can be free in soul, but to transform the external nature more is needed.

*

I have told you once before that your experiences are subjective — and in the subjective sphere they are correct in substance so far as they go. But to enter the Supermind subjective experience is not sufficient. Some sufficient application of intuition and overmind to life must first be done.

*

The difficulty of the Yoga is not in getting experiences or a subjective realisation of the Truth; it is in objectivising the Truth, that is, in making the outer consciousness down to the material an expression of the inner Truth. So long as that is not done, the attacks of the lower Nature can always continue.

Experience and the Change of One's Nature

Merely to have experiences of the higher consciousness will not change the nature. Either the higher consciousness has to make a dynamic descent into the whole being and change it — or it must establish itself in the inner being down to the inner physical so that the latter feels itself separate from the outer and is able to act freely upon it — or the psychic must come forward and change the nature — or the inner

will must awake and force the nature to change. These are the four ways in which change can be brought about.

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When you are in connection with the higher worlds above the mental, with the mental and the psychic or even with some of the higher vital planes, then there is the peace and Ananda — but connection with the lower vital worlds can easily bring disturbance and unrest, so long as your vital itself is not changed and made full of peace and strength and quiet.

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You forget that for a long time she was often keeping much more to herself, to X's great anger. During that time she built up an inner life and made some attempt to change certain things in her outer — not in the outward appearance but in the movements governing it. There is still an enormous amount to be done before the inward change can be outwardly visible, but still she is not insincere in her resolution. As for her not having any depression it is because she has established a fundamental calm which is only upset by clashes with X; all the rest passes on the surface ruffling it perhaps, but not breaking the calm. She has also a day or two ago had the experience of the ascent above and of the wideness of peace and joy of the Infinite (free from the bodily sense and limitation) as also the descent down to the Muladhara. She does not know the names or technicalities of these things but her description which was minute and full of details was unmistakable. There are three or four others who have had this experience recently so that we may suppose the working of the Force is not altogether in vain, as this experience is a very big affair and is supposed to be, if stabilised, the summit of the old Yogas. For us it is only a beginning of spiritual transformation. I have said this though it is personal so that you may understand that outside defects and obstacles in the nature or the appearance of unyogicness does not necessarily mean that a person can do or is doing no sadhana.

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To change the nature is not easy and always takes time, but if there is no inner experience, no gradual emergence of the other purer consciousness that is concealed by all these things you now see, it would be almost impossible even for the strongest will. You say that first you must get rid of all these things, then have the inner experiences. But how is that to be done? These things, anger, jealousy, desire, are the very stuff of the ordinary human vital consciousness. They could not be changed if there were not a deeper consciousness within which is of quite another character.

There is within you a psychic being which is divine, directly a part of the Mother, pure of all these defects. It is covered and concealed by the ordinary consciousness and nature, but when it is unveiled and able to come forward and govern the being, then it changes the ordinary consciousness, throws all these undivine things out and changes the outer nature altogether. That is why we want the sadhaks to concentrate, to open this concealed consciousness — it is by concentration of whatever kind and the experiences it brings that one opens and becomes aware within and the new consciousness and nature begin to grow and come out. Of course we want them also to use their will and reject the desires and wrong movements of the vital, for by doing that the emergence of the true consciousness becomes possible. But rejection alone cannot succeed; it is by rejection and by inner experience and growth that it is done.

You say that all these things were hidden within you. No; they were not deep within, they were in the outer or surface nature, only you were not sufficiently conscious of them because the other true consciousness had not opened and grown within you. Now by the experiences you have had the psychic has been growing and it is because of this new psychic consciousness that you are able to see clearly all that has to go. It does not go at once because the vital had so much the habit of them in the past, but they will now have to go because your soul wants to get rid of them and your soul is growing stronger in you. So you must both use your will aided by the Mother's force to get rid of these things, and go on with your inner psychic experiences — it is by the two together that all will be done.

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The persistence or the obstinate return of the old Adam is a common experience: it is only when there is a sufficient mass of experience and a certain progression of consciousness in the higher parts of the being that the lower can be really transmuted. It is that that one must allow to develop. It is the pressure of the Yoga shakti and the increase of the experiences that is wanted in your case, not this preoccupation with an external "grim" tapasya.

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Once these experiences [*of peace and the descent of force*] begin, they repeat themselves usually, whether the general condition is good or not. But naturally they cannot make a radical change until they settle themselves and become normal in the whole being or at least in the inner part of it. In the latter case the old movements can still come, but they are felt as something quite superficial and the sadhana increases in spite of them. There is no question of good or wicked. If some part of the being even has been opened the experiences come.

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The action of the higher consciousness does not usually begin by changing the outer nature — it works on the inner being, prepares that and then goes outward. Before that, whatever change is done in the outer nature has to be done by the psychic.

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All experiences can be brought into the smallest constituents of the being.

Inner Attitude and Outward Things

You have had some experiences which are signs of a future possibility. To have more within the first one and a half years it would be necessary to have the complete attitude of the sadhak and give up that of the man of the world. It is only then that progress can be rapid from the beginning.

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All these [*outward restraints such as moderation in eating food and drinking tea*] are external things that have their use, but what I mean [*by “the complete attitude of the sadhak”*] is something more inward. I mean not to be interested in outward things for their own sake, following after them with desire, but at all times to be intent on one’s soul, living centrally in the inner being and its progress, taking outward things and action only as a means for the inner progress.

The Power of Creative Formation

It [*feeling that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are looking at one*] simply means you have a subjective sense of our Presence. But must a subjective sense of things be necessarily a vain imagination? If so, no Yoga is possible. One has to take it as an axiom that subjective things can be as real as objective things. No doubt there may be and are such things as mental formations — but, to begin with, mental formations are or can be very powerful things, producing concrete results; secondly whether what one sees or hears is a mental formation or a real subjective object can only be determined when one has sufficient experience in these inward things.

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You have a strong power of (subjective) creative formation, mostly, I think, on the mental but partly too on the vital plane. This kind of formative faculty can be used for objective results if accompanied by a sound knowledge of the occult forces and their workings; but by itself it results more often in one's building up an inner world of one's own in which you can live very well satisfied, so long as you live in yourself, apart from any close contact with external physical life; but it does not stand the test of objective experience.

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In each plane there is an objective as well as a subjective side. It is not the physical plane and life alone that are objective.

When you have the power of formation of which I spoke, whatever is suggested to the mind, the mind constructs and establishes a form of it in itself. But this power can cut two ways; it may tempt the mind to construct mere images of the reality and mistake them for the reality itself. It is one of the many dangers of a too active mind.

You make a formation in your mind or on the vital plane in yourself — it is a kind of creation, but subjective only; it affects only your own mental or vital being. You can create by ideas, thought-forms, images a whole world in yourself or for yourself; but it stops there.

Some have the power of making consciously formations that go out and affect the minds, actions, vital movements, external lives of others. These formations may be destructive as well as creative.

Finally, there is the power to make formations that become effective realities in the earth-consciousness here, in its mind, life, physical existence. That is what we usually mean by creation.

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Chapter Four: The Danger of the Ego and the Need of Purification

Spiritual Experiences and the Ego

A certain exaltation of the being comes naturally with the stronger experiences and the sense of marvel or miracle may go with it, but there should be no egoistic feeling in the exaltation.

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What you have to be careful about is, when the feeling of power and strength comes into you or when you have experiences, not to allow it to be seized on by any kind of egoistic or vital desire, pride, ambition, wish to dominate others — even if it takes the garb of doing the Mother's work, — for this is your great weakness which always gets in and spoils your progress. Also when you have experiences, do not allow yourself to get exalted and excited by them so as to lose discrimination; for, if you do, then even though the experiences when they begin may be of the right kind, the vital forces take advantage of the excitation and rush in with their own deformations. Remain always calm, collected, quiet within, vigilant — discriminate always. The progress so made may be more slow or seem so; but it is more sure.

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A true spiritual experience must be free from the claim of the ego. What the ego can do however is to get proud of having the experience and think, "What a great one am I." Or it may think, "I am the Self, the Divine, so let me go and do what I will, for it is the Divine who wills in me." It is only if the experience of Self imposes silence on the other parts and frees the psychic that the ego disappears. Even if not ego itself, numerous fragments and survivals of ego-habit can remain and have to be eliminated.

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Yes, if there is the solid experience, the ego habit is much diminished, but it does not go altogether. It takes refuge in the sense of being an instrument and — if there is not the psychic turn — it may easily prefer to be the instrument of some Force that feeds the satisfaction of the ego. In such cases the ego may still remain strong although it feels itself instrumental and not the primary actor.

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Although there is no ego in the spiritual planes, yet by the spiritual experience the ego on the lower planes may get aggrandised through pride and wrong reception of the experience. Also by entering into the larger mental and vital planes one may aggrandise the ego. These things are always possible so long as the higher consciousness and the lower are not harmonised in the being and the lower transformed into the nature of the higher.

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The first result of the downflow of the overmind forces is very often to exaggerate the ego, which feels itself strong, almost irresistible (though it is not really so), divinised, luminous. The first thing to do, after some experience of the thing, is to get rid of this magnified ego. For that you have to stand back, not allow yourself to be swept in by the movement, but to watch, understand, reject all mixture, aspire for a purer and yet purer light and action. This can only be done perfectly if the psychic comes forward. The mind and vital, especially the vital, receiving these forces, can with difficulty resist the tendency to seize on and use them for the ego's objects or, which comes practically to the same thing, they mix the demands of the ego with the service of a higher object.

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There is [*when one receives forces without a basis of peace, light and love*] more a sense of having power than real power. There are some mixed and quite relative powers — sometimes a little effective, sometimes ineffective — which could be developed into something real if put under the control of the Divine, surrendered. But the ego comes in, exaggerates these small things and represents them as something huge and unique and refuses to surrender. Then the sadhak makes no progress — he wanders about in the jungle of his own imaginations without any discrimination or critical sense or among a play of confused forces he is unable to understand or master.

Forces can come anywhere. The Asuras have their forces, but without peace, light or love — only they are forces of darkness.

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The man there [*in the correspondent's dream*] symbolises that ego-tendency in the human nature which makes a man, when some realisation comes, to think how great a realisation is this and how great a sadhak am I and to call others to see and admire — perhaps he thinks like the man in the dream, "I have seen the Divine, indeed I feel I am one with the Divine, — I will call everybody to see that." This is a tendency which has injured the sadhana of many and sometimes ruined the sadhana altogether. In the thoughts you describe you came to see something in yourself which is there more or less in all human beings, the desire to be thought well of by others, to occupy a high place in their esteem or their affection, to have honour, position, admiration. When anybody joins this feeling to the idea of sadhana, then the disposition to do the sadhana for that and not purely and simply for the sake of the Divine comes in and there must be disturbance or else an obstruction in the sadhana itself or if in spite of it spiritual experience comes, then there is the danger of his misusing the experience to magnify his ego like the man in the dream. All these dreams are coming to you to give you a vivid and concrete knowledge and experience of what these human defects are so

that you may find it easier to throw them out, to recognise them when they come in the waking state and refuse them entrance. These things are not in yourself only but in all human nature; they are the things one has to get rid of or else to guard against so that one's consecration to the Divine may be complete, selfless, true and pure.

Purification and Preparation of the Nature

I don't think there is any cause for dissatisfaction with the progress made by you. Experiences come to many before the nature is ready to make full profit from them; to others a more or less prolonged period of purification and preparation of the stuff of the nature or the instruments comes first while experiences are held up till this process is largely or wholly over. The latter method which seems to be adopted in your case is the safer and sounder of the two. In this respect we think it is evident that you have made considerable progress, for instance in control over the violence and impatience and heat natural to the volcanic energy of your temperament, in sincerity also curbing the devious and errant impulses of an enormously active mind and temperament, in a greater quiet and harmony in the being as a whole. No doubt the process has to be completed, but something very fundamental seems to have been done. It is more important to look at the thing from the positive rather than the negative side. The things that have to be established are — *brahmacaryam śamaḥ satyam praśāntir ātmasaṁyamah*: *brahmacaryam*, a complete sex-purity; *śamaḥ*, quiet and harmony in the being, its forces maintained but controlled, harmonised, disciplined; *satyam*, truth and sincerity in the whole nature; *praśāntiḥ*, a general state of peace and calm; *ātmasaṁyamah*, the power and habit to control whatever needs control in the movements of the nature. When these are fairly established one has laid a foundation on which one can develop the Yogic consciousness and with the Yogic consciousness there comes an easy opening to realisation and experience.

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The progress does not always come in the way that people expect. There is first a preparation within even for many years before such experiences come as people usually associate with the word progress. There has been this preparation and progress in you, but because struggle is still there you cannot recognise it.

You must put your trust in the Mother and let her Force work in you — keep the attitude of confidence and self-offering and the result will appear as soon as the consciousness is ready.

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According to the affirmation of people acquainted with the subject, the preliminary purification before getting any Yogic experiences worth the name may extend to 12 years. After that one may legitimately expect something. You are far from the limit yet — so no reason to despair.

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Do not be over-eager for experience, — for experiences you can always get, having once broken the barrier between the physical mind and the subtle planes. What you have to aspire for most is the improved quality of the recipient consciousness in you — discrimination in the mind, the unattached impersonal Witness look on all that goes on in you and around you, purity in the vital, calm equanimity, enduring patience, absence of pride and the sense of greatness — and more especially, the development of the psychic being in you — surrender, self-giving, psychic humility, devotion. It is a consciousness made up of these things, cast in this mould that can bear without breaking, stumbling or deviation into error the rush of lights, powers and experiences from the supraphysical planes. An entire perfection in these respects is hardly possible until the whole nature from the highest mind to the subconscious physical is made one in the light that is greater than Mind; but a sufficient foundation and a consciousness always self-observant, vigilant and growing in these things is indispensable — for perfect purification is the basis of the perfect siddhi.

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You must not try to get experiences; you are not yet ready for them; instead of the right experience something abnormal comes. You must get your vital purified and calm so that these movements may not come. Nothing abnormal like not sleeping, not eating — all that is the vital trying to do extraordinary things so as to imagine it is going fast and doing high sadhana. A pure, simple, quiet, well-balanced vital is necessary for this Yoga.

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The automatic tendency is a good sign as it shows that it is the inner being opening to the Truth which is pressing forward the necessary changes.

As you say, it is the failure of the right attitude that comes in the way of passing through ordeals to a change of nature. The pressure is becoming greater now for this change of character even more than for decisive Yoga experience — for if the experience comes it fails to be decisive because of the want of the requisite change of nature. The mind for instance gets the experience of the One in all, but the vital cannot follow because it is dominated by ego-reaction and ego-motive or the habits of the

outer nature keep up a way of thinking, feeling, acting, living which is quite out of harmony with the experience. Or the psychic and part of the mind and emotional being feel frequently the closeness of the Mother, but the rest of the nature is unoffered and goes its own way prolonging division from her nearness, creating distance. It is because the sadhaks have never even tried to have the Yogic attitude in all things — they have been contented with the common ideas, common view of things, common motives of life, — only varied by inner experiences and transferred to the framework of the Asram instead of that of the world outside. It is not enough — and there is great need that this should change.

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Quite correct. Unless the adhar is made pure, neither the higher truth (intuitive, illumined spiritual) nor the overmental nor the supramental can manifest; whatever forces come down from them get mixed with the inferior consciousness and a half-truth takes the place of the Truth or even sometimes a dangerous error.

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As for experiences, anybody with an occult bent can have experiences. The thing is to know what to do with them.

Mixed and Confused Experiences

I do not question at all the personal intensity or concreteness of your internal experiences, but experiences can be intense and yet be very mixed in their truth and their character. In your experience your own subjectivity, sometimes your ego-pushes interfere very much and give them their form and the impression they create on you. It is only if there is a pure psychic response that the form given to the experience is likely to be the right one and the mental and vital movements will then present themselves in their true nature. Otherwise the mind, the vital, the ego give their own colour to what happens, their own turn, very usually their own deformation. *Intensity* is not a guarantee of entire truth and correctness in an experience; it is only *purity* of the consciousness that can give an entire truth and correctness.

The Mother's presence is always there; but if you decide to act on your own — your own idea, your own notion of things, your own will and demand upon things, then it is quite likely that her presence will get veiled; it is not she who withdraws from you, but you who draw back from her. But your mind and vital don't want to admit that, because it is always their preoccupation to justify their own movements. If the psychic were allowed its full predominance, this would not happen; it would

have felt the veiling, but it would at once have said, "There must have been some mistake in me, a mist has arisen in me," and it would have looked and found the cause.

