

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

SPECIAL ISSUE

24 APRIL 2015

PRICE: Rs. 30.00

SUBSCRIPTIONS

INLAND

Annual: Rs. 200.00

For 10 years: Rs. 1,800.00

Price per Single Copy: Rs. 30.00

OVERSEAS

Sea Mail:

Annual: \$35 or Rs. 1,400.00

For 10 years: \$350 or Rs. 14,000.00

Air Mail:

Annual: \$70 or Rs. 2,800.00

For 10 years: \$700 or Rs. 28,000.00

All payments to be made in favour of *Mother India*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. For outstation cheques kindly add Rs. 15 for annual membership and Rs. 50 for 10-year subscription.

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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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Publishers: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

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

Editors: RAVI, HEMANT KAPOOR, RANGANATH RAGHAVAN

Published by: MANOJ DAS GUPTA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM TRUST

PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT, PONDICHERRY 605 002

Printed by: SWADHIN CHATTERJEE

at Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry 605 002

PRINTED IN INDIA

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers under No. R.N. 8667/63

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXVIII

No. 4

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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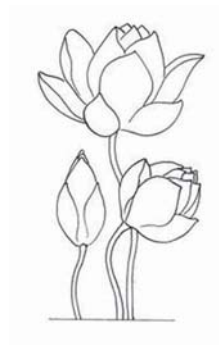
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TORN ARE THE WALLS

Torn are the walls and the borders carved by a miserly Nature,
I now have burst into limitless kingdoms of sweetness and wonder.
Breaking the fences of Matter's gods and their form and their feature,
Fall'n are the barriers schemed and the vetoes are shattered asunder.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 675)



EXPERIENCES AND REALISATIONS IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA

PART ONE

THE PLACE OF EXPERIENCES IN THE PRACTICE OF YOGA

SECTION TWO: VICISSITUDES ON THE WAY TO REALISATION

Chapter One: Variations in the Intensity of Experience

The Up and Down Movement in Yoga

THE up and down movement which you speak of is common to all ways of Yoga. It is there in the path of bhakti, but there are equally alternations of states of light and states of darkness, sometimes sheer and prolonged darkness, when one follows the path of knowledge. Those who have occult experiences come to periods when all experiences cease and even seem finished for ever. Even when there have been many and permanent realisations, these seem to go behind the veil and leave nothing in front except a dull blank, filled, if at all, only with recurrent attacks and difficulties. These alternations are the result of the nature of human consciousness and are not a proof of unfitness or of predestined failure. One has to be prepared for them and pass through. They are the “day and night” of the Vedic mystics.

As for surrender, everyone has his own first way of approach towards it; but if it is due to fear, “form” or sense of duty, then certainly that is not surrender at all; these things have nothing to do with surrender. Also, complete and total surrender is not so easy as some seem to imagine. There are always many and large reservations; even if one is not conscious of them, they are there. Complete surrender can best come by a complete love and bhakti. Bhakti on the other hand can begin without surrender, but it naturally leads, as it forms itself, to surrender.

You are surely mistaken in thinking that the difficulty of giving up intellectual convictions is a special stumbling-block in you more than in others. The attachment to one’s own ideas and convictions, the insistence on them is a common characteristic and here it seems to manifest itself with an especial vehemence. It can be removed by a light of knowledge from above which gives one the direct touch of Truth or the luminous experience of it and takes away all value from mere intellectual opinion, ideas or conviction and removes the necessity for it, or by a right consciousness which brings with it right ideas, right feeling, right action and right everything else. Or else it must come by a spiritual and mental humility which is rare in human nature — especially the mental, for the mind is always apt to think its own ideas, true or false,

are the right ideas. Eventually it is the psychic growth that makes this surrender too possible and that again comes most easily by bhakti. In any case, the existence of this difficulty is not in itself a good cause for forecasting failure in Yoga.

*

The rhythm of up and down is fairly general — it is only a few who keep an even course and even these have slight though comparatively rare drops of the consciousness. But the times vary — although it is true that it comes upon a few at the same time, and occasionally there is a massed general attack and shaking. It seems difficult as yet to eliminate these vicissitudes of the sadhana.