It is perfectly true that so long as there is not an unreserved self-giving in both the internal and external, there will always be veilings, dark periods and difficulties. But if there is unreserved self-giving in the internal, the unreserved self-giving in the external would naturally follow; if it does not, it means that the internal is not unreservedly surrendered; there are reservations in some part of the mind insisting on its own ideas and notions; reservations in some part of the vital insisting on its own demands, impulses, movements, ego-ideas, formations; reservations in the internal physical insisting on its own old habits of many kinds, and all claiming consciously, half-consciously or subconsciously that these should be upheld, respected, satisfied, taken as an important element in the work, the "creation" or the Yoga.

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All this is absolutely idiotic confusion. It has come because you have persisted in disobeying and disregarding everything I wrote for you.

I told you you were not to try to decide by your mind. You persistently go on repeating, "*I must decide. I must decide. I must take a decision. I must take a resolution.*" You are always repeating this "*I, I, I must decide*" as if you knew better than myself and the Mother! "*I must understand, I must decide.*" And always you find that your mind can decide nothing and understand nothing. And yet you go on repeating the same falsehood.

I tell you plainly once again that all your so-called experiences are worth nothing, mere vital ignorance and confusion. The only experience you need is the experience of the presence of the Mother, the Mother's light, the Mother's force, and the change they bring in you.

You have to throw away all other influences and open yourself only to the Mother's influence.

You have to think and talk no longer about energies flowing out and your energies and others' energies. The only energy you have to feel is the descent and inflow and action of the Mother's force.

These were my instructions and so long as you carried them out, you were progressing rapidly.

Throw all these incoherent false experiences away. Go back to the single rule I gave you. Open to the Mother's presence, influence, light, force — reject everything else. Only so will you get back clearness (instead of this confusion), peace, psychic perception and progress in the sadhana.

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But why be overwhelmed by any wealth of any kind of experiences? What does it amount to after all? The quality of a sadhak does not depend on that; one great spiritual realisation direct and at the centre will often make a great sadhak or Yogi, an army of intermediate Yogic experiences will not, that has been amply proved by a host of instances. You need not therefore compare that wealth to your poverty. To open yourself to the descent of the higher consciousness (the true being) is the one thing needed and that, even if that comes after long effort and many failures, is better than a hectic gallop leading nowhere.

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You have missed my rather veiled hint about wealth of “any kind of experiences” and the reference to the intermediate zone which, I think at least, I made. I was referring to the wealth of *that* kind of experience. I do not say that these experiences are always of no value, but they are so mixed and confused that if one runs after them without any discrimination at all they end either by leading astray, sometimes tragically astray, or by bringing one into a confused nowhere. That does not mean that all such experiences are useless or without value. There are those that are sound as well as those that are unsound; those that are helpful, in the true line, sometimes signposts, sometimes stages on the way to realisation, sometimes stuff and material of the realisation. These naturally and rightly one seeks for, calls, strives after, or at least one opens oneself in the confident expectation that they will sooner or later arrive. Your own main experiences may have been few or not continuous, but I cannot recollect any that were not sound or were unhelpful. I would say that it is better to have a few of these than a multitude of the others. My only meaning in what I wrote was not to be impressed by mere wealth of experiences or to think that that is sufficient to constitute a great sadhak or that not to have this wealth is necessarily an inferiority, a lamentable deprivation or a poverty of the one thing desirable.

There are two classes of things that happen in Yoga — realisations and experiences. Realisations are the reception in the consciousness and the establishment there of the fundamental truths of the Divine, of the Higher or Divine Nature, of the world-consciousness and the play of its forces, of one’s own self and real nature and the inner nature of things, the power of these things growing in one till they are a part of one’s inner life and existence, — as for instance, the realisation of the Divine Presence, the descent and settling of the higher Peace, Light, Force, Ananda in the consciousness, their workings there, the realisation of the divine or spiritual love, the perception of one’s own psychic being, the discovery of one’s own true mental being, true vital being, true physical being, the realisation of the overmind or the supramental consciousness, the clear perception of the relation of all these things to our present inferior nature and their action on it to change that lower nature. The list of course might be infinitely longer. These things also are often called experiences when they

only come in flashes, snatches or rare visitations; they are spoken of as full realisations only when they become very positive or frequent or continuous or normal.

Then there are the experiences that help or lead towards the realisation of things spiritual or divine or bring openings or progressions in the sadhana or are supports on the way — experiences of a symbolic character, visions, contacts of one kind or another with the Divine or with the workings of the higher Truth, things like the waking of the Kundalini, the opening of the chakras, messages, intuitions, openings of the inner powers, etc. The one thing that one has to be careful about is to see that they are genuine and sincere and that depends on one's own sincerity, for if one is not sincere, if one is more concerned with the ego or being a big Yogi or becoming a superman than with meeting the Divine or getting the Divine Consciousness which enables one to live in or with the Divine, then a flood of pseudos or mixtures comes in, one is led into the mazes of the intermediate zone or spins in the grooves of one's own formations. There is the truth of the whole matter.

Then why does Krishnaprem say that one should not hunt after experiences but only love and seek the Divine? It simply means that you have not to make experiences your main aim, but the Divine only your aim; and if you do that, you are more likely to get the true helpful experiences and avoid the wrong ones. If one seeks mainly after experiences, his Yoga may become a mere self-indulgence in the lesser things of the mental, vital and subtle physical worlds or in spiritual secondaries, or it may bring down a turmoil or maelstrom of the mixed and the whole or half-pseudo and stand between the soul and the Divine. That is a very sound rule of sadhana. But all these rules and statements must be taken with a sense of measure and in their proper limits, — it does not mean that one should not welcome helpful experiences or that they have no value. Also when a sound line of experience opens, it is perfectly permissible to follow it out, keeping always the central aim in view. All helpful or supporting contacts in dream or vision, such as those you speak of, are to be welcomed and accepted. I had no intention of discouraging such things at all. Experiences of the right kind are a support and help towards the realisation; they are in every way acceptable.

Purification and Positive Experience

It is a mistake to dwell too much on the lower nature and its obstacles, which is the negative side of the sadhana. They have to be seen and purified, but preoccupation with them as the one important thing is not helpful. The positive side of experience of the descent is the more important thing. If one waits for the lower nature to be purified entirely and for all time before calling down the positive experience, one might have to wait for ever. It is true that the more the lower nature is purified, the easier is the descent of the higher Nature, but it is also and more true that the more the higher

Nature descends, the more the lower is purified. Neither the complete purification nor the permanent and perfect manifestation can come all at once, it is a matter of time and patient progress. The two (purification and manifestation) go on progressing side by side and become more and more strong to play into each other's hands — that is the usual course of the sadhana.

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I do not know what Krishnaprem said or in which article, I do not have it with me. But if the statement is that nobody can have a successful meditation or realise anything till he is pure and perfect, I fail to follow it; it contradicts my own experience. I have always had realisation by meditation first and the purification started afterwards as a result. I have seen many get important, even fundamental realisations by meditation who could not be said to have a great inner development. Are all Yogis who have meditated with effect and had great realisations in their inner consciousness perfect in their nature? It does not look like it to me. I am unable to believe in absolute generalisations in this field, because the development of spiritual consciousness is an exceedingly vast and complex affair in which all sorts of things can happen and one might almost say that for each man it is different according to his nature and that the one thing that is essential is the inner call and aspiration and the perseverance to follow always after it no matter how long it takes or what are the difficulties or impediments — because nothing else will satisfy the soul within us.

It is quite true that a certain amount of purification is indispensable for going on, that the more complete the purification the better because then when the realisations begin they can continue without big difficulties or relapses and without any possibility of fall or failure. It is also true that with many purification is the first need, — certain things have to be got out of the way before one can begin any consecutive inner experience. But the main need is a certain preparation of the consciousness so that it may be able to respond more and more freely to the higher Force. In this preparation many things are useful — the poetry and music you are doing can help, for it acts as a sort of *śravaṇa* and *manana*, even, if the feeling roused is intense, a sort of natural *nididhyāsana*. Psychic preparation, clearing out of the grosser forms of mental and vital ego, opening mind and heart to the Guru and many other things help greatly — it is not perfection or a complete freedom from the dualities or ego that is the indispensable preliminary, but preparedness, a fineness of the inner being which makes spiritual responses and receiving possible.

There is no reason therefore to take as gospel truth these demands which may have been right for Krishnaprem on the way he has trod, but cannot be imposed on all. There is no ground for despondency on that ground — the law of the spirit is not so exacting and inexorable.

Purification and Consecration

What Krishnaprem writes (I have not read it yet) is perfectly true that purification of the heart is necessary before there can be the spiritual attainment. All ways of spiritual seeking are agreed on that. Purification and consecration are two great necessities of sadhana. It is not a fact that one must be pure in heart before one can have *any* Yogic experience at all, but those who have experiences before purification is done run a great risk. It is much better to have the heart pure first, for then the way becomes safe. Nor can the Divine dwell in one's consciousness, if that consciousness is obscure with impurity. It is for the same reason that I advocate the psychic change of the nature first — for that means the purification of the heart, the turning of it wholly to the Divine, the subjection of the mind, of the vital passions, desires, demands, of the physical instincts to the control of the inner being, the soul. What Krishnaprem calls intuitions I would describe as psychic intimations or, as some experience it, the voice of the soul showing the outer members what is the true thing to be done. Always when the soul is in front, one gets the right guidance from within what is to be done, what avoided, what is the wrong thing or the true thing in thought, feeling, action. But this inner intimation emerges in proportion as the consciousness grows more and more pure.

I never intended that X should stay here; he came for darshan and sat down here without a “by your leave”. I allowed him to remain for a while to see if he got any profit out of it; afterwards came his repeated illness and he somehow stuck on till now. What I meant by some concrete method was things like repetition of a mantra, pranayama, asana etc. He has been doing these things even here or some of them at least; it is the only thing he really understands (or misunderstands?); but purification of the heart he has not been capable of doing. What I mean by subtle methods is psychological, non-mechanical processes — e.g. concentration in the heart, surrender, self-purification, working out by inner means the change of the consciousness. This does not mean that there is no outer change, — the outer change is necessary but as a part of the inner change. If there is impurity and insincerity within, the outer change will not be effective; but if there is a sincere inner working, the outer change will help it and accelerate the process. What use is X's eating less except for his body's health? But if a man seeks to restrain and get rid of his greed for food or attachment, (not by starvation, though), then he is doing something useful to his sadhana.

Y's case is different. His main stumbling block was ambition, pride, vanity, the desire to be a big Yogi with occult powers. To try to bring down occult powers into an unpurified mind, heart and body — well, you can do it if you want to dance on the edge of a precipice. Or you can do it if your aim is not to be spiritual but to be an occultist, for then you can follow the necessary methods and get the help of the occult powers. But the occult spiritual forces and masteries can be called down or come down without calling only if that is quite secondary to the true thing, the

seeking for the Divine, and if it is part of the Divine plan in you. Occult powers can only be for the spiritual man an instrumentation of the Divine Power that uses him, they cannot be the aim or an aim of his sadhana. I don't know who started *Y* on this false path or whether he hit on it himself; many people here have a habit of doing Yoga according to their own ideas without caring for the guidance of the Guru — from whom however they expect an entire protection and success in sadhana even if they prance or gambol into the wrongest paths possible.

Of course, renunciation of sex is indispensable for the purification you seek, — the heart must be pure and consecrated to the Divine. There must be no turn left that side. As for food, well, that is not so much a purification of the heart as of the vital in the physical, but it is of course very helpful to get control there. The purification of the heart is the central necessity, but a purification of the mind, vital and physical is also called for. But the most important thing for purification of the heart is an absolute sincerity. No pretence with oneself, no concealment from the Divine or oneself or the Guru, a straight look at one's nature and one's movements, a straight will to make them straight. It does not so much matter if it takes time; one must be prepared to make it one's whole life-task to seek the Divine. Purifying the heart means after all a pretty considerable achievement and it is no use getting despondent, despairful etc. because one finds things in oneself that still need to be changed. If one keeps the true will and true attitude, then the intuitions or intimations from within will begin to grow, become clear, precise, unmistakable and the strength to follow them will grow also. And then before even you are satisfied with yourself, the Divine will be satisfied with you and begin to withdraw the veil by which he protects himself and his seeker against a premature and perilous grasping of the greatest thing to which humanity can aspire.

Purification and Transformation

Transformation is made possible by purification.

*

If you remain in a fully conscious state, the clearing of the outer nature ought not to be difficult — afterwards the positive work of its transformation into a perfect instrument can be undertaken.

Conditions for the Coming of Experience

If you make your mind quiet, the experience will come. If you cannot make your mind quiet, work and pray and wait. Those who are able to open to the Divine receive him — but also to those who can wait for the Divine, the Divine comes.

*

If one feels [*the Mother's Force working while in a state of quietness*] it is all right — but it does not always happen. The quietness, silence or peace is a basis for the extension of consciousness, the coming of higher experiences or realisations etc. In what way or order they come differs according to the individual nature.

*

Visions and experiences will come; but the most important thing is to get in the peace, Ananda, confidence and establish it. When that is fixed, afterwards the consciousness can open to the working of the Mother's Force — its coming down into the body and its working will bring all the experience and change that is needed.

*

To fix the calm and strength is the main thing now — more important than fresh experiences; these will come fast enough if the calm and strength become durable, are made the habit and stuff of the consciousness.

*

As for sadhana what is necessary is to arrive at a certain quiet of the inner mind which makes meditation fruitful or a quietude of the heart which creates the psychic opening. It is only by regular concentration, constant aspiration and a will to purify the mind and heart of the things that disquiet and agitate them that this can be done. When a certain basis has been established in these two centres the experiences come of themselves. Many, no doubt, get some kind of experiences such as visions etc. before the basis is well laid by a sort of mental or vital aptitude for these things, but such experiences do not of themselves lead to transformation or realisation — it is by the quietude of the mind and the psychic opening that these greater things can come.

*

Experience in the sadhana is bound to begin with the mental plane, — all that is necessary is that the experience should be sound and genuine. The pressure of understanding and will in the mind and the Godward emotional urge in the heart are the two first agents of Yoga, and peace, purity and calm (with a lulling of the lower unrest) are precisely the first basis that has to be laid; to get that is much more important in the beginning than to get a glimpse of the supraphysical worlds or to have visions, voices and powers. Purification and calm are the first needs in the Yoga. One may have a great wealth of experiences of that kind (worlds, visions, voices etc.) without them, but these experiences occurring in an unpurified and troubled consciousness

are usually full of disorder and mixture.

At first the peace and calm are not continuous, they come and go, and it usually takes a long time to get them settled in the nature. It is better therefore to avoid impatience and to go on steadily with what is being done. If you wish to have something beyond the peace and calm, let it be the full opening of the inner being and the consciousness of the Divine Power working in you. Aspire for that sincerely and with a great intensity but without impatience and it will come.

*

It is necessary to lay stress on three things — (1) an entire quietness and calm of the mind and the whole being, (2) a continuance of the movement of purification so that the psychic being (the soul) may govern the whole nature, (3) the maintenance in all conditions and through all experiences of the attitude of adoration and bhakti for the Mother. These are the conditions in which one can grow through all experiences with security and have the right development of the complete realisation without disturbance to the system or being carried away by the intensity of the experiences. Calm, psychic purity, bhakti and spiritual humility before the Divine are the three conditions.

*

The special experiences you are having are glimpses of what is to be and what is growing and preparing and are helping to make the consciousness ready for it. It is not therefore surprising that they change and are replaced by others — that is what usually happens; for it is not these forms that are to be perpetuated, but the essence of the thing which they are bringing. Thus the one thing that has to grow most now is the silence, the quietude, the peace, the free emptiness into which experiences can come, the sense of coolness and release. When that is in possession of the consciousness fully, then something else will come into it which is also essential to the true consciousness and fix itself — it proceeds usually like that. There is nothing strange therefore in the special forms of experience ceasing and being followed by others after you have written about or brought them to the Mother. When the more permanent forms of realisation begin to come, it will no longer be like that.

* * *

Chapter Five: Suggestions for Dealing with Experiences

Letting the Experiences Develop Naturally

It is better to let the experiences develop naturally. It is not necessary, when they come freely, to determine with the mind which is to be remembered or sought after.

*

An experience should be allowed its full time to develop or have its full effect. It should not be interrupted except in case of necessity or, of course, if it is not a good experience.

*

You have to watch and see how they [*experiences*] develop. For the most part they carry their own meaning and if you go on observing them with a silent and vigilant mind you will understand more than if you were in a constant turmoil of thought about them.

*

When an experience begins, you should not interfere with it by either questioning or by disturbing movements.

Thinking about Experiences

To think and question about an experience when it is happening is the wrong thing to do; it stops it or diminishes it. Let the experience have its full play — if it is something like this “new life force” or peace or Force or anything else helpful. When it is over, you can think about it — not while it is proceeding. For these experiences are spiritual and not mental and the mind has to be quiet and not interfere.

*

During the experience the mind should be quiet. After the experience is over it can be active. If it is active while it is there, the experience may stop altogether.

*

It was not an imagination, but an experience. When such an experience occurs, the attempt to take hold of it mentally and continue it may on the contrary interrupt it. It is best to let it continue of itself; if it ceases, it is likely to recur.

*

There are two centres or parts of the consciousness — one is a witness, *sākṣī*, and observes, the other consciousness is active and it is this active consciousness that you felt going down deep into the vital being. If your mind had not become active, you would have known where it went and what it went there to experience or do. When there is an experience, you should not begin to think about it, for that is of no use at all and it only stops the experience — you should remain silent, observe and let it go on to its end.

*

There is something in you that does want to stick to the habit of mentalising about everything. So long as you were not having real experiences, it did not matter. But once real experiences begin you have to learn to approach them in the right way.

Observing Experiences without Attachment

At a certain stage of the sadhana, in the beginning (or near it) of the more intense experiences, it sometimes happens that there is the intense realisation of some aspect of the Divine, a sort of communion with it, and that is seen everywhere and all as that. It is a transitory phase and afterwards one gets the larger experience of the Divine in all its aspects and beyond all aspects. Throughout the experience there should be one part of the being that observes and understands — for sometimes ignorant sadhaks are carried away by their experience and stop short there or fall into extravagance. It must be taken as an experience through which you are passing.

Observing Experiences without Fear or Alarm

It is always dangerous to allow fear to come in like that and associate itself with experiences in the sadhana. There is nothing in the experiences themselves as you describe them that are at all alarming. A burning in the head or a creeping or ticklish sensation or a sense of something moving and working in the head has often been felt by many when there was an opening and the Force was working there. The other things also are in themselves usual enough, the sense of something separate from oneself and the opening and connection made between the head and the centre

above. But where the anomaly comes in is that with the connection comes the fear and nervous physical upsetting. So long as there is fear it is no use going on with these experiences — you have to stop and get back to the normal consciousness. Besides that, as I have already said, you must realise what it is in you that has come across and created this upsetting. It is not the descent and the experiences, for many have had them or similar things without being any the worse. It is something in you, probably in your lower vital and physical, that does not want the Higher Consciousness because it will have to change and it has no intention of changing. When this pressure acts, it gets at once a fear and shakes the physical mind and system by its fear. You will have then to get rid of this — till then it will not be safe for you to go farther.

*

These experiences are symbolic in their character, so there is no reason to be horrified by the green waters even if you did drown in a well in the last life. All such experiences should be observed quietly without alarm or depression or other such feelings. One can look at them and try to see or feel their meaning, but too active a speculation in the mind rather hinders than helps the seeing.

If you sink down into an unopened part and open it to the light or empty and clear it, that is a quite salutary and necessary operation and there is no reason for alarm. As for self-preservation, one does not drown in these inner wells — it is only a bath or a plunge. And if it happens to be the well of the psychic, nothing more salutary than to plunge into it.

Speaking about Experiences

The usual rule given by Yogis is that one should not speak of one's experience to others except of course the Guru while the sadhana is going on because it wastes the experience, there is what they call *kṣaya* of the tapasya. It is only long past experiences that they speak of and even that not too freely.

*

The Light left you because you spoke of it to someone who was not an *adhikārī*. It is safest not to speak of these experiences except to a guru or to one who can help you. The passing away of an experience as soon as it is spoken of is a frequent happening and for that reason many Yogis make it a rule never to speak of what happens within them unless it is a thing of the past or a settled realisation that nothing can take away. A settled permanent realisation abides, but these were rather things that come to make

possible an opening in the consciousness to something more complete — to prepare it for realisation.

*

I thought it was understood that what I wrote to you about persons was private. Experiences one's own or others' if one comes to know of them, should not be talked about or made a matter of gossip. It is only if there can be some spiritual profit to others and even then if they are experiences of the past that one can speak of them. Otherwise it becomes like news of Abyssinia or Spain, something common and trivial for the vital mass-mind to chew or gobble.

*

To show what is written about experiences or to speak about one's experiences to others is always risky. They are much better kept to oneself.

*

I rather doubt whether it should be done.² There is a privacy about experiences which stands in the way of their being dealt with like that, at least until the sadhak has got into siddhi. They can be spoken of to a few, if one wishes, but to make public like that in a general way, even without names, is a little difficult. People besides might begin to speculate on these experiences, gossip and ask questions. What might be useful is some experiences with explanation, if the answer gives one, which would make clear certain sides of the sadhana. But they would have to be carefully chosen.

*

General knowledge is another matter, it is intellectual and the intellect gains by the intellectual activity of teaching. Also if in Yoga it were only a matter of imparting intellectually one's mental knowledge of the subject, that rule³ would perhaps hold; but this mental aspect is only a small part of Yoga. There is something more complex which forms the bigger part of it. In teaching Yoga to another one becomes to some extent a master with disciples. The Yogis have always said that one who takes disciples, takes upon himself the difficulties of his disciples as well as one's own — that is why it is recommended not to take disciples unless and until one is siddha and even then

2. *The correspondent wished to compile a "Journal of Experiences" containing the letters of sadhaks who had written about their experiences to Sri Aurobindo and he had commented on them. This collection of letters would be kept in the Ashram library for sadhaks to read. — Ed.*

3. *The rule that one understands something better by teaching it. — Ed.*

only if one receives the Divine authority to do it — what Ramakrishna called getting the *cāprās*. Secondly, there is the danger of egoism — when one is free from that, then the objection no longer holds. There is a separate question and that is the telling of one's own experiences to others. That too is very much discouraged by most Yogis — they say it is harmful to the sadhana. I have certainly seen and heard of any number of instances in which people were having a flow of experiences and, when they told it, the flow was lost — so there must be something in this objection. I suppose however it ceases to apply after one has reached a certain long-established stability in the experience, that is to say, when the experience amounts to a definite and permanent realisation, something finally and irrevocably added to the consciousness. I notice that those who keep their experiences to themselves and do not put themselves out on others seem to have a more steady sadhana than others, but I don't know whether it is an invariable rule. It would probably not apply any longer after a certain stage of realisation.

*

It is true that experiences often disappear when spoken or written about to others. But that does not always happen, nor does it happen to everybody.

*

It is not good to talk too much to others about the sadhana and its experiences. There can be exceptions to the rule, but that depends on the person and circumstances.

*

If you want to keep the joy, it will be wise not to speak of it to others. Things spoken about get wings and try to escape.

The Difficulty of Keeping Experiences

The rush of the experience at the beginning is often very powerful, so powerful that the resisting elements remain quiescent — afterwards they rise up. The experience has then to be brought down and settled in these parts also.

*

Yes, that is the truth of the working. At first what has to be established comes with difficulty and is felt as if abnormal, an experience that one loses easily — afterwards it comes of itself, but does not yet stay; finally it becomes a frequent and intimate state of the being and makes itself constant and normal. On the other hand all the confusions and errors once habitual to the nature are pushed out; at first they return frequently, but afterwards they in their turn become abnormal and foreign to the nature and lose frequency and finally disappear.

*

One can speak of a condition as coming freely and spontaneously when it comes of itself or as soon as it is remembered after an interruption. One can speak of it as coming at will, when it comes back at a slight pressure of the will and nothing more is necessary. Yours comes by an effort of the will which has to be sustained and is kept at the price of a constant vigilance. But this effort and vigilance are quite the right thing and must be done until the condition either becomes stable or comes automatically or at will, as described above. This is not pulling, so you need not hesitate to go on with it fully. It is the necessary tapasya.

What prevents it from remaining is the natural lapse to a lower consciousness which comes either from the mind's or vital's inclination to indulge in accustomed occupations or by sleep or by losing oneself in some outer action such as talking — because these things are associated with the ordinary mental consciousness and still need it to be done. At a later stage it will be possible to do these things with the surface mind only while the new consciousness remains intact and is either found there immediately as soon as the surface occupation ceases or else remains even during the occupation upholding the surface action or enveloping it as a small movement in itself.

*

All that you have written is quite correct; but the smallness is a general characteristic of the human instrument before it has the spiritual change. When the quietude comes, then the wideness also begins to come. The state you feel in which things go right, is the psychic and spiritual condition of the being; it is true that at first it is there only at times, but that is usual in the sadhana. All new states and realisations come like that at first; they are there for a short time, then seem to cease and other things come up from below and cover and hide the new condition. This is because of the habit of the past nature. But the true condition goes on returning till it and not the old things establishes itself as the habit and rule of a new nature.

The inward condition and its new outlook on things without the eagerness of the old consciousness in work is simply a passage through which you are going

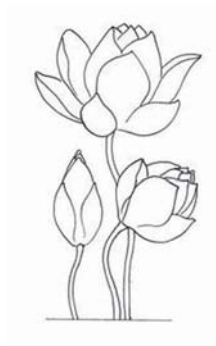
towards the new nature in which you will remain unmoved and undisturbed by things, but with a new and freer power of action which comes from within and from above.

*

It is more difficult at this stage for the experiences of Ananda (this felicity seems from your description to be an intense psychic Ananda) to be kept permanently than for peace to remain abidingly. The difficulty of keeping up these states in work or reading is more a matter of habit than anything else, because the mind is accustomed to absorb in the reading or work and forget all else for the time being. But once one gets the right poise and can keep in the inner being during work, that difficulty disappears.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Letters on Yoga – III, CWSA, Vol. 30, pp. 1-54)



“O MARVELLOUS UNITY, I DISAPPEAR IN THEE”

May 12, 1914

MORE and more it seems to me that we are in one of those periods of activity in which the fruit of past efforts becomes apparent, — a period in which we act according to Thy law in the measure in which it is the sovereign controller of our being, without having even the leisure to become conscious of the law.

This morning passing by a rapid experience from depth to depth, I was able, once again, as always, to identify my consciousness with Thine and to live no longer in aught but Thee; — indeed, it was Thou alone that wast living, but immediately Thy will pulled my consciousness towards the exterior, towards the work to be done, and Thou saidst to me, “Be the instrument of which I have need.” And is not this the last renunciation, to renounce identification with Thee, to renounce the sweet and pure joy of no longer distinguishing between Thee and me, the joy of knowing at each moment, not only with the intellect but by an integral experience, that Thou art the unique Reality and that all the rest is but appearance and illusion. That the exterior being should be the docile instrument which does not even need to be conscious of the will which moves it, is not doubtful; but why must I be almost entirely identified with the instrument and why should not the “I” be entirely merged in Thee and live Thy full and absolute consciousness?

I ask, but I am not anxious about it. I know that all is according to Thy will, and with a pure adoration I trust myself joyously to Thy will. I shall be what Thou wouldst have me be, O Lord, conscient or inconscient, a simple instrument as is the body or a supreme knowledge as art Thou. O the sweet and peaceful joy when one can say “All is good” and feel Thee at work in the world through all the elements which lend themselves to that transmission.

Thou art the sovereign Master of all, Thou art the Inaccessible, the Unknowable, the eternal and sublime Reality.

O marvellous Unity, I disappear in Thee.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 139-40)

“THE HIERARCHY OF BEING” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Do you think a special key is necessary to explain this poem or does it possess a sufficiently intelligible suggestiveness as a whole as well as in each part to give an intuitive sense of coherent meaning? I am anxious to know with what success it interprets

THE HIERARCHY OF BEING

Abysmal shadow of the summit-soul —
Self-blinding grope toward the Sorrowless —
Trance-core of labyrinthine outwardness —
Visage of gloom with flowering aureole.

Streak on gold streak wounding the illusive night —
Miraculous monarchy of eagled gaze —
Eternal truth's time-measuring sun-blaze —
Lonely omnipotence locked in self-light.

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

I can hardly say — it is quite clear to me, but I don't know what would happen to the ordinary reader. It is a fine poem, the last stanza remarkable.

About “monarchy” and “monarchies”. The singular is greater than the plural — in this case.

3 March 1934

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of January 2015)

Chapter: XL

The Empire Strikes (1)

To those who argued in 1908 that a few bombs would not drive away the British, we can do no better than quote the very effective reply given by Barindra Ghose himself — the leader of those who manufactured the first bomb in Bengal: “Your sermon is lost labour. We did not mean or expect to liberate our country by killing a few Englishmen. We wanted to show people how to dare and die.”

Few would deny that this object was more than fulfilled. The discovery of the activities of the Maniktola group of revolutionaries led by Barindra Ghose gave an impetus to the latent mentality of the Indians such as nothing else could. It gave rise to the fearless spirit of defiance and resistance against the dread of British power and prestige, which had formed the foundation of all subsequent revolutionary activities including the non-violent *Satyagraha* of Mahatma Gandhi.

R. C. Majumdar¹

WE have already seen the impression the British Administration had formed of Sri Aurobindo from the letter written by E. A. Gait, Chief Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, to the Home Secretary, Govt. of India. Based on the reports the Administration received from its intelligence agencies and various other sources in India and abroad, the opinion it formed was nothing surprising; what should surprise us is the place Sri Aurobindo had come to occupy in the imagination of the patriotic people in India and elsewhere, in spite of his total disinclination to become an icon. For example, the police invade the office of the Anushilan Samiti, Dacca, and find “in the verandah of the upper storey, a mounted and framed picture of Arabaido Ghose” as the C.I.D. report states.² Even for the Indians in far Paris it was Sri Aurobindo who was believed to be the greatest leader of the Extremists, recounts Hemchandra Kanungo who visited that city and who was grossly unfriendly towards Sri Aurobindo on account of his dislike of Barindra Kumar.³ How much the youths of the time trusted Sri Aurobindo becomes evident in a casual statement made much later by Lala Hardayal (1884-1939), the famous revolutionary leader of Punjab in the early 20th century:

“If we could get independence through *Charkha*”, wrote Hardayal, “Aurobindo and Tilak would have taken to it.”⁴

It seems that, though inexplicable to our reasoning, the spirit Sri Aurobindo represented had become a dynamic force and his name or picture a symbol inspiring an urge for freedom in countless hearts as well as terror in the minds of the ruling class.

So, the inevitable was happening: simultaneously with the raid on Muraripukur Gardens, the Navashakti building on Grey Street had come under seige. Here is a barely known but a first-hand account of the event narrated by Sri Aurobindo’s sister, Sarojini Devi, which she read out at the annual conference of the West Bengal Janakalyan Sangha, at the insistent request of the organisers. Translated from the Bengali, it reads (words within brackets are the present author’s):

We had been at the new residence of Sri Aurobindo on 48 Grey Street for no more than three or four days when at the last hour of the night (dawn of the 2nd of May, 1908), at 4 a.m., somebody was heard planting heavy blows on the gate. Our younger aunty, Lajjawati Basu, woke me up and said, “Someone seems to be calling.” I woke up our servant and asked him to find out. The moment he opened the gate a battalion of police desperately barged into the compound and ran helter-skelter. Then groups of them entered the inner courtyard and rushed upstairs and covered the whole place.

“Call Auro,” Aunty asked me. I went into his room and, when he responded to my repeated calls, told him, “The entire house is filled with police.” He heard and sat up on his bed and remained quiet. I turned to go to my room and saw a number of policemen on the roof and also saw standing behind me a number of well-armed Sahib Sergeants and native policemen. One gentlemanly-dressed police officer, a pistol hanging from his waist and another pistol pointed at me, stared at me. He lowered his pistol when his eyes met mine. I heard later that he was the Magistrate, Alipore. I wonder if he suspected me of being a violent revolutionary with a bomb on my person.

They had made the native guards stand before the windows of the two rooms, guns in hands. The police, after searching Sri Aurobindo’s room, stood in front of our room along with him. He asked me to open the doors of our room. Aunty, my sister-in-law (Sri Aurobindo’s wife, Mrinalini Devi) and I were in that room. Opening the door I saw Sri Aurobindo standing handcuffed. While in that condition he handed over a guinea (a gold coin more or less equivalent to a pound) to me. Then I surveyed the policemen. The one whom I looked at was Vinod Gupta, the Police Inspector. When Brother entered the room I asked Vinod Gupta what we should do after they take him away. He advised me to inform Uncle Krishna Kumar Mitra and Shyamsundar Babu.