*

Everything once gained is there and can be regained. Yoga is not a thing that goes by one decisive rush one way or the other — it is a building up of a new consciousness and is full of ups and downs. But if one keeps to it the ups have a habit of resulting by accumulation in a decisive change — therefore the one thing to do is to keep at it. After a fall don't wail and say, "I'm done for," but get up, dust yourself and proceed farther on the right path.

*

After one has got to a certain stage the things gained are never lost — they may be covered over but they return — they have only gone inside and come back to the surface.

Alternations, Oscillations, Fluctuations of Consciousness

It is always like that — some days of experience, some days of no experience (or only experience of peace and quietude) alternating. It is only later on that the consciousness becomes capable of continuous experience and even then there are alternations of the level.

*

The reason why there are these alternations of which you complain is that the nature of the consciousness is like that; after a little spell of wakefulness it feels the need of a little sleep. Very often in the beginning the wakings are brief, the sleeps long; afterwards it becomes more equal and later on the sleep periods are shorter and

shorter. Another cause of these alternations, when one is receiving, is the nature's need of closing up to assimilate. It can take perhaps a great deal, but while the experience is going on it cannot absorb properly what it brings, so it closes down for assimilation. A third cause comes in the period of transformation, — one part of the nature changes and one feels for a time as if there had been a complete and permanent change. But one is disappointed to find it cease and a period of barrenness or lowered consciousness follows. This is because another part of the consciousness comes up for change and a period of preparation and veiled working follows which seems to be one of unenlightenment or worse. These things alarm, disappoint or perplex the eagerness and impatience of the sadhak; but if one takes them quietly and knows how to use them or adopt the right attitude, one can make these unenlightened periods also a part of the conscious sadhana. So the Vedic Rishis speak of the alternation of "Day and Night both suckling the divine Child".

*

Everyone has these alternations because the total consciousness is not able to remain always in the above experience [*of the higher force working powerfully*]. The point is that in the intervals there should be quietude, at least in the inner being, no restlessness, dissatisfaction or struggle. If that point is attained, then the sadhana can go on smoothly — not that there will be no difficulties, but there will be no disquietude or dissatisfaction etc. etc.

*

The impermanence of the better condition is a fairly general phenomenon. There is an oscillation always, a coming and going till the change that is trying to take place is strong enough to fix itself. This is due to two reasons, first the inability of the vital and physical to give up their old movements at once and accommodate themselves to the new and secondly to the habit of things hiding in the nature somewhere under the pressure from above and turning up as soon as they get an opportunity.

*

These slight oscillations always happen until everything is open. They are due to one of two causes, — either

(1) Some small part or movement of the being comes up which is not quite open and needs to have the Influence brought into it, or

(2) A shadow is thrown by the outside force, bringing back, not the old disturbance, but some temporary obscuration or appearance of obscuration.

Do not be disturbed, but immediately become quite quiet and open yourself.

The important thing is not to allow the old strong disturbance and confusion to come back and, secondly, not to allow a long obscuration, even if the obscuration be without a serious disturbance. To keep hold on quiet persistently will prevent the serious disturbance; to keep quiet and steadily open yourself will prevent any long obscuration.

*

These oscillations [*of consciousness*] always come. The universal lower Nature tries to come back and resume its hold — the lower vital or the physical consciousness responds, not always because it wants or likes to do so but because the old habit of response is still so strong that it cannot help it.

The first necessity is to detach yourself, not to regard it as your own, to learn to feel it as something foreign and refuse to be touched or upset. Then it will become easier for the lower vital or physical itself to reject and refuse to admit it.

*

These fluctuations in the force of the aspiration and the power of the sadhana are unavoidable and common to all sadhaks until the whole being has been made ready for the transformation. When the psychic is in front or active and the mind and vital consent, then there is the intensity. When the psychic is less prominent and the lower vital has its ordinary movements or the mind its ignorant action, then the opposing forces can come in unless the sadhak is very vigilant. Inertia comes usually from the ordinary physical consciousness, especially when the vital is not actively supporting the sadhana. These things can only be cured by a persistent bringing down of the higher spiritual consciousness into all the parts of the being.