From the roofs of the neighbourhood house people enquired of me why was the house being searched. "I do not know," was my answer. They asked me if they could be of any help. I requested them to inform Krishna Kumar Mitra and Shyamsundar Babu. A boy cycled down to inform the two. Uncle arrived along with the Honourable Bhupendranath Basu. By then the police was about to lead away the arrested persons — Sri Aurobindo along with Abinash Bhattacharya and Sailendranath Basu who were residing with us.⁵

Upendrachandra Bhattacharya, the younger brother of Abinash Bhattacharya, who was on his way to meet his brother, alighted from the train at Sealdah Railway Station. He was then in his mid-teens. He has left a vivid account of the situation in his reminiscences in Bengali:

Reaching the turn of Harrison Road I saw a number of policemen standing there and crowds along both the sides of the road. Travelling by a tram car up to College Street I saw the situation to be the same: congeries of policemen on one side of the road and a large crowd on the other side. If this much stretch of road had so much police presence, I could imagine the terror they must have caused to the city. I was left in no doubt as to what could have happened to my brother and others. Reciting the name of Mother Durga I got into another tram car heading for Shyam Bazar and got down on Grey Street.

Anger was writ large on the face of the large crowd there. The policemen stood scattered among them or stood in groups. I paid no heed to the situation around me and walked briskly towards the Navashakti office. Arriving there I saw that Sri Aurobindo, my brother and Sailen-da, handcuffed and rope around their waists, were being led into a second class horse-drawn carriage, the notorious Police officer Cregan standing near it in an arrogant pose. Beside him stood the famous public leader and celebrated Attorney Bhupen Basu who vehemently protested against this treatment of the arrested ones. The people around too raised their agitated voice on that issue. . . . Overwhelmed by anger, I felt like pouncing upon Cregan, ready to sacrifice my own life. But just then my eyes fell on my brother. He signed to me to keep away from them. I stood in silence and witnessed that heart-rending scene. I keenly observed Sri Aurobindo. While the people were excited beyond limit surveying his condition, he sat absolutely aloof, calm and quiet. His meditative eyes were as if wandering in some unknown sphere looking for light.⁶

We reproduce here an extract from Sri Aurobindo's own narration of the event from his *Kara Kahini* (originally in Bengali) or *Tales of Prison Life*, though it is widely read:



Grey Street House — where Sri Aurobindo was arrested

It was Friday night. I was asleep, my mind free from anxiety. At about five early in the morning my sister rushed into my room looking scared and called me by name. I woke up. The next moment the small room became crowded with armed policemen: Superintendent Cregan, Clark Sahib of the 24 Parganas, the charming and delightful figure of our well-known Shriman Vinod Kumar Gupta as well as some Inspectors, Red-turbans, Detectives and witnesses for the search. Pistols in hands they came rushing with heroic valour as if they had come with guns and cannon in order to capture a well-protected fort. I heard that a white-skinned hero had pointed a pistol at my sister's breast, though I had not seen it. As I sat on my bed, still half-asleep, Cregan asked me, "Who is Aurobindo Ghose; is it you?" I answered, "Yes, I am Aurobindo Ghose." At once he asked a policeman to place me under arrest. Thereafter we two had a brief but heated exchange because of an extremely uncivilised utterance by Cregan. I asked for the search warrant, read it and put my signature on it. When I saw the mention of bomb in the warrant I understood that this incursion by the police force was linked with the Muzaffarpur killing. What I did not understand was why should they arrest me before they had found any bomb or explosive material and without a body warrant. But I did not raise any objection, for that would be futile. Soon after that, at Cregan's order, I was handcuffed and a string of rope was tied around my waist. A Hindustani constable stood behind me with the end of the rope in his clutch. During this time they brought upstairs Srijut Abinash Bhattacharya and Srijut Sailendra Basu, handcuffed and tied with rope at the waist. It was after half an hour — I do not know at whose instance — they removed the handcuff and the rope. Cregan's words and conduct suggested as if he had entered the den of violent beasts, that uneducated and aggressive law-breakers that we were, it was not necessary to talk or behave with us politely. But the Sahib had grown a bit soft after the quarrel. Vinod Babu tried to tell him something about me. Thereafter Cregan asked me, "Is it true that you had passed B.A.? How come you sleep in such a room without a bed on the floor? Is it not shameful for a man like you to live in this fashion?" I told him, "I am poor; I live like a poor man." The Sahib burst forth, "Is it because of your desire to become a rich man that you had worked out all this?" I thought that it would be impossible to make this dumb skull of a Briton understand the value of patriotism, sacrifice and the discipline of austerity, and I did not try it.⁷

The *Tales of Prison Life* gives us the sequence of events that followed. Of the two gentlemen picked up from the public to serve as witnesses one was unwilling and the other seemed much too willing. Sri Aurobindo was entertained to several amusing scenes: a clump of earth from Dakshineswar lying in a card-board box plunged Mr. Clark into a Hamlet-like situation — to probe or not to probe into it — for it could be "a terribly powerful explosive"! They decided to carry a heavy iron

safe belonging to the *Navashakti* since it refused to reveal its interior however they tried. A quietly resting bicycle too was “gladly” carried away because it bore a Railway label bearing the word Kustia for, that being a place where someone had “shot a sahib”, who knew if that innocuous-looking thing would not prove to be an open sesame for the shooting mystery! Vinod Gupta seemed to fall short of exclaiming ‘Eureka’ at any scrap of paper or a letter falling into his hand as he flitted around or marched up and down the building.

They came to the ground floor where Cregan sipped tea. Sri Aurobindo had his cup of cocoa and toast, obviously while still handcuffed. As if that was not torture enough, Cregan inflicted on him his political philosophy, an intellectual torture the fellow’s victim had to “suffer coolly”.

It was eleven-thirty by the time the operation ended and all of them came out into the open.

Later Sri Aurobindo recollected that it was at the remonstrance of Bhupendranath Bose that the police removed the rope and the handcuffs from their arrestees.⁸ Of course the first celebrity to reach the spot was evidently his maternal uncle, Krishnakumar Mitra. He must have protested against Cregan’s conduct to which the police could have remained unresponsive, for he was known to be a sympathiser of the Nationalists. He did not lose time in fetching Bhupendranath Basu⁹ whose exhortation made all the difference because he was an influential Moderate leader.

Bhupendranath Bose offered to stand security for Sri Aurobindo for the latter’s release on bail, but the police refused the offer just as they had turned down the solicitor Hirendranath Datta’s wish to be present as a witness during the search operation on behalf of the residents of the house.

The silent crowd that kept looking on burst into shouts of “Bande Mataram” as soon as the Police signalled the carriage to start.¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo’s *Kara Kahini* gives us the sequence of events that followed. After a stop-over at the local Police Station where the arrestees were given an opportunity for a bath and were provided with lunch under the courteous supervision of Vinod Gupta, they were led to the Police Headquarters at Lal Bazar and thereafter to Royd Street, another wing of the Station where a detective officer named Maulvi Sams-ul-Alam tried to befriend Sri Aurobindo, initiating a discussion on what he imagined to be his original interpretation of Hinduism and Islam. His amused listener chose to silently suffer the Maulvi’s sophisticated discourse until the latter broached his final thesis: a man of Sri Aurobindo’s stature cannot but confess his sins to the police of the holy British Empire. But when his strategy seemed to have failed, he descended to a stark mundane plane. Opening a page of his autobiography — needless to say still under making and in the form of a manuscript — and drawing his hapless listener’s attention to it, the “Mahatma” asserted that behind all “the moral and material prosperity of his life” lay a profound secret imparted to him by his sage father: One should never refrain from swallowing up the dish that was laid

out before one. This *Mahamantra* — the hymn sublime — was the basic wisdom he practised and that explained his striking success!

The piercing look Maulvi Sahib cast on me while making this statement gave me the sensation as if I was the dish laid out before him!

The Maulvi, of course, must have felt awfully disappointed that even such an allegory implying compassionate treatment (a ready dish!) from his mighty captors in exchange for a few confessional statements went in vain. (It was a pity that this detective-cum-preceptor did not last long enough to do justice to the striking prosperity he had achieved through his father's formula. One and half year later he was shot dead by a young man on the court veranda.)

By evening the “renowned” police officer Ramdayal Mukhopadhyay had appeared on the scene. Sri Aurobindo found him to be intelligent and enterprising, but too artificial and unnatural in his talk, demeanour and gesture, as if he were acting on a stage non-stop. According to a chronicler of the period, it was this gentleman who had falsely implicated some innocent labourers in the Narayangarh railway track explosion (See Chapter XXXVII in *Mother India*, November 2014) and secured their imprisonment and transportation and had been decorated with the title “Roy Bahadur”. Well, even after Barindra Kumar's confession proved the unfortunate labourers to be innocent and they were set free, Ramdayal was not deprived of that pompous tag.¹¹

Showering his words of kindness and sympathy on Sri Aurobindo Ramdayal exhorted the policemen around to provide these guests with good food and comfortable bed! But before long Sri Aurobindo and Shailendra were led to the Lal Bazar Police Station through a stormy weather and remanded in custody in a big room upstairs and were served with meagre tiffin for dinner.

Soon the Commissioner of Police, Halliday, accompanied by another Englishman, a sergeant, appeared before them. “Beware! Never let anybody else stay or talk with this man!” he shouted at the sergeant, pointing at Sri Aurobindo. Shailendra was at once shifted to another room and locked up.

“Are you not ashamed of being involved in this cowardly deed?” he demanded of his solitary prisoner.

“What right do you have to assume that I was involved?” answered the prisoner.

“It's not my assumption. I know everything!” asserted the Commissioner.

“Only you people know what you know or do not know. I fully deny my association in any manner with this killing,” answered Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo had to spend the entire next day, a Sunday, in that room. He could see some boys descending by a staircase and guessed that they were the ones arrested from Muraripukur Gardens. It was after a month that he was to know them personally. Here there was no facility for having a bath and the food served was

unpalatable. On Monday, however, he was treated to tea and bread, courtesy the sergeant. His lawyer's pleading for the prisoner to be supplied with food from home went unheeded; he was not even allowed to meet any lawyer.

He, along with Abinash and Shailendra, was led to the Commissioner on Monday. Since all the three had the experience of being arrested earlier, thanks to "the piety earned in previous lives", they refused to answer any question put to them by the officer. Next day they were produced before the Magistrate, Thornhill. It was during this time that he could meet a relative, of course in the presence of an English officer, and sent home the message that there was no cause for anxiety and that his innocence was bound to be established.

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

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VIDYAVATI KOKIL: THE LITTLE BIG SADHIKA (1914-1990)

ON the path of sadhana the Mother and Sri Aurobindo remain our enduring beacons. But on this journey of self-knowledge and self-development, a few fellow-travellers cross our path who are able to reignite the flame of aspiration in us in moments when it flags. These lives shine as abiding inspirations when we recall the way they lived this adventure of self-improvement. Vidyavati Kokil has been for me one of those matchless human beings whose life keeps reassuring me that this arduous yoga *is* doable against the greatest of odds. Since this is the centenary year of her birth, I would like to take this opportunity to remember her and express my gratitude for having been embraced in her gentle love.

Vidyavati was born on July 26 in 1914 in the small town of Moradabad founded by Shah Jahan on the banks of the Ramganga in Uttar Pradesh. Her childhood began during the ongoing battle for the independence of Mother India even as she lost her mother at the tender age of eight. She would accompany her father to political gatherings and there recite Sanskrit slokas, cry out slogans and charm people with her singing. She had such a sweet, melodious voice that her father nicknamed her 'kokil' and thus she came to be known as Vidyavati Kokil. Her participation in the freedom movement was fervent and she even went to jail once with Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit.

In a memoir she wrote, she noted:

Right from my childhood I had this dreadful stomach-ailment which haunted me. My father, therefore, was not keen on my getting married. But before my mother's insistence he was helpless. . . .

At the age of 16, I was married to a cultured, dignified Congressman. He supported and helped me in all my endeavours and it is here that literary creation imperceptibly slipped into my life.

Once married she went to live with her husband's family in Allahabad, the sacred confluence of Ganga and Yamuna. She was fortunate to have an understanding and kind husband, Trilokinath. And at her in-laws' she found the same revolutionary atmosphere as in her family home and it was here that the two streams of patriotism and poetic creation began to mingle.

During the Freedom movement she had not had any formal education but she had begun to learn English in the cultured, literary atmosphere of Allahabad. Vidyavati's involvement with the freedom struggle was intense; however, after India won independence, any kind of recognition was the last thing she sought.

I was never drawn to any political reward or position after India's liberation. I felt that behind the tapasya that had infused strength into the nation to recover her independence lay something invincibly great and I did not want to lose that. I did not want that unfinished new raga of fire and inner power, which had begun resonating in me to fade away and die . . . I became increasingly detached from without and kept digging deeper and deeper into my inner spaces and thoughts and feelings. And at the same time the flow of my literary expression gained more and more intensity and direction. Several of my anthologies were published and received awards and recognition from the state government.

As Vidyavati Kokil turned her attention inward, her poetry gained in depth of feeling and expression and this was widely acknowledged by the literary world of Hindi writing. She was invited to literary gatherings and her poetry was praised by writers and critics. Vidyavati Kokil believed that poetry was an emotion that simply welled up from within, free of any genre or style, and she often used to sing her poetic compositions, which added to their sweetness and simplicity. "How sweet, how meaningful, how suffused with inner experience!" exclaimed Dinkar, the renowned Hindi poet, after listening to her. Commenting on *Punarmilan*, an anthology of her poetry, the celebrated bard Sumitranandan Pant observed: "In her songs resonates the artlessness and sweetness of birdsong, the spontaneous exultation of the heart."

Despite this literary praise and recognition, Vidyavati Kokil lived in a strange state of restlessness. From the very beginning of her life she was beset by nagging questions: What is the real goal of human life? Where are we heading? Where is our true 'home'? She notes in her memoir:

For the lost, rudderless human being, reaching 'home' would mean the beginning of the search of that new sunlit path that will lead him to that state of consciousness where life is cleansed of all sorrow and pain. Isn't the search of that path the real purpose of this life? That state is not to be found in the beyond but here and now, hidden in the hustle-bustle of this very life. The key to that world is concealed in our heart's depths, the glimmer of that world's Light longs to shine through our eyes. Isn't the whole of humankind drawn by this Truth alone? Isn't the solution to all our difficulties to be found in This? Will we not turn our eyes towards that ultimate goal for which we came down to this earth?

These questions rang in my heart, first softly and not very distinctly, but then they would not allow me to live my life quietly, by day or by night. This quest first led me to wage the battle to liberate my motherland as no free thoughts could prosper in a chained country. And so as a result on the crest of this freedom movement, at the tender age of fourteen, an imprisoned stream within my being burst its banks and began to flow into poems and songs. In the large

gatherings of revolutionaries, my compositions went up like conches echoing in the air. From north to south, from east to west, in political and literary meetings, my heart sounded its yearning call through poems in an attempt to awaken an inner god but in vain. How was I to arouse him? I was at a loss.

Along with these insistent questions and yearnings, Vidyavati nurtured two living dreams. The first was a voice that kept repeating: *You will travel far from home to find your real home.* The second was: *A book written in English will come into your hands and it will finally answer the questions that have been haunting you.* These were very significant dreams for Vidyavati. Much before she had even heard of Pondicherry, she had resolved to realise her first dream. One day she announced to her husband that she would leave home within a year. With amazing understanding he did not protest or oppose her decision. Vidyavati could not make up her mind about where she was going to re-settle: at the Gandhi Ashram in Sabarmati or at the Vinoba Ashram in Wardha? Then some household responsibilities cropped up which needed her immediate attention and so more time elapsed. Then her husband fell seriously ill. Kokil-ji never neglected or ignored her domestic duties and she took on every challenge with grace and responsibility. When Trilokinath-ji had recovered, he himself suggested to her to go and spend some time at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. She wrote to the Mother for permission to come, which was granted. Her husband was happy to see her go to spend a fortnight at the Ashram as suggested by the Mother. Her coming to the Ashram in September of 1955 was to be the fulfilment of her first dream! In the meantime her second dream continued to haunt her. Reflecting on her two dreams, Vidyavati writes:

So suddenly one day my first dream of settling far away from home got realised! It was as if someone had held me by the hand and led me to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry! Once in that world, all my lofty longings were answered and all of a sudden my entire being experienced a state of unimaginable restfulness and ease.