*

These fluctuations always take place. By insistence and practice it becomes finally possible to keep the aspiration and the open consciousness above continuously, but even then periods of active progress and periods of assimilation alternate.

*

Fluctuations of this kind cannot but come and when they come, one has to remain very quiet and detach oneself from the surface condition and wait for it to pass while calling the Mother's Force. A neutral condition of this kind serves a certain purpose in the economy of the purification and change — it brings up things that have to be transformed or rejected, lifts up some part of the being in order to expose

it to the transforming force. If one can understand, remain quiet and detached from the surface movements, not identified, then it goes sooner, the Force can quickly clear out what rises and afterwards it is found that something has been gained and a progress made.

*

Yes, indeed, to keep the fixed consciousness of the soul, even when there are fluctuations in the outer nature, is a great victory. If one can do that, it means that the capacity to arrive is there fixed in the being and only the firm will is needed for the entire certitude.

Fluctuations in the Working of the Force

There are no fixed rules [*about fluctuations in the working of the Force*]. There are simply a mass of tendencies and forces with which one has to become familiar. It is not a fixed machinery which one can manage by devices or by pulling this or that button. It is only by the inner Will, the constant aspiration, by detachment and rejection, by bringing down the true consciousness, force etc. that it can be done.

*

I can only say as before, that there is no specific reason [*for fluctuations in the working of the Force*] which the mind can determine. It depends on the total condition and interaction of the forces. One has to hold on to the aspiration and look steadily towards the goal without being disturbed by these inequalities and fluctuations.

*

I don't know.¹ Times and seasons vary according to the poise and flux and reflux of the forces in the consciousness. It is not a thing to which you can affix a rationalised and systematised explanation. One can feel it and understand in the essence of the consciousness, but not formulate precise cause and effect.

1. *The correspondent asked why he felt an emptiness in the morning, a suspension of sadhana. — Ed.*

Lulls, Pauses, Interim Periods

There are always lulls of this kind. One must not get upset — otherwise they are prolonged and disturbances come in. One must remain quiet, aspire steadily but without vehemence or, if one presses for a change, then too with a quiet steady pressure.

*

There are always periods when all one can do is to remain quiet and aspire. A continuous activity of the light and power is only possible when the whole being has been prepared and the psychic is constantly in front.

*

Everyone has periods when the consciousness is covered up. One has to go on in spite of that, and if you persist in aspiration and keep turned to the Mother, then these periods will diminish and the consciousness more and more open to her.

At such periods instead of allowing these things to hold you, you should separate yourself from them and regard them as something foreign which you have to reject.

*

There are always long periods of this kind at the beginning when the first openings of experience are covered up by the restless mind and vital; but with perseverance they diminish — the experience always returns and takes up more and more of the consciousness till it becomes its normal state.

*

There are always pauses of preparation and assimilation between two movements. You must not regard these with fretfulness or impatience as if they were untoward gaps in the sadhana. Besides, the Force rises up lifting part of the nature on a higher level and then comes down to a lower layer to raise it; this motion of ascent and descent is often extremely trying because the mind partial to an ascent in a straight line and the vital eager for rapid fulfilment cannot understand or follow this intricate movement and are apt to be distressed by it or resent it. But the transformation of the whole nature is not an easy thing to accomplish and the Force that does it knows better than our mental ignorance or our vital impatience.

*

There is nothing wrong in having intervals of passive peace without anything happening — they come naturally in the sadhana as a basis for fresh action when the nature is ready for it. It is only the vital attitude that turns it into a disharmony, because somewhere in its being there is not the assent to or participation in the peace and passivity. To be able often to rest, repose in all the being outspread in the silent Brahman is an indispensable thing for the Yogi. But the vital wants always fuss, action, to feel that it is somebody doing something, getting on, having progress, on the move. The counterpart to this rajasic fuss is inertia. If the whole being can widen itself out, rest satisfied in the silence, then progressively inertia fades out and gives place to *sama*.

*

In the interim periods, if any come, to maintain the calm observing consciousness is the one great necessity.

The dynamic activity of the higher consciousness may be suspended but once manifested its presence is always there.

*

They [*certain experiences*] are first indications of an opening — but the opening has to be stabilised and enlarged. Also so long as the external mind is very much on the top they come at intervals only. Continuous experience is only possible when one gets inside and stays there.

*

There are always variations in the intensity of experience, due to the necessity of assimilation in the consciousness. It is only at a much later stage that the consciousness remains always at its highest level.

*

These variations are inevitable. They go on until three things are sufficiently and unfluctuatingly established: (1) A fixed peace and gladness. (2) A clear light and understanding. (3) A complete selfless love and surrender.

Drops or Falls of Consciousness

These drops [*of consciousness*] happen to all sadhaks; their causes are various; sometimes it is a pull from below, sometimes an invasion from outside, sometimes a less ascertainable cause. When it happens, one must always remain as quiet as possible behind and call back the better condition.

*

A drop of consciousness need not be so serious or take as long a time to repair. A few hours or, if there is much disturbance or mental obstruction, a few days should be sufficient to recover. Sometimes it takes longer if the sadhak continues to be too troubled or agitated or otherwise stands in his own way by dwelling too much on the obstacle. But years are taken only when there is, not a mere dropping of the consciousness, but a strong fall of the whole nature from the path or other very serious accident etc. There is nothing of this kind here or anything that could cause it.

*

You must have allowed the consciousness to fall — there may have been some tamasic movement or it may merely be the habit of oscillation between the two conditions [*obscure and luminous*] that still persists.

The speedy removal of the difficulties depends on the continuance of the experiences. Otherwise the consciousness oscillates between the higher and the lower condition — which does not prevent the ultimate liberation, but does cause delay.

*

Yes — if the peace is established, then the falls [*of consciousness*] are only on the surface and do not affect the inner consciousness.

*

Fall of the concentration happens to everybody — it has not to be taken as if it were something tragic or allowed to be the cause of depression.

Fatigue, Inertia and Lowering of the Consciousness

The falling down [*of the consciousness*] comes usually by some inertia coming in the consciousness through fatigue or through mere habit of relaxation or it comes through some vital reaction which one may or may not notice or it comes through a wrong movement of the mind. These are the positive lowering causes, but at the back of them is the fact that these alternations are almost inevitable so long as the consciousness is in any way subject to the old nature. The intervals of non-sadhana may however be long or short according to inner circumstances (mainly the power of the will or the psychic or the higher being to restore quickly the true poise).

*

An occasional sinking of the consciousness happens to everybody. The causes are various, some touch from outside, something not yet changed or not sufficiently changed in the vital, especially the lower vital, some inertia or obscurity rising up from the physical parts of nature. When it comes, remain quiet, open yourself to the Mother and call back the true condition, and aspire for a clear and undisturbed discrimination showing you from within yourself the cause or the thing that needs to be set right.

*

Yes, the ordinary physical consciousness is not able to hold the contact and it does get tired — also it cannot assimilate much at a time. But it is not always the Divine who takes away the pressure; the lower consciousness itself loses it or gives it up.

*

An always intense aspiration, an unswerving and unwavering will turned to the one thing only, help to get through the difficulties without discouragement or falling into depression — they give an impetus for a rapid development. But the difficulties come all the same because they are inherent in human nature. Even the best sadhaks have these periods of suspension of the sadhana, of nothing happening, of the absence of the urge of the inner being. It is when some difficulty arises in the physical nature that has to be dealt with or when a pause has to be made for a veiled preparation, or for some similar reason. Even when the working of the sadhana is in the mind or vital which are more plastic such periods are frequent — when the physical is concerned they must necessarily come and are usually marked not so much by any apparent struggle but by an immobility and an inertia of the energies that were at work before. This is very troublesome to the mind because it suggests

entire cessation, incapacity to progress or unfitness. But it is not really so. One must be quiet and go on opening oneself to the working or keeping the will to do so — afterwards there will be a greater progress. Many sadhaks indulge in such a period a spirit of despondency and loss of faith in the future which delays the renewal, but this should be avoided.

*

It is difficult to say [*why the veiling of consciousness persists*] — usually it is when something in the mind and vital accepts and indulges the lower forces that this inability to re-enter the true consciousness remains so obstinate. Physical tamas can produce long interregnums of obscure consciousness, but not usually with such a violent obstruction — usually only dull and obstinate.