*“Raat yun dil mein teyree khoee huee yaad ayee
Jaise veeraney mein chupke sey bahar aa jaaye
Jaise sahraan mein haule sey chaley baad-e-naseem
Jaise beemar ko bewaja quaraar aa jaaye.”* (Faiz Ahmed Faiz)

(“At night your lost memory stole into my heart;
As spring silently glides into the wilderness;
As in a wasting desert morning breeze begins to blow;
As in one sick beyond hope, hope begins to grow.”)

In this unbelievably rarefied air of Their Presence many recalcitrant inflexible difficulties of my nature began to dissolve and drop. One day in the vast treasure-trove of Sri Aurobindo's writings, I chanced upon *Savitri*, considered by many a learned seeker as the fifth or modern Veda. As I began swimming in this infinite ocean, I realised that this was the English book that would at last quench my obsessive thirst and I would find the answers to all my relentless questions and doubts about life. *Savitri* is a 24000-verse epic in English where every word is a mantra. I set off on its exploration with one-pointed determination. There was no way I could leave the Ashram now! I handed over all responsibility and duties towards my kith and kin to the Divine. Who could be a better caretaker than Him when He had given His consent?

In life it is often observed that as one approaches the Light, the attacks of the hostile forces also grow manifold. And so it was with Vidyavati Kokil. Death came knocking at her life's door.

When I first came to the Ashram I was very ill, but at that time the curse of old age had not caught up with me. Doctors had wanted to perform two emergency operations but I declined. Not because I was alone, not because I had lost the will to live, not even because I had no faith in allopathic cures. The real reason was that after coming here, far removed from the ordinary worldly life, I had the experience of a dimension of such timelessness that even in my state of terrible ill-health, the fragrance of immortality kept infusing me. That is why very respectfully and trustingly, I turned away from the ways of the ordinary world and informed the Mother about my decision regarding the doctors' advice. The Mother supported me in my courage and I gained in strength as I silently continued with my life. This was my first victory over death.

Her life found new meaning and direction in the Ashram. The fifteen-day sojourn that her husband had anticipated got extended more and more and soon it dawned on her that Pondicherry was indeed that long-sought 'home' she had been pining for.

Meanwhile, the composition of poetry continued along with occasional articles on literary and spiritual themes. She also translated many of Sri Aurobindo's English poems into Hindi, such as 'The Rose of God', 'The Blue Bird', 'The Dream Boat', and 'Trance', but her life's greatest work or tapasya was yet to unfold.

As Sumitranandan Pant observed:

Thanks to the inspirational purity of the Ashram, Vidyavati's songs touched a height where they were charged with a soul-stirring devotion and poignancy.

Of her discovery of *Savitri*, Vidyavati reminisces:

In those days nobody ‘taught’ *Savitri* to anybody. It was not an easy poem to navigate. After a lot of courage and persistence, I managed to persuade Purani-ji to take up this challenge for me. He had to leave for England to do some research on documents related to Sri Aurobindo’s life and would not return for another five-six months. I had no other option except to wait for his return. I kept urging my husband to allow me to extend my sojourn in the Ashram since I had resolved not to leave before I had finished my study of *Savitri*. I was blessed to have a most patient, understanding and generous man for husband. Purani-ji finally returned and after resting for ten days resumed his classes. Even these ten days seemed endless! We resumed from Canto five of the Book of Love where we had left off. This Book is like the heart of the epic: gentle, pulsating, poignant and delightful. From the very first day I felt a borderless sky opening before me, speaking to me, giving me indications and teaching me to fly. Absorbed in this, all else vanished from my attention; I had no other object of study, no other duties or responsibilities.

And in this way the study of *Savitri* continued for about ten years. When she had any difficulty she would turn to Purani-ji and when he was busy, to Rishabhchand-ji. Then a strong urge possessed her: to undertake the near-impossible, to translate Sri Aurobindo’s English masterpiece, *Savitri*, into Hindi.

This was when Death struck a second blow.

Utterly unmindful of my ignorance, of my meagre vocabulary and of my ineptitude in the literary skills, I embarked upon this endeavour when Death returned to strike me in the appalling form of oppressive insomnia. This blocked all my energies and impeded me from working to such an extent that one day I decided to jump into the sea. Continually the Mother poured her gracious blessing on my unworthy head and then one day I seized on Death’s mischief. All this arose from my stomach’s frailty. Then, with the mysterious force of my courage, once more I confronted it and succeeded in conquering the peril. This was my second victory over Death. I had suffered from this malady for twelve years.

She continued her translation with unflinching determination and redoubled energy as she knew that this was the fulfilment of her life’s second dream.

Through all these efforts I was totally changed and even while being part of this world, began living an altogether different life. . . . My poetic creativity and thought-patterns had completely changed. I had been used to paddling in

ponds until then, and now I suddenly found myself in a limitless ocean! My little boat dared to take the plunge into the awe-inspiring billows of *Savitri*! How could I not when I knew that this book was the fulfilment of that ancient second dream: the answer to all my unresolved doubts and questions about life? I had recognised it at once and its wondrous, symbolic poetry became my constant inspiration. Now there rose within me an uncontrollable desire to sing it in my native language, Hindi. Why should it remain only in English? I knew that translating it was an impossible challenge even for great pundits, but that did not dampen or dissuade my childlike mind.

Aware that the Mother had not authorised anyone until then to venture into translation of this work, Vidyavati began her endeavour with Book Five. She showed both Purani-ji and Rishabhchand-ji a sampling of her efforts and received encouragement to carry on. The translation-work continued, as did the skepticism of some of the Ashramites. When news reached the Mother, Vidyavati sent her all the work she had done and urged her to give a clear 'yes' or 'no' answer whether to continue the work. The Mother gave her consent to Vidyavati and the translation work now gained new momentum. However the task was not easy. On the one hand was the Master's difficult language and on the other the understanding of the deep layered meaning of the verses, assimilating it and then recreating it in another language, with another rhythm and music. It all seemed almost hopeless.

Piqued by my unstoppable activity, Death assaulted me a third time and this was its most grievous attack. This happened while I was in the middle of recording *Savitri* and had almost come to the end. Just one Canto remained when my tongue was struck. My speech was considerably affected and the recording had to be stopped. The motor nerves kept weakening day by day, year after year. Little by little, my speech, my eating and drinking, the movement of limbs, all petered out. Today Parkinson's has reached its most debilitating point, and I am quite incapacitated. I am unable even to explain to anybody about the kind of hardship I am stuck in due to this weakening of my motor nerves. It is for me to bear all alone.

Vidyavati's frail, diminutive body fought on valiantly. People wondered how she could carry on in that piteous condition.

How I have dragged on for four years — this nobody can explain. The doctors can only marvel in silence. They had been unanimous in giving up hope on me, saying this disease was incurable and I would last but a few days. In the state I was in, who could take that impossible responsibility for me? My eating and drinking as well as the use of my limbs started diminishing frighteningly.

I could not even swallow a spoon of water all by myself. My mouth would dry up, unable to swallow saliva, and breathing became an ordeal. My mouth had to be washed and cleaned all the time and food and water had to be administered to me with a syringe that was unavailable then in India and was graciously sent by a well-wisher from America. Although my family members in the North were eager to send all the help and assistance they could, it was difficult for any of them to come and live with me. My husband who was himself 85 then decided to come and be with me. But what could he do in such an arduous condition?

I came into contact with Kokil-ji thanks to my father. He was also a poet who expressed his deepest aspirations in Hindi poetry. I would sometimes go with him to visit Kokil-ji and sit quietly and listen to their spiritual and literary exchanges. As a young school-boy I used to listen to the stories of her life narrated ever so gently and selflessly. When I pressed her a little she would sing me a poem or two. Even on my youthful mind and heart they left a strong imprint because of their extraordinary sincerity of feeling and simplicity of expression. My admiration for her as a person grew with each visit. I used to call her my “little big sadhika”. I admired her deeply anchored faith, her unwavering dignity and strength; she never drew attention to her physical infirmities or frailties. Even in that state, she would insist on feeding me, thus giving me a taste of her simple, delicious, sattvic cooking. I was doubly grateful, for in a poet’s hand whatever she served turned into a matchless delicacy. And all this in an atmosphere of such lovely warmth and contained joy!

Once, in the mid eighties, I remember going to her just to sit in her presence and feel comforted. I was going through a personal crisis about leaving the Ashram at the time. Gripped with mental torture, I kept thinking that I might be turning my back on my spiritual destiny. She looked at me with exceeding tenderness and said in an extraordinarily modern perception of things: “What is this stupidity of dividing life into spiritual and unspiritual? That is the old ridiculous religious divide. Whatever you do, *beta*, with TOTAL sincerity and in absolute calm is your soul’s calling. Just follow that. That is being spiritual.” For a young man in the throes of a crucial dilemma, these words were like soothing balm. My eyes welled up with tears! How vast was her understanding of Their path! On another occasion when I was feeling somewhat confused about whether to keep working in Auropress in Auroville or to come back to the Ashram, she gave me this guidance: “Keep your focus and everything will be clear, just like with a camera! When things look a little fuzzy, it is because our focus is not right. Just hold on to that central loyalty to your soul’s calling, to the Mother, and everything will fall into place, and be just as it ought to be. Trust her completely.” What an illuminating reassurance this was for me.

Vidyavati Kokil continued to suffuse her life and her poetry with this incredibly invigorating energy even in her splendid solitude. But through all the vicissitudes

of her life, there was one person who stood by her: Trilokinath-ji. Her husband's unfaltering support, the constancy of his deep understanding was truly soul-stirring. He patiently waited and then went gently into the good night two years after her. On Trilokinath-ji's eightieth birthday, she had offered him the following poem as a token of her love and gratitude:

How can I call you but a husband?
 One who never laid a claim,
 Nor asked from me a service,
 In the vast generosity of your soul's sky
 Allowed my soul-bird to freely fly.

How can I call you just a father?
 One who nurtured me in youth,
 Protecting me throughout my life,
 Not a thing you asked for yourself,
 Kept giving forever in joy, unasked.

How can I call you companion mine?
 Who all companionship's joys renounced
 Embracing a life of solitude hard,
 From pleasures sensual turned away,
 In lonely pain kept your tears at bay.

You are a yogi splendid, pure,
 Meditation, japa you do not need,
 Of yoga's trappings you're exempt,
 Whose inner being is fully steeped
 In all simplicity at the Mother's Feet.

And there was gratitude also for a 'divinely sent angel' who came to her in her great need:

Was I to give up my body then? The Mother's love and Grace are incalculable however, and in an Ashram where every resident is absorbed in their own sadhana, I was blessed with the arrival of a human being into my life who dedicated herself entirely to my service! This divinely-sent angel had come to the Ashram to live the life of a seeker. And in that atmosphere of freedom that is so characteristic of the Ashram, she never faltered even for a moment from looking after me day and night.

And so I got back into my own intense sadhana on the path of this dreadful illness that I had received from the Divine. During these last four years of unbearable pain and discomfort how I managed to live life with cheer and

optimism — so much so that I even managed to get two of my books ready for publication — is something that cannot be gauged unless experienced through the Grace and protection of Sri Aurobindo. Knowing that science and medicine could neither understand the different parts and planes of the human being nor bring about a lasting harmony between them, I stayed away from these methods and relied as usual on Nature's ways. Swallowing medicines was something I never encouraged and so I resolved that the day I would be unable to take in any food, I would take that as a sign from the Divine and cease from living too. I look at the Mother and she merely smiles. Its significance is inscrutable.

In the introduction to the last book she prepared for publication *Sri Arvind-Aayaam*, Kokil-ji wrote:

This will be my last book. Parkinson's has reached its last stage. Man is so entangled and enslaved to his nature and habits that he cannot liberate himself from them. These knots of diseases and unnatural weaknesses are but a way of liberating us. All I can say is that this illness was for me a chance to peep over on the other side and that is why I was able to catch a glimpse of that other side. What I have not been able to achieve in this life I am busy preparing myself to do in the next one. As soon as my work is done, I will order the relentless lord of life, Death, to appear.

And thus on July 17 in 1990, Vidyavati's heroic struggle came to an end and her melodious voice which had given immortal wing to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's world for those who were conversant only with Hindi, fell silent. The rock-like faith, the undaunted conviction and inner determination behind the frail physical frame had at last attained its long-sought abode of rippleless, blissful rest. She had outfaced Death yet again.

I have set out today . . .
 Beckoned by a call, on a new Adventure-trail
 On promise of a New world, into a new Dawn I sail
 Past and present I have wiped away.

A whole new sight! A whole new world!
 Vast ocean of Peace where rioting waters whirled,
 And the future glowing golden before me unfurled.

Immortal stillness has filled all my being,
 A deathless Gaze, and the dead to Life spring!
 And God shines through in every worldly thing.

This Face once seen, all faces seem pale,
 One touch of this Knowledge, and past knowledge feels stale,
 Before this dawning Ray of Light, star-lamps dim and fail.
 I have set out today . . .
 Beckoned by a call, on a new Adventure-trail
 On promise of a New world, into a new Dawn I sail.

(*Bhavishya ki oar* [Towards the future]: excerpts in translation)

MAURICE SHUKLA

He who chooses the Infinite has been chosen by the Infinite. He has received the divine touch without which there is no awakening, no opening of the spirit; but once it is received, attainment is sure, whether conquered swiftly in the course of one human life or pursued patiently through many stadia of the cycle of existence in the manifested universe.

Nothing can be taught to the mind which is not already concealed as potential knowledge in the unfolding soul of the creature. So also all perfection of which the outer man is capable, is only a realising of the eternal perfection of the Spirit within him. We know the Divine and become the Divine, because we are That already in our secret nature. All teaching is a revealing, all becoming is an unfolding. Self-attainment is the secret; self-knowledge and an increasing consciousness are the means and the process.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 53-54)

ABRAHAM LINCOLN — NOBLE AND RESOLUTE

(Continued from the issue of January 2015)

10. Lincoln's leadership qualities

ON March 4, 1861, Abraham Lincoln delivered his inaugural address — earlier shown to several cabinet members for their comments. Ignoring advice that there was a risk to his life, the President-elect rode with President Buchanan in an open carriage to the Capitol. Troops were deployed all over for Lincoln's safety since there were rumours of an assassination plot against him. Tensions were high and it looked as if the country was at war. He reassured the Southerners that his policy towards them was one of forbearance and not force and contrary to their fears he would not endanger their property, peace, security and would do nothing to interfere with the institution of slavery where it lawfully existed. However, he underlined the prerequisite that the Union must be preserved at all costs. Whilst the tone was conciliatory Lincoln asserted that he would use his constitutional power to hold the property and places belonging to the government. He beseeched the Southern states to think about the consequences of their actions. But after the pleading, he made his stand amply clear: "secession is anarchy."¹ He concluded his speech in a firm yet conciliatory manner:

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of Civil War. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the Government, while I shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it."

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. . . .²

Lincoln took seriously his promises and oaths under the Constitution. He was now President of the United States and felt duty-bound to keep the States united in the face of insurrection and secession. Since the first day in office Lincoln barely had time to sleep and eat. His open-heartedness was such, that his doors were thrown open to the public. There were swarms of people, each with their own agenda,

1. See website: www.whitehousehistory.org

2. Website: www.bartleby.com

including politicians, office seekers and weeping mothers wanting their sons relieved from the army. Lincoln always kept his ear to the ground interacting with people to be aware of what they were thinking, to get the pulse of the citizens. He once told a correspondent of *The New York Times*, “You perhaps wonder what interest I can find in talking to a newspaper correspondent. But I am always seeking information, and you newspapermen are so often behind the scenes at the front I am frequently able to get ideas from you which no one else can give me.”³ At first he placed no limits on visitors, and they approached him relentlessly from dawn to dusk, making it impossible for him to fulfil his other duties. Thereafter his personal secretaries John G. Nicolay and John Hay worked out a system whereby he could meet the public and yet discharge his other functions. Still, to the dismay of his aides, if a visitor came at an odd or irregular hour, Lincoln would open the door and invite the person anyway. He was polite and attentive to almost everyone including the jobless and the frail. Some came in muddy boots and slightly dishevelled and some in their finest clothing but all were received graciously. He avoided hypocrisy and never lied or exclaimed, “I am delighted to see you” when he wasn’t delighted and usually greeted people with, “What can I do for you?” If the request was reasonable he would promise to do what he could; if he was eager to get rid of somebody he would crack a joke to amuse the visitor and escort him to the door. Being sensitive, he was careful not to hurt anyone’s sentiments and tried to give something to everybody, or else an interesting sentence or even a poem. Earlier the *New York Tribune* correspondent, Henry Villard observed that Lincoln listened patiently and “showed remarkable tact” with every caller, adapting to their individual characteristics or peculiarities. He never evaded a good question and gave appropriate replies. He had a remarkable ability to aptly use a humorous story to clarify or enforce a point. Humour helped him to heal wounded feelings or alleviate disappointments. Villard concluded: “He is the very embodiment of good temper and affability. They will all concede that he has a kind word, an encouraging smile, a humorous remark for nearly everyone that seeks his presence, and that but few, if any, emerge from his reception room without being strongly and favourably impressed with his general disposition.”⁴

The endless public demands took their toll and wore him out and on a rare instance he would get irritated. When a Senator warned him that he was wasting his energies and would exhaust himself, he replied, “They don’t want much, they get but little, and I must see them.”⁵ He did admit that each visitor took away a special piece of his vitality and even said, “Yes, it was bad enough in Springfield, but it was child’s play compared with this tussle here. I hardly have a chance to eat or sleep. I

3. Don Edward Fehrenbacher, Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 498.

4. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 280-81.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 334.

am fair game for everybody of that hungry lot.”⁶ To overcome his fatigue Lincoln would let his humour flow as he found this therapeutic. Occasionally he would go for a concert for he liked music of all kinds. The opera and theatre too relaxed him though he spent most evenings in the White House office burning the midnight oil. He also spent evenings with his family and then continued his work once they were asleep. Later he would read the Shakespearean tragedies or some poetry till sleep overtook him. His only regular source of relaxation was a daily carriage ride at four.

One of the major problems Lincoln faced was of assigning federal positions; a nerve-racking task of trying to balance opposing forces. People were seeking his patronage but he disliked office seekers calling them “vultures.” He wanted to placate all Republican groups and factions, reward his friends, be fair to everybody and yet put the best man in office. Indeed a tall order! Lincoln was circumspect about patronage, once instructing his aide John G. Nicolay to tell a potential ally that “my motto is ‘fairness to all’ — but commit me to nothing.”⁷ Before making important State appointments, Lincoln usually took the views of State delegations, Senators and Congressmen. Lincoln consulted his Cabinet, those who were in touch with their localities, besides taking views of various editors, lawyers and clergymen. On the odd instance a position was given to a friend but patronage involved a balancing act between personal debts and political reality. William Herndon wrote that when “a delegation of gentlemen who called to press the claims of one of his warm personal friends for an important office,” Mr. Lincoln refused because he “did not regard it as just to the public to pay the debts of personal friendship with offices that belonged to the people.”⁸

Lincoln’s attitude was more universal than individual; there was a strong ethical and empathetic element to his politics and policies. He was broad-minded, even admiring Democrats and a year before his own election declared, “All honour to Jefferson,” and at the same time reminded Democrats that Jefferson had also trembled for his country over the issue of slavery.⁹ Lincoln chose Montgomery Blair, Norman Judd and Gideon Welles, all one-time Democrats, for Cabinet posts. He not only had to keep the country together, but also manage the opposing groups in the Republican Party. “President Lincoln,” Judge David Davis later recalled, “swore in his soul he would act justly; he said he intended to appoint Democrats & Republicans alike.”¹⁰ Lincoln approved positions for several Illinois Democrats who had been strong opponents in previous years.

To the surprise of many, he unhesitatingly appointed all his major rivals during the race for the Republican nomination of President in 1860 — William H. Seward,

6. Don Edward Fehrenbacher, Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 457.

7. William O Stoddard, *Inside the White House in War Times*, p. 9.

8. William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon’s Life of Abraham Lincoln*, p. xxx.

9. Website: www.neh.gov (Lecture by Harold Holzer)

10. Website: www.mrlincolnandfriends.org (W. H. Herndon interview with D. Davis, September 20, 1866)

Salmon P. Chase and Edward Bates. Mr. Lincoln “was certainly a very poor hater,” recalled friend Leonard Swett. “He never judged men by his like, or dislike for them. If any given act was to be performed, he could understand that his enemy could do it just as well as any one. If a man had maligned him, or been guilty of personal ill-treatment and abuse, and was the fittest man for the place, he would put him in his Cabinet just as soon as he would his friend.”¹¹

A less secure man might have surrounded himself with personal supporters, but Lincoln insisted: “We needed the strongest men of the party in the Cabinet. We needed to hold our own people together. I had looked the party over and concluded these were the very strongest men. Then I had no right to deprive the country of their services.”¹² Further, every man Lincoln selected in his Cabinet was better known, better educated and more experienced in public life than him and they singly or collectively could have eclipsed him but for his profound and quiet self-confidence.

Extraordinarily able, these men were ambitious, hoping to manipulate the President or even at some later stage usurp his place. Lincoln’s foremost aim was to preserve the Union and he felt that these were the best men to fulfil that objective. He chose the very experienced William H. Seward — New York’s renowned Governor and Lincoln’s chief rival for the Republican Presidential nomination — for the prime post of Secretary of State. The multi-talented Seward was a veteran politician, extremely self-confident and a highly educated intellectual with a vast administrative experience far superior to Lincoln’s. Seward thought that Lincoln would make him a kind of prime minister and let him run the administration, at times taking it for granted that Lincoln would follow his advice. Seward was dismissive of Lincoln writing in his diary: “The man is not equal to the hour.” The only hope, he repeatedly wrote, lay in his influence with the President. In his first month in office he tried to undermine Lincoln by trying to dictate policy and strategy. That Seward might try to undermine the President did not deter Lincoln from choosing the best man for the job. Seward’s impertinence could have easily led to a dismissal but Lincoln showed exceptional maturity and magnanimity. Presidential aide John Nicolay later wrote, “had Mr. Lincoln been an envious or a resentful man, he could not have wished for a better occasion to put a rival under his feet.” Seward’s effrontery could easily have provoked a swift dismissal. Yet as happened so often, Lincoln showed an “unselfish magnanimity,” which was “the central marvel of the whole affair.”¹³ Seward came into office thinking he would actually be controlling Lincoln, but Lincoln was able to sit Seward down, remind him who was President and ultimately make him his close friend and confidant.

New York politician Chancey Depew noted, “No President ever had a Cabinet of which the members were so independent, had so large individual followings, and

11. *Ibid.*, (Leonard Swett’s letter to William H. Herndon, January 17, 1866).

12. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 319.

13. See *Ibid.*, pp. 341-42.

were so inharmonious”.¹⁴ While it was possible that the members of this most unusual cabinet in the history of the country would devour one another, Lincoln determined that “he must risk the dangers of faction to overcome the dangers of rebellion.”¹⁵ Behind Lincoln’s quiet exterior, was a supremely confident man of great integrity with a steely determination to achieve his goal of a united country. So the urbane Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner noticed. On his first visit to the new President, he expected to find a country bumpkin he would dominate. By the time he walked out the door, he realised he had himself been dominated. He confessed that he had never met anyone in his life so sure of his own intellectual superiority.¹⁶

Edward Bates, another rival who contested the race for the Republic nomination, called Lincoln an unexceptional man driven to extreme anti-slavery principles. Yet, Lincoln chose him because he was a Whig, a border Southerner, and a fine lawyer, thus filling all the requirements for one type of Cabinet post i.e. Attorney General. Bates himself acknowledged his gratitude when in his resignation — due to domestic reasons — in November 1864, he wrote, “In tendering the resignation of my office of Attorney-General of the United States (which I now do) I gladly seize the occasion to repeat the expression of my gratitude, not only for your good opinion which lead to my appointment, but also for your uniform and unvarying courtesy and kindness during the whole time in which we have been associated in the public service.”¹⁷

Lincoln selected Salmon P. Chase as Secretary of the Treasury, despite personal relations between them not being cordial. Chase never ceased to underestimate Lincoln and resented the fact that he lost the Presidency to a man he considered his inferior. But this did not pre-empt Lincoln from admiring Chase, once stating that, “Chase is about one and half times bigger than any other man that I ever knew.”¹⁸ When Chase finally gave up position in 1864, William Pitt Fessenden succeeded him as Secretary of the Treasury despite the fact that on one occasion as a Senator, he had an argument with President Lincoln over patronage and used several expletives. Lincoln, who was accustomed to the profanity of Episcopalian William Seward, calmly said to Fessenden: “You are an Episcopalian, aren’t you, Senator?” When Fessenden admitted he was, President Lincoln unnervingly continued: “I thought so. You Episcopalians all swear alike.”¹⁹

To take blame and responsibility for the errors of others was a peculiar characteristic of Lincoln’s magnanimity. Once, Seward made a critical decision without consulting Lincoln, and got the order signed by Lincoln without him perusing it. It was not unusual that documents from the experienced Seward were signed by

14. Rufus Rockwell Wilson, editor, *Intimate Memories of Lincoln*, p. 503.

15. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 319.

16. See website: www.haroldholzer.com

17. Website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org (Letter from E. Bates to A. Lincoln, Nov. 24, 1864)

18. *Ibid.* (Alice Hunt Sokoloff, Kate Chase for the Defense).

19. Website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org (Charles A. Jellison, *Fessenden of Maine*, p. 131)

Lincoln without reading them. Seward's hasty decision resulted in a failed mission of grave importance. To the astonishment of Naval Secretary, Gideon Welles — who was also aware of Seward's blunder — Lincoln "took upon himself the whole blame — said it was carelessness, heedlessness on his part — he ought to have been more careful and attentive." In fact, Welles continued, Lincoln "often declared that he, and not his Cabinet, was in fault for errors imputed to them." Captain Fox who executed this unsuccessful mission was inconsolable though the fault primarily lay with Seward. Lincoln, once more, assumed blame, assuring Fox that "by an accident, for which you were in no wise responsible, and possibly I, to some extent was, you were deprived of a war vessel with her men, which you deemed of great importance to the enterprise. I most cheerfully and truly declare that the failure of the undertaking has not lowered you a particle, while the qualities you developed in the effort, have greatly heightened you, in my estimation."²⁰ As the war wore on it was observed that Lincoln always refused to let a subordinate take the blame for his own decisions.²¹ In mid May Seward too began appreciating Lincoln's remarkable abilities and remarked to his wife, "It is due to the President to say, that his magnanimity is almost superhuman."²²

Lincoln chose Simon Cameron as Secretary of War, despite being warned by colleagues of his unfair dealings with some. Cameron at times was rude with Lincoln and Nicolay observed that Cameron was "Selfish and openly discourteous to the President."²³ Yet, Lincoln did not dismiss him. Hardly a year had passed when there were serious allegations of corruption against Cameron. Lincoln was compelled to remove him but later reappointed him, despite opposition, as Minister to Russia so as not to humiliate him. Further, Lincoln defended him and took joint responsibility for some irregularity of War Department purchases — an act for which Cameron remained ever grateful.

Most surprisingly Lincoln replaced Cameron with Edwin Stanton. Not only was Stanton in the opposing Democrat party but six years earlier had publicly humiliated and treated Lincoln with contempt. Stanton was astonished that Lincoln had gifted him the post of Secretary of War. Though Stanton was brash Lincoln saw in Stanton a tenacious man of great abilities who was determined to preserve the Union. Stanton was scrupulously honest and worked fifteen-hour days at the war desk. And Stanton was not Lincoln's sole cabinet Democrat. After nearly a year of disappointment with Cameron, Lincoln had found in Stanton the leader the War Department desperately needed. Lincoln's choice of Stanton revealed his singular ability to transcend personal vendetta, humiliation, or bitterness in order to achieve a greater cause — preserving the Union. The Mother has said, "To be above offence

20. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 344-45.

21. See *Ibid.*, p. 453.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 364.

23. Website: www.longislandwins.com

or insult makes one truly great.”²⁴

A Stanton biographer told a story about a subsequent confrontation between the two regarding the draft allocation for some Confederate soldiers who volunteered to serve on the Western frontier: “Stanton said: ‘Now, Mr. President, those are the facts, and you must see that your order cannot be executed.’ Lincoln, sitting on a sofa in Stanton’s office with his legs crossed, answered firmly: ‘Mr. Secretary, I reckon you’ll have to execute the order.’ Stanton snapped: ‘Mr. President, I cannot do it. The order is an improper one, and I cannot execute.’ Lincoln looked Stanton straight in the eye and said with determination: ‘Mr. Secretary, it will have to be done.’ Having done that, the President later admitted in a letter to General Ulysses S. Grant that he had been in the wrong and took full responsibility for his action. Lincoln, though, had to take more factors into consideration than his subordinates did.”²⁵

Despite the occasional instance of dissent, Lincoln recognised Stanton as sincere to the Union cause and stood by his decisions. For instance, refusing to make an appointment desired by Congressmen George Julian and Owen Lovejoy, Lincoln remarked, “Gentlemen, it is my duty to submit. I cannot add to Mr. Stanton’s troubles. His position is one of the most difficult in the world. Thousands in the army blame him because they are not promoted and other thousands out of the army blame him because they are not appointed. The pressure upon him is immeasurable and unending. He is the rock on the beach of our national ocean against which the breakers dash and roar, dash and roar without ceasing. He fights back the angry waters and prevents them from undermining and overwhelming the land. Gentlemen, I do not see how he survives, why he is not crushed and torn to pieces. Without him I should be destroyed. He performs his task superhumanly. Now do not mind this matter, for Mr. Stanton is right and I cannot wrongly interfere with him.”²⁶

“No two men were ever more utterly and irreconcilably unlike,” Stanton’s private secretary, A. E. Johnson, observed. “The secretiveness which Lincoln wholly lacked, Stanton had in marked degree; the charity which Stanton could not feel, coursed from every pore in Lincoln. Lincoln was for giving a wayward subordinate seventy times seven chances to repair his errors; Stanton was for either forcing him to obey or cutting off his head without more ado. Lincoln was as calm and as unruffled as the summer sea in moments of the gravest peril; Stanton would lash himself into a fury over the same condition of things. Stanton would take hardships with a groan; Lincoln would find a funny story to fit them. Stanton was all dignity and sternness, Lincoln all simplicity and good nature . . . yet no two men ever did or could work better in harness. They supplemented each other’s nature, and they

24. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 264.

25. See website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org (Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, *Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln’s Secretary of War*, p. 387).

26. See Frank A. Flower, *Edwin McMasters Stanton*, pp. 369-370.

fully recognised the fact that they were a necessity to each other.”²⁷ As Stanton came to understand Lincoln and his abilities, his initial disdain turned to admiration. Curiously, Stanton became extremely close and attached to Lincoln, quite obviously touched, like so many, by Lincoln’s magnanimity. A contemporary observed: “Few war ministers have had such real personal affection and respect for their king or president as Mr. Stanton had for Mr. Lincoln.”²⁸

It is interesting to note how the present US President, Barak Obama, was inspired by Lincoln and tried to follow in his footsteps. Obama’s favourite book, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, recounts how Lincoln, in the interests of getting the best talent, surrounded himself with advisers who were better educated and more experienced and who made no secret of coveting Lincoln’s job. Shortly before being chosen the Democrat Party’s nominee for President, Obama was asked, with a clear reference to his chief rival, Hillary Clinton, if he would be willing to bring in everybody who could possibly help him. Obama’s answer was a resounding yes. “One of my heroes is Abraham Lincoln,” he said. Lincoln “basically pulled in all the people who had been running against him into his cabinet because, whatever personal feelings there were, the issue was, ‘How can we get this country through this time of crisis?’”²⁹

Lincoln’s style of managing people and keeping conflicting rival members of the Cabinet together had a stamp of marked impersonality, yet it was empathetic. His lack of vanity and prejudice, his inability to humiliate those who insulted him or bore him illwill, maintaining instead a general goodwill towards all, and keeping the interests of the nation above his own, were some of his outstanding qualities in guiding a crises-ridden nation. Among the Cabinet members, there was considerable friction based on jealousy of relations with the President and animosity over policy. The Cabinet meetings were fiery affairs. Members openly feuded with one another and with the President. They castigated each other as liars and scoundrels. Yet this information rarely appeared in the newspapers; we know about it through diaries and letters. Despite the competitive strains and jealousies amongst his able and ambitious Cabinet colleagues, Lincoln skilfully managed them and kept his quarrelling Cabinet and Generals united in the cause of saving the Union. As long as his each did his job well, Lincoln would give him all the freedom and encouragement. But on controversial critical decisions he was firm and would avoid long-winded contentious cabinet debates and would only counsel Seward and Stanton. Aware this would provoke resentment amongst others, he would through many small acts of kindness and generosity manage to keep the respect and affection of his disgruntled colleagues. Amongst all the cabinet secretaries and administration officials, Lincoln

27. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 560.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

29. Website: www.guardian.com

— despite his pressing responsibilities and anxieties — maintained the most generous and even-tempered disposition. In the end, the feuding cabinet members, with the exception of the overly ambitious Chase, remained loyal to Lincoln.