*

The depression is not the only cause of suspension of experiences. There are others such as inertia etc. If one can have experiences continuously in spite of these things, that means that a part of the consciousness has definitely separated from the rest and is able to go on in spite of the outer resistance.

*

Even if there is physical fatigue sometimes it is not inevitable that it should interfere with the sadhana. The inner movement can always go on.

*

When the physical consciousness prevails, often one does not feel any sign or effect [*of inner or higher experiences*] even if they are there.

*

How do you expect anything so obtuse and forgetful as the physical consciousness to have the effect if the experiences are not repeated? It is as when you learn a lesson, you have to repeat it till the physical mind gets hold of it — otherwise it does not become a part of consciousness.

Variations during the Day

It happens to most sadhaks that in particular parts of the day they feel concentrated and get results, and in others that condition is not there. This is especially in the earlier stages of the progress. It is only after the higher consciousness, peace etc. have settled in the being that one can usually be at all times in the active condition of sadhana.

*

It is often like that — the period of intense activity is limited to a particular part of the day and then the rest of the time there is a lull.

*

It is quite usual to have such periods in the day. The consciousness needs time for rest and assimilation, it cannot be at the same pitch of intensity at all times. During the assimilation a calm quietude is the proper condition.

*

These variations in the consciousness during the day are a thing that is common to almost everybody in the sadhana. The principle of constant oscillation, relaxation, relapse to a normal or a past lower condition from a higher state that is experienced but not yet fixed in realisation or else realised but not yet perfectly stable, becomes very strong and marked when the working of the sadhana is in the physical consciousness. For there is an inertia in the physical nature that does not easily allow the intensity natural to the higher consciousness to remain constant, — the physical is always sinking back to something more ordinary; the higher consciousness and its force have to work long and come again and again before they can become constant and normal in the physical nature. Do not be disturbed or discouraged by these variations or this delay, however long and tedious; remain careful only to be quiet always with an inner quietude and as open as possible to the higher Power, not allowing any really adverse condition to get hold of you. If there is no adverse wave, then the rest is only a persistence of imperfections which all have in abundance; that imperfection and persistence the Force must work out and eliminate, but for the elimination time is needed.

*

There is no mentally definite and rigidly effective reason for the thing [*a fall into inertia*] coming in the evening rather than at 2 p.m. or in the midnight or in the morning. For some people the fall comes in the evening, for some in the morning, for some at other times, and so too with the rise. But the alternations happen to most people in one kind of rhythm or another. The times vary with people and even can vary with the same men. There is no definable reason for it being at a particular time except that it has made itself habitual at that time. The rest is a question of the play of forces which is observable but the reasons of which escape mental definition.

*

That is a frequent experience (though I suppose it is not general) — not only with peace, but other things; there is a tendency towards a lowering of the consciousness in the evening. On the other hand with some it is the opposite. I don't know that it actually depends on work and mixing, though these may have a wearing effect — I find more often that it is a sort of rhythm of rise and fall in the consciousness during the day. Even when peace is perfectly established, there may be this rhythm for other things that are being developed.

The Need for Periods of Assimilation

Intensities like that do not remain so long as the consciousness is not transformed — there has to be a period of assimilation. When the being is unconscious, the assimilation goes on behind the veil or below the surface and meanwhile the surface consciousness sees only dullness and loss of what it had got; but when one is conscious, then one can see the assimilation going on and one sees that nothing is lost, it is only a quiet settling in of what has come down.

*

Yes — the system has to take rest so as to assimilate and renew its receptive power.

*

When one is assimilating, one is not receiving.

*

The periods of assimilation continue really till all that has to be done is fundamentally done. Only they have a different character in the later stages of sadhana. If they

cease altogether at an early stage (you are still in a very early stage), it is because all the nature was capable of has been done and that would mean it was not capable of much.

*

What I have written is perfectly clear. The periods of assimilation continue till all that has to be done is fundamentally done. If they stop early, it means that all has been done that could be done and nothing more is possible, the later and more advanced developments of the sadhana are not possible, — if they were, the assimilation periods would continue until all was developed and not cease. The only reason for such a premature end of the sadhana would be that the sadhaka is not capable of going farther.

*

The only change in the assimilation periods afterwards is that certain things remain settled while the assimilation applies to others that are not yet settled in the system. E.g. one feels always a constant peace in the inner being, but disturbances go on on the surface, till the surface also has assimilated peace. Or perhaps peace is settled everywhere and always there but knowledge comes and goes or strength comes and goes. Or all these are there but Ananda comes and goes etc. etc.

*

There is always a gain or progress at some point after these periods of assimilation if one takes them rightly — however dull or troublesome they may be.

*

If your faith is getting firmer day by day, you are certainly progressing in your sadhana and there can have been no fall. An interruption of definite experiences may be only a period of assimilation in which one prepares for a new range of experience. Keep yourself open and aspire.

* * *

Chapter Two: Emptiness, Voidness, Blankness and Silence

Periods of Emptiness

If it is only emptiness, there is nothing wrong. Alternations of emptiness and fullness are a quite normal feature of experience in sadhana.

*

Emptiness usually comes as a clearance of the consciousness or some part of it. The consciousness or part becomes like an empty cup into which something new can be poured. The highest emptiness is the pure existence of the Self in which all manifestation can take place.

*

To be an empty vessel is a very good thing if one knows how to make use of the emptiness.

*

Keep the quiet and do not mind if it is for a time empty; the consciousness at times is like a vessel which has to be emptied of its mixed and undesirable contents; it has to be kept vacant for a while till it can be filled with the right contents. The one thing to be avoided is the refilling of the cup with the old contents. Meanwhile wait, open yourself upwards, call very quietly and steadily, not with a too restless eagerness for the peace to come into the silence and, once the peace is there, for the joy and the presence.

*

You have written of the Force coming down [*during a period of emptiness*] — even sometimes of its filling all parts — so what is this “never”? I did not at all mean that there is a mechanical process by which every time there is emptiness afterwards there comes an entire filling up. It depends on the stage of the sadhana. The emptiness may come often or stay long before there is any descent — what fills may be silence and peace or Force or Knowledge and they may fill only the mind or mind and heart or mind and heart and vital or all. But there is nothing fixed and mechanically regular about these two processes.

*

Usually such feelings of emptiness [*in the body*] come when the identification with the body is lessening and the consciousness is preparing to take its seat either above or in a cosmic wideness or in some beginning of that wideness.

*

An emptiness in the mind or vital may be spiritual without emptiness being an essential characteristic of the higher consciousness. If it were, there could be no Force, Light or Ananda in the higher consciousness. Emptiness is only a result produced by a certain action of the higher Force on the system in order that the higher consciousness may be able to come into it. It is a spiritual emptiness as opposed to the dull and inert emptiness of complete *tamas* which is not spiritual.

*

If it is the spiritual emptiness then it will not be felt as interfering with the *sadhana*.

*

If it is real emptiness, one can last in it for years together, — it is because the vital is restless and full of desires (not empty) that it is like that [*difficult to remain empty*]. Also the physical mind is by no means at rest. If the desires were thrown out and the ego less active and the physical mind at rest knowledge would come from above; in place of the physical mind's stupidities, the vital mind could be calm and quiet and the Mother's Force take up the action and the higher consciousness begin to come down. That is the proper sequel of emptiness. But nothing of this has happened because the "emptiness" could not complete itself, that is to say, the true silence and peace.

Emptiness — A Transitional State

The emptiness that you described in your letter yesterday was not a bad thing — it is this emptiness inward and outward that often in Yoga becomes the first step towards a new consciousness. Man's nature is like a cup of dirty water — the water has to be thrown out, the cup left clean and empty for the divine liquor to be poured into it. The difficulty is that the human physical consciousness feels it difficult to bear this emptiness — it is accustomed to be occupied by all sorts of little mental and vital movements which keep it interested and amused or even if in trouble and sorrow still active. The cessation of these things is hard to bear for it. It begins to feel dull and restless and eager for the old interests and movements. But by this

restlessness it disturbs the quietude and brings back the things that had been thrown out. It is this that is creating the difficulty and the obstruction for the moment. If you can accept emptiness as a passage to the true consciousness and true movements, then it will be easier to get rid of the obstacle.

All in the Asram are not suffering from the sense of dullness and want of interest, but many are because the Force that is descending is discouraging the old movements of the physical and vital mind which they call life and they are not accustomed to accept the renunciation of these things, or to admit the peace or joy of silence.

*

There is a certain truth in what you say about the empty cup — a certain emptying of the consciousness of old things is necessary before anything positive can settle itself. It is what is happening in your physical consciousness, the old movements are being emptied out and you fall quiet, but they press in again and the cup has to be repeatedly emptied. If there is a firm and persistent rejection, then this repeated return of these old movements will cease to be so persistent; the periods of quiet and its intensity will increase until the peace and quietude can be established and permanent.

It is not however a fact that the whole nature has to be emptied of the old things before there can be the Light and Grace. It is done usually in different parts of the nature at different times. You had your former experiences because the mind and higher vital were sufficiently emptied and quiet to receive some experiences of a new consciousness. Now it is the physical mind, physical vital and body that have to be emptied — these always take longer than the others because the physical is more full of old habits, more obstinate in keeping and always repeating them, more slow to receive anything new or to change. But by the detachment and steady rejection and reliance on the Mother's force, this obstinacy can be overcome and the cup emptied for filling with the Divine Light.

*

There is nothing out of the normal in what you describe — it happens in the course of the change of consciousness. What has to be remedied is that you feel the stillness, emptiness, but seem to have no joy of it or the satisfied peace of the self or sense of wideness or quiet release and freedom. Usually the cessation of the lower activities brings a sense of freedom, release, repose. The inner consciousness does not miss the mental jumpings or the vital swirl — it feels as if the silence were its native element.

*

Emptiness is not in itself a bad condition, only if it is a sad and restless emptiness of the dissatisfied vital. In sadhana emptiness is very usually a necessary transition from one state to another. When mind and vital fall quiet and their restless movements, thoughts and desires cease, then one feels empty. This is at first often a neutral emptiness with nothing in it, nothing in it either good or bad, happy or unhappy, no impulse or movement. This neutral state is often or even usually followed by the opening to inner experience. There is also an emptiness made of peace and silence, when the peace and silence come out from the psychic within or descend from the higher consciousness above. This is not neutral, for in it there is the sense of peace, often also of wideness and freedom. There is also a happy emptiness with the sense of something close or drawing near which is not yet there, e.g. the closeness of the Mother or some other preparing experience. What you describe is the neutral quiet. There is no need for anxiety. When it comes, one has only to remain quiet and open and turned to the Mother till something develops from within.

*

What you describe is the same neutral condition that you had before. It is a transitional state in which the old consciousness has ceased to be active, the new is preparing behind a neutral quietude. One must take it quietly and wait for it to turn into the spiritual peace and the psychic happiness which is quite different from vital joy and grief. To have neither vital joy nor vital grief is considered by the Yogins to be a very desirable release, — it makes it possible to pass from the ordinary human vital feelings to the true and constant inner peace, joy or happiness. I suppose you have no time just now for sitting in meditation. The pressure of sleep is a pressure to go inside and the habit of meditation makes it possible to turn the sleep that comes into a kind of sleep-samadhi in which one is conscious of various experiences and progresses in the inner being.

*

If you mean that after this kind of samadhi [*during the afternoon rest*], you feel a greater emptiness or voidness, it is quite natural. To void the being of the old consciousness and its movements and to fill the mind from above are the two main processes now by the Force from above.

*

When you feel empty like that, you have only to remain very still and open yourself to receive the Light and Force. Emptiness is a bad condition only when it is dull or when you receive into it wrong movements. But often one has to be empty in order to receive what is to be given.

*

In itself this emptiness and quietude free from all anxiety or trouble or thought about people or things is not a bad sign or an undesirable state. It is a state of what the Yogis call *udāsīnatā*, a separateness from all things and indifference, an untroubled neutral quietude. In many Yogas it is considered a very advanced and desirable condition — a state of liberation from the world, though not yet of realisation of the Divine, — but they consider it a necessary passage to the realisation. In