Lincoln later modestly admitted to Swett, “I may not have made as great a President as some other men, but I believe I have kept these discordant elements together as well as anyone could.”³⁰ Historians concur that during the Civil War, Lincoln was able to brilliantly manage his team of rivals. In the Republican Party, too, Lincoln successfully kept the Conservatives within the Party along with the opposing Abolitionists (Radicals). His ability to spot, reward and hold talent for a greater cause was unparalleled.

For military appointments, too, Lincoln endeavoured to pick the best man for the job, irrespective of the candidate’s affiliations. He selected a conservative democrat George McClellan for the top job of General-in-Chief of the US Army. Another conservative Democrat, Benjamin Butler, was appointed as Brigadier General. Butler gratefully told Lincoln: “I will accept the commission but there is one thing I must say to you, as we don’t know each other: That as a Democrat I opposed your election, and did all I could for your opponent; but I shall do no political act, and loyally support your administration as long as I hold your commission; and when I find any act that I cannot support I shall bring the commission back at once, and return it to you.” Lincoln replied: “That is frank, that is fair. But I want to add one thing: When you see me doing anything that for the good of the country ought not to be done, come and tell me so, and why you think so, and then perhaps you won’t have any chance to resign your commission.”³¹

Lincoln’s leadership skills were a blend of integrity, straightforwardness, gratefulness, tact, openness, an ability to listen and understand, and a knack to motivate and delegate, yet being decisive at the opportune time. He also did not allow personal matters to affect professional issues or influence his judgement. Mary, for instance, distrusted and disliked several Cabinet Secretaries — particularly William H. Seward. She also disliked Edwin Stanton’s wife and Salmon Chase’s daughter. Among Cabinet wives, she was close only to the wife of Gideon Welles. Mary tried to indirectly influence Cabinet appointments but without any success. Mary revealed, “He [Lincoln] used to say to me when I talked to him about Chase and those who did him evil. Do good to those who hate you and turn their illwill to friendship.”³² Such large-heartedness is rarely seen in a human being, let alone a politician. There was also no love lost between Mary and Nicolay and Hay, yet the two Presidential secretaries were ever personally very close to Lincoln and deeply admired him. They were part of his family, like sons, who during the troubled days of Lincoln’s

30. Website: www.mrlincolnanfriends.org (Letter from L. Swett to William Herndon, August 29, 1887)

31. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 369.

32. Website: www.mrlincolnanfriends.org (Mary Todd Lincoln interview with W. H. Herndon, Sep. 1866)

first term offered him conversation, love and undivided loyalty. At the same time the President, in his largeness of mind, did not interfere with Mary's social relations. Despite Mary's quirks she was very empathetic to wounded soldiers and regularly visited hospitals to sympathise and console them, despite having lost two of her beloved children. Her actions were selfless for unlike other society women she never publicised her noble efforts. Like other benefactors she could have easily taken journalists with her to the hospitals — and it would be natural for her to do so — so that citizens could know about her goodness and offset some of the bad press she received but she preferred to keep her hospital visits private.

Lincoln's skills in dealing with people were outstanding and he had an innate sense of getting to the psychological roots of a person. He used humour to defuse tensions by telling apt but funny stories and by his obvious good fellowship he converted many opponents or rivals into personal friends or well-wishers. Lincoln reportedly said, "If you want to win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his friend."³³ Further he hated to fire incompetent subordinates and indecisive Generals and always gave them an opportunity to correct themselves. He disliked personal confrontations and withdrew from any quarrelling as he hated fussing. According to Judge David Davis, Lincoln "hated" quarrels. He "hated to say hard and sharp things of any man and never [stepped] beyond this except that his duty, his honour obligations, principles demanded it."³⁴ We are reminded of the Mother's words:

You should be very polite with those who depend upon you for their living. If you ill-treat them, they feel very much but cannot reply to you as man to man for fear of losing their job.

There may be some dignity in being rough with your superiors, but with those who depend on you, the true dignity is to be very courteous.³⁵

Lincoln was never prejudiced towards those who were friendly with his rivals or critics. Nor did he hold anything against those who were antagonistic to his friends.

Lincoln refused to hold the friendships of others against them. Nor did he hold the enemies of his friends against them. He ordered the reinstatement of Army Captain Edward W. Andrews, who was a political supporter of his Democrat rival George B. McClellan in the 1864 election. "Supporting General McClellan for the Presidency is no violation of army regulations, and as a question of taste of choosing between him and me, well, I'm the longest, but he's better looking," he quipped.³⁶ If he felt

33. Websites: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org and www.greatmenquotations.blogspot.in

34. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, editors, *Herndon's Informants*, p. 351.

35. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, p. 169.

36. Allen Thorndike Rice, editor, *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 518 (Edward W. Andrews).

there was a grudge behind any complaint brought to him, he would quote the biblical text: “Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.”³⁷ When a Congressman put in a grievance to dismiss a Democratic rebel in the Interior Department, Lincoln put a hand on his shoulder and said, “Don’t ask me to strike so low as I have to do with those whom I despise, for we are at war. Democratic aid we must have if possible, and I conciliate to avoid friction.”³⁸ Lincoln’s inability to be petty or hold a grudge against anyone was a conspicuous aspect of his personality. Indeed, the Mother has said: “Nobility: the incapacity for any pettiness either of sentiments or of action.”³⁹

None in his Cabinet gave Lincoln more trouble than Salmon P. Chase, who overtly challenged Lincoln’s re-election in the late winter of 1864. Fellow Illinois Republican, Shelby M. Cullom, thought Chase should have been dismissed, but Lincoln refused to do it. President Lincoln “was of too kindly a disposition, too great a man to punish any one for being against him, but at the same time he was more farseeing than others. He knew that to remove Chase would only make a martyr of him; to send him back to Ohio would only place him in a position to make trouble for the administration, and so he simply let him alone, which was by far the wisest thing to do.”⁴⁰

The amiable qualities of President Lincoln that all visitors encountered are revealed in a letter written by Samuel G. Suddarth, a state military official in Kentucky. After visiting the East Room of the White House, Suddarth and his colleagues,

were conducted up to the President’s Sanctorum or business room, where to our surprise and gratification all further formality was laid aside. Mr. Lincoln shook us cordially by the hand and received us in so natural and unostentatious a manner, and with that kind of unaffected, plain, and native urbanity, as to dispel all embarrassment, and cause us to feel entirely easy. His conversational powers are fine — and his custom of interspersing his conversations with incidents, anecdotes and witticisms are well calculated to impress his hearers with the kind-heartedness of the man. . . . history will record him as one of the most remarkable men of modern times. He is dignified in his manners and address, without austerity. Self poised and clear in his perceptions.⁴¹

America’s celebrated poet, Walt Whitman — a Lincoln admirer — never actually met Lincoln but often observed him from afar. Arriving at the White House, Whitman

37. See website: www.mrlincolnandfriends.org

38. See *Ibid.* (Josiah Busnell Grinnell, *Men and Events of Forty Years*, p. 174).

39. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2nd Ed., Vol. 14, p. 176.

40. Nathan William MacChesney, editor, Shelby M. Cullom, *Abraham Lincoln: The Tribute of a Century, 1808-1909*, pp. 503-504.

41. Harry E. Pratt, editor, *Concerning Mr. Lincoln*, p. 101.

saw Lincoln “talking to a gentleman, apparently a dear friend. His face and manner have an expression & are inexpressibly sweet — one hand on his friend’s shoulder, the other holds his hand. I love the President personally.”⁴²

Speaking on Lincoln’s style of dealing with his cabinet colleagues, Assistant Secretary of War, Charles A. Dana, later wrote:

The relations between Mr. Lincoln and the members of his Cabinet were always friendly and sincere on his part. He treated every one of them with unvarying candour, respect, and kindness; but though several of them were men of extraordinary force and self-assertion — this was true especially of Mr. Seward, Mr. Chase, and Mr. Stanton — and though there was nothing of selfhood or domination in his manner toward them, it was always plain that he was the master and they the subordinates. They constantly had to yield to his will in questions where responsibility fell upon him. If he ever yielded to theirs, it was because they convinced him that the course they advised was judicious and appropriate. I fancied during the whole time of my intimate intercourse with him and with them that he was always prepared to receive the resignation of any one of them. At the same time I do not recollect a single occasion when any member of the Cabinet had got his mind ready to quit his post from any feeling of dissatisfaction with the policy or conduct of the President. Not that they were always satisfied with his actions; the members of the Cabinet, like human beings in general, were not pleased with everything. In their judgment much was imperfect in the administration; much, they felt, would have been done better if their views had been adopted and they individually had had charge of it. Not so with the President. He was calm, equable, uncomplaining. In the discussion of important questions, whatever he said showed the profoundest thought, even when he was joking. He seemed to see every side of every question. He never was impatient, he never was in a hurry, and he never tried to hurry anybody else. To every one he was pleasant and cordial. Yet they all felt it was his word that went at last; that every case was open until he gave his decision.⁴³

His manner of dealing with his Generals was also quite tactful and sophisticated. Soon after the battle of Shiloh the President promoted two officers to Major-Generalships. General Sherman, dissatisfied with these two promotions, telegraphed Washington that if such ill-advised promotions continued, the best chance for officers would be to be transferred from the front to the rear. This telegram was shown to the President. He immediately replied by telegraph to Sherman that, in the matter of

42. Website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org

43. *Ibid.* (Charles A. Dana, *Recollections of the Civil War*, pp. 157-58).

appointments, he was necessarily guided by officers whose opinions and knowledge he valued and respected. “The two appointments,” he tactfully added, “referred to by you in your dispatch to a gentleman in Washington were made at the suggestion of two men whose advice and character I prize most highly. I refer to Generals Grant and Sherman.” General Sherman then recalled, to his great embarrassment, that in the flush of victory, General Grant and himself had both recommended these promotions, but that it had escaped his memory at the time of writing his telegraphic dispatch.⁴⁴

Lincoln could also override his cabinet secretaries in making a decision without consulting the relevant secretary. But he would do it with great tact and kindness. When he felt compelled to issue Naval Secretary Gideon Welles an order regarding the instructions of naval officers at neutral ports, he assured Welles that “it is not intended to be insinuated that you have been remiss in the performance of the arduous and responsible duties of your Department, which I take pleasure in affirming has, in your hands, been conducted with admirable success.”⁴⁵

Prize-winning author Doris Kearns Goodwin encapsulates Lincoln’s leadership:

It soon became clear, however, that Abraham Lincoln would emerge the undisputed captain of this most unusual cabinet, truly a team of rivals. The powerful competitors who had originally disdained Lincoln became colleagues who helped him steer the country through its darkest days. Seward was the first to appreciate Lincoln’s remarkable talents, quickly realising the futility of his plan to relegate the president to a figurehead role. In the months that followed Seward would become Lincoln’s closest friend and advisor in the administration. Though Bates initially viewed Lincoln as a well-meaning but incompetent administrator, he eventually concluded that the president was an unmatched leader, “very near being a perfect man.” Edwin Stanton, who had treated Lincoln with contempt at their initial acquaintance, developed a great respect for the commander-in-chief and was unable to control his tears for weeks after the president’s death. Even Chase, whose restless ambition for the presidency was never realised, at last, acknowledged that Lincoln had outmanoeuvred him.

This, then, is a story of Lincoln’s political genius revealed through his extraordinary array of personal qualities that enabled him to friendships with men who had previously opposed him; to repair injured feelings that, left untended, might have escalated into permanent hostility; to assume responsibility for the failures of subordinates; to share credit with ease; and to learn from mistakes. . . . His success in dealing with the strong egos of the men in his cabinet suggests that in the hands of a truly great politician the qualities we generally associate with decency

44. See Allen Thorndike Rice, editor, *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

45. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 526.

and morality — kindness, sensitivity, compassion, honesty, and empathy — can also be impressive political resources.⁴⁶

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

46. *Ibid.*, pp. xvi-vii.

War and destruction are not only a universal principle of our life here in its purely material aspects, but also of our mental and moral existence. It is self-evident that in the actual life of man intellectual, social, political, moral we can make no real step forward without a struggle, a battle between what exists and lives and what seeks to exist and live and between all that stands behind either. It is impossible, at least as men and things are, to advance, to grow, to fulfil and still to observe really and utterly that principle of harmlessness which is yet placed before us as the highest and best law of conduct. We will use only soul-force and never destroy by war or any even defensive employment of physical violence? Good, though until soul-force is effective, the Asuric force in men and nations tramples down, breaks, slaughters, burns, pollutes, as we see it doing today, but then at its ease and unhindered, and you have perhaps caused as much destruction of life by your abstinence as others by resort to violence; still you have set up an ideal which may some day and at any rate ought to lead up to better things.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays on the Gita, CWSA, Vol. 19, p. 42)

RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of January 2015)

XIV

THE figure to be taken up now, Transferred Epithet, belongs to the group of figures based on association. It is also known as Hypallage but this term is hardly ever used. In this figure an epithet is transferred from the noun it qualifies to another to which it does not apply. The stock example of it is the last line of the first quatrain of Gray's *Elegy*: "The ploughman homeward plods his weary way." Here the epithet "weary" actually qualifies the ploughman, but has been transferred to the way which is inanimate and cannot be weary. It is the ploughman who is weary. This figure is more common in poetry than in prose. All the same it can be found in our author:

Only an occasional cartman hoarsely announced from time to time the cautious progress of his vehicle.¹

Here it is the cartman who is progressing cautiously with his vehicle. The vehicle itself is inanimate and is being propelled by the cartman. The epithet belongs to him, not to the vehicle.

The next group is that of figures based on imagination and I have chosen five of them: Personification, Apostrophe, Invocation, Pathetic fallacy, and Hyperbole.

In Personification an abstract idea or an inanimate object is given human attributes. Aspects of nature can also be personified. This figure is very popular with poets as well as prose writers. When Gray says "Let not Ambition mock their useful toil" he is thinking of Ambition as a human being superciliously mocking the poor villagers. Our writer makes frequent use of this very common figure. There are so many and such fine ones that it is difficult to select. In the example quoted below the soul of a poet is imagined to be the conductor of the orchestra of poetic activities:

The other faculties are there in their place, but the conductor of the orchestral movement is the soul coming forward to get its own work done . . .²

While talking about the poet's attitude to Nature, he gives a personification of her:

1. *Collected Plays and Stories*, CWSA, Vols. 3-4, p. 957.

2. *The Future Poetry* (1953 ed.), p. 29.

It brings in a look upon Nature which pierces beyond her outsides and her external spirit and lays its touch on the mysteries of her inner life . . .³

Many personifications of Nature exist in poetry but they usually lay stress either upon her external features, or as with Wordsworth, upon her deep, spiritual aspect. Rarely does he touch upon both at one and the same time as is done here. Apart from that, it is a very finely constructed sentence. Demetrius, while remarking upon periods, first of all refers to Aristotle's definition of it as having a beginning, a middle and an end and then adds that the term implies a rounded structure and a thought held in suspense. This particular period is an ideal one from all points of view.

The three figures, personification, apostrophe and invocation are so intimately related that the two last are often considered to be variations of the first and few indeed are those who differentiate between them, specially the last two.

The difference between the first two: when an abstract idea is given human attributes we have personification. When this personified abstract idea, or part of nature, is addressed directly we have apostrophe. Personification is not limited to abstract ideas only, nor is apostrophe. Human beings, divinities, mythical characters, part of nature also can be apostrophised. The first three of these do not come under personification, for they are already persons. So the range of apostrophe is wider than that personification.

Thus in apostrophe a human being, a mythical character, a divinity or a personified idea is addressed directly. It used to be known as "adjuration" and the name apostrophe has been given by Longinus. He gives an example from Demosthenes to show how by using this one figure of speech he has given sublimity to his subject and his oration. Milton's famous "Hail! Holy Light" etc., Shakespeare's "O judgement, thou art fled to brutish beats!" are examples of apostrophe.

The example from our author is a highly evocative piece of poetic prose which had been cited earlier for anaphora. It is recounting what a bird is singing to the little girl Luilla in the story *The Golden Bird*:

Luilla! Luilla! Luilla! 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 . . .⁴

The sentence is far longer — only the first part of it has been quoted, as much as is needed to exemplify apostrophe.

Invocation is so like apostrophe that many writers do not differentiate between

3. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

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

the two. It occurs when the apostrophised entity is not only addressed directly but also to do something. When Shelley says:

Swiftly walk o'er the western wave
Spirit of Night!⁵

he is personifying Night, addressing her directly and also asking her to walk over the western wave. So it is, strictly speaking, not an apostrophe but an invocation. His *West Wind* begins as an apostrophe and goes on like that till the last line of the first section when suddenly it becomes an invocation: "Destroyer and Preserver, hear, O hear!" Incidentally, not only is the poem written in terza rima, but each section of it is an independent Shakespearean sonnet. It is a truly, truly admirable poem, in spite of all that Leavis might say against it. One can say that it is not only perfect, but that in the last few lines, specially the last line, it is elevated to the status of mantra. This cannot be said of all poems.

(To be continued)

RATRI RAY

5. *Palgrave's Golden Treasury*, p. 188. (All editions have the same pagination till Bk. IV.)

On Prose Style

It uses rhythms which ordinary speech neglects, and aims at a general fluid harmony of movement. It seeks to associate words agreeably and luminously so as at once to please and to clarify the intelligence. It strives after a more accurate, subtle, flexible and satisfying expression than the rough methods of ordinary speech care to compass. A higher adequacy of speech is its first object. Beyond this adequacy it may aim at a greater forcefulness and effectiveness by various devices of speech, by many rhetorical means for heightening the stress of its intellectual appeal.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Future Poetry, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 16)

AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

(Continued from the issue of January 2015)

14. The Dark Rays

SRI AUROBINDO'S evaluation of Spenser carries the tone of disappointment. What could have become the dawn of spiritual poetry in English was embroiled in the thickets of romance. Sri Aurobindo could never be dismissive and so leaves Spenser at that and moves on to the opening bars of the playwriting genius of the times. The Elizabethan playwrights realised that external life could not be easily left behind to take up the mystic, the allegorical, the metaphysical and the spiritual turns in man's genius. This is how the genre that used the physical contours of human existence in a big way to convey the eternal truths had entered the crucible of the times. Writing in *The Future Poetry*, he says:

Life is still the Muse of this poetry, but it is a Life which demands to feel itself more and is already knocking or trying to knock at the gates of the deeper subjective being. And in all the best work of the time it has already got there, not very deep, but still enough to be initially subjective. Whatever Shakespeare may suggest, — a poet's critical theories are not always a just clue to his inspiration, — there is not here any true or exact holding up of a mirror to life and Nature, but instead a moved and excited reception and evocation. Life throws its impressions, but what seizes upon them is a greater and deeper life-power in the poet which is not satisfied with mirroring or just beautifully responding to what is cast upon it, but begins to throw up at once around them its own rich matter of receptive being and shaping force and so creates something new, something more personal, intimate, fuller of a first inner vision, emotion, passion of self-expression.¹

Great creation in English poetry which would give us Shakespeare, Milton and others was not too far away from the creative artistes of this time. However, before that happened, there was a spread of dark rays in dramatic poetry, a preparation with rough sketches, as it were. There is a great meaning in the myth of the churning of the ocean. When Devas and Asuras churned the ocean with Vasuki as rope, it was the Halahala poison that they first confronted. Then other things would follow

1. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 88.

but the poisonous fumes could not be ignored, and they had also a place in the divine dispensation.

When I wander in my library trying to remember the dramatists who would lead us to the spire of Shakespeare, Thomas Kyd is the first to appear. Those were the days when we were the youth sighing over melodramas like *Devdas* on the silver screen, and Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* was taken in our stride. What a drama! We soberly followed this precursor of Shakespeare's immortal *Hamlet*. I vaguely remember the Professor telling us that when we read *Hamlet* later on, we would appreciate the difference between an uncut diamond stone brought out from the mines and a cut, well-polished diamond set in burnished gold.

Literature itself, perhaps, is often dictated by public taste. We see it happening in India's film industry. Sometimes it is musicals; then the producers discover a shift in taste and move to mythologicals, crime-thrillers, comedies and so on. Perhaps the mood of the English audience was for the depiction of melodramas on the stage, reflecting the wars that had been going on and on. They had to be romantic, of course. Not mere revenge-killings. If we set aside Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* that is innocent of any romantic imagination, Thomas Kyd (1558-94) becomes the first to give English literature a full-length tragedy that filled the stage with dead bodies, some good English dramatic poetry and a slice of romantic interest. He was obviously inspired by Senecan tragedy.

The Spanish Tragedy, or *Hieronimo is Mad Again* became immediately popular. The story is simple enough. Horatio, son of Hieronimo is about to get married to Bel-Imperia, daughter of the Duke of Castille. There are some fine romantic conversations and we watch the birth of Elizabethan dramatic poetry that would be Sri Aurobindo's favourite area. Bel-Imperia looking forward to her happy married life says on the eve of the wedding:

Our hour shall be, when Vesper begins to rise,
That summons home distressful travellers:
There none shall hear us but the harmless birds:
Haply the gentle nightingale
Shall carol us asleep, ere we be ware,
And, singing with the prickle at her breast,
Tell our delight and mirthful dalliance:
Till then each hour will seem a year and more.

A nameless gloom haunts Bel-Imperia, though, and already we see the expertise of the Elizabethan dramatist in creating an atmosphere of gloom for the tragic mode. Horatio is brutally murdered. Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia vow to avenge the dead hero. They manage to discover the murderers by re-enacting the tragedy of Horatio as a play. Much of the action happens to be stabbing people to death. Yet, how can

we forget Horatio's mother Isabella, trying to overcome her grief so that she can nurse her husband Hieronimo who is almost mad? She is certainly an inspiring personality. As she finds no justice from the king, she wreaks her vengeance upon the bower which had witnessed the tragedy, an unusual, poignant scene in dramatic literature:

Since neither piety nor pity moves
 The king to justice or compassion,
 I will revenge myself upon this place,
 Where thus they murder'd my beloved son.
 Down with these branches and these loathsome boughs
 Of this unfortunate and fatal pine:
 Down with them, Isabella; rent them up,
 And burn the roots from whence the rest is sprung.
 I will not leave a root, a stalk, a tree,
 A bough, a branch, a blossom, nor a leaf,
 No, not an herb within this garden-plot
 Accursed complot of my misery
 Fruitless for ever may this garden be,
 Barren the earth, and blissless whosoe'er
 Imagines not to keep it unmanur'd!

This spontaneity of utterance and the inward tuning of violence conveys an incalculable amount of human anguish than mere ranting or going around cutting down people. Here are the beginnings of the unforgettable scenes in Shakespeare which have become immortal. As when Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep:

Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not
 sweeten this little hand. Oh! oh! oh!

Or Cleopatra taking her last step in life:

Give me my robe. Put on my crown. I have
 Immortal longings in me. Now no more
 The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.

The poetic dramas that presaged Shakespeare may be likened to the dark mud which has all the rich ingredients and produces the lotus blooms above the water, a sheer poetry in nature. Kyd's play was a tremendous success. Naturally others wanted to cash in on the popularity of melodrama. In that tremendous churning, there were a few brilliances too which have endured till this day. One of them is Christopher

Marlowe (1564-1593) who has left behind the classic, *Doctor Faustus*. He wrote other plays too which were well received in his time like *Tamburlaine the Great*, *Edward the Second*, *The Massacre at Paris* and *The Jew of Malta*. Sri Aurobindo had immense regard for Marlowe's poetry, considering him "great in spite of an eventual failure."²

Marlowe alone of the lesser Elizabethan dramatists stands apart from his fellows, not solely by his strong and magnificent vein of poetry, but because he knows what he is about; he alone has some clearly grasped dramatic idea. And not only is he conscious of his artistic aim, but it is a sound aim on the higher levels of the dramatic art.³

Threatening scenarios but not the kind of physical melodrama we find in the revenge tragedies. It is the world within man that is his subject. Marlowe had read about the ferocious 14th century Amir Taimur (Taimur the Lame, Tamburlaine or Tamerlane) who had razed to the ground several great cities. The Tartar marauder had led an army of one lakh of soldiers, crossed the river Sindhu, and spread devastation in India killing and destroying without pity. It is recorded that he strangled to death one hundred thousand prisoners of war in front of the walls of Delhi as the Delhi Sultanate had come to an end. Historians tell us that he carried back to his city of Samarkhand ninety war elephants and a huge amount of invaluable treasures from Delhi. What is the power within that creates such a personality? Legouis and Cazamian say that Marlowe was simply dazzled by the arrogant conqueror of Persia, Russia, India and Syria. Sri Aurobindo speaks of Marlowe as he contemplates upon *Tamburlaine* and his other plays:

He knows that the human soul in action is his subject and Karma the power of the theme, and he attempts to create a drama of the human will throwing itself on life, the will egoistic and Asuric, conquering only to succumb to the great adversary Death or breaking itself against the forces its violence has brought into hostile play. This is certainly a high and fit subject for tragic creation and his boldly coloured and strongly cut style and rhythm are well-suited for its expression.⁴

Such is the adroit critical lens of Sri Aurobindo which discovers the changed perspective in the presentation of revenge themes. What was Tamburlaine trying to avenge? The insults he may have received as a poor, unlettered Scythian shepherd? Ruthless are his ways and his wife Zenocrate knows that he means to win and is

2. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 73.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

4. *Ibid.*

sure of his ascendant star. As she tells Zabina who is skeptical of Tamburlaine's win over the Turkish emperor:

If Mahomet should come from heaven and swear
My royal lord is slain or conquered,
Yet should he not persuade me otherwise
But that he lives and will be conqueror.

Tamburlaine is a long play, in two parts. Having achieved success everywhere Tamburlaine turns his attention to the East and we see him on his gory trail in the second part of the play. He is now grown older and has three sons but is not happy since they do not come up to his standard of being bloodthirsty and ruthless. His idea of a hero is quite, quite different from the dictionary of a cultured person. What is the Tamburlaine ideal of a hero? When one takes up Marlowe whatever the subject or scene, we get mesmerised by the lively blank verse, among the very best in the Elizabethan "nest of singing birds":

For he shall wear the crown of Persia
Whose head hath deepest scars, whose breast most wounds,
Which, being wrath, sends lightning from his eyes,
And in the furrows of his frowning brows
Harbours revenge, war, death, and cruelty;
For in a field, whose superficies
Is cover'd with a liquid purple veil,
And sprinkled with the brains of slaughte'd men,
My royal chair of state shall be advanc'd;
And he that means to place himself therein,
Must armed wade up to the chin in blood.

We move on and on drawn by the sheer poetic magic of Marlowe's pen. For the rest, the journey is dreary and when Tamburlaine finds that his sons do not come up to his standards of heroism, he even stabs one of them to death. Ultimately, as James Shirley says, "scepter and crown must tumble down!" The play ends with the death of Tamburlaine.

All the other dramas of Marlowe also have fine poetry, but luring stories that do not exactly illumine our spirits. In his critique which includes *Doctor Faustus*, Sri Aurobindo points this out in clear terms:

Unhappily, Marlowe had the conception, but not any real power of dramatic execution. He is unable to give the last awakening breath of life to his figures; in the external manner so common in English poetry and fiction he rather

constructs than evolves, portrays than throws out into life, paints up or sculptures from outside than creates from within, — and yet it is this other inward way that is the sole true method of poetic or at least of dramatic creation. He has not, either, the indispensable art of construction; only in one of his tragedies does he vitally relate together his characters and their action throughout, and even that, though a strong work, falls far short of the greatness of a masterpiece.⁵

Sri Aurobindo was, no doubt, referring to *Doctor Faustus* as the lone exception. All his dramas are hero-oriented. I suppose it would be more appropriate to refer to all his heroes as antiheroes. Of these which include Barabbas and Tamburlaine, Doctor Faustus alone stands out for gathering a modicum of the onlooker's pity. Also, he is a unique creation. If Marlowe lathered other dramas with blood and gore, he avoided such disgusting horror in *Doctor Faustus*. After all these decades, I remember the classes I sat through to learn *Doctor Faustus*.

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus seems different from Marlowe's other plays because Doctor Faustus is a different character altogether. He might have been able to present a somewhat different, psychological study in Tamburlaine and Barabbas but obviously box-office compulsions could not be totally set aside even in those days! Sri Aurobindo points out this aspect gently, that Marlowe had been "working for that semi-barbarous public, to minister to tastes which were quite incongruous with his purpose and which he had not flexibility enough to bring within its scope or to elevate towards its level. In fact, Marlowe was not a born dramatist; his true genius was lyrical, narrative and epic."⁶ Indeed it is in this drama that Sri Aurobindo finds even a trickle of Overhead poetry and gives an example too:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

For the students, most of them in their late teens, there was subdued excitement because the Professor was going to read the entire text line by line and explain. When we opened our books we found it was English but could not make anything out of the introduction by the chorus:

Not marching now in fields of Thrasymene,
Where Mars did mate the Carthaginians;
Nor sporting in the dalliance of love,
In courts of kings where state is overturn'd;
Nor in the pomp of proud audacious deeds,

5. Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, pp. 77-78.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

Intends our Muse to vaunt her heavenly verse:
 Only this, gentlemen, — we must perform
 The form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad . . .

We were typical students of the Andhra area who were thorough with Indian mythological characters like Bhima and the Kauravas thanks to the celluloid actors like N. T. Rama Rao and S. V. Ranga Rao, but were innocent of Thrasymene and Carthaginians. But soon the tremendous story held us in its grip for here the battle between good and evil was for the soul of Faustus. Also, here we were not troubled by the clash of swords and cutting down of living persons. We were amid scholars and literature and science and the research-oriented mind of Faustus. Again, for our minds conditioned to Indian tales of mantra and magicians and mantriks and tantriks, Faustus intoning Latin terms and Mephistophilis appearing before him was easy enough to understand. The injection of dark humour by introducing the Clown was another factor. However, the chief attraction was (and still is) Marlowe's scintillating blank verse. There was never a dull moment till we came to the dreaded last few lines. Repentance comes too late for Faustus:

See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
 One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah, my Christ! —
 Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!

Too late, too late! It was a warning for the classroom: make the right choice in life. Or else? We have what Sri Aurobindo describes as a great culminating moment "in which the lyrical cry and the epic touch break out through the form of drama".⁷

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
 And burned is Apollo's laurel-bough,
 That sometime grew within this learned man.
 Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall,
 Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise,
 Only to wonder at unlawful things,
 Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
 To practise more than heavenly power permits.

With the Professor's explanations and exhortations, studying *Doctor Faustus* was almost like attending a moral instruction class. That was good for us. For I remember the lines even today and fondly stroke the same volume with which I had sat expectant, eager and with a nameless dread in the Honours class in 1956! For as Legouis and

7. *Ibid.*

Cazamian have said, the concluding portions of the drama are unforgettable. “They stand by themselves, distinct from all the rest of the drama. They are unsurpassable, even by Shakespeare.”⁸

There were others who ventured into poetic drama in these Renaissance times. Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe and Thomas Lodge wrote plays too but who remembers these dark rays? Ah yes, Robert Greene is remembered for his letter to Marlowe in which he is supposed to have referred to Shakespeare as “an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers” and that he had a “tiger’s heart wrapped in a Player’s hide”. We enjoyed his parody of Shakespeare as “Shake-scene”. All this matter would be important for our Shakespeare paper when a question could be asked whether the Bard of Avon plagiarised from the writings of his contemporaries like Greene. Of their dramas, very little. When we did go to the library to read and take down notes, some titles made us smile like Nashe’s *The Anatomy of Absurdity* and *An Almond for a Parrot*. They are good satires by a university-educated scholar but their contemporary references have no effect on us when we read them in the twentieth century.

But all these dramatists are important for the historian of English literature as they laid the path strong for the coming of the greatest dramatist of all times, William Shakespeare.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

8. Legouis and Cazamian, *A History of English Literature*, p. 403.

The superiority of the English poets who lead the way into the modern age is that sudden almost unaccountable spiritual impulse, insistent but vague in some, strong but limited in one or two, splendid and supreme in its rare moments of vision and clarity, which breaks out from their normal poetic mentality and strives constantly to lift their thought and imagination to its own heights, a spirit or Daemon who does not seem to trouble at all with his voice or his oestrus the contemporary poets of continental Europe. But they have no clearly seen or no firmly based constant idea of the greater work which this spirit demands from them; they get at its best only in an inspiration over which they have not artistic control, and they have only an occasional or uncertain glimpse of its self motives.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Future Poetry, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 124)

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I, Manoj Das Gupta, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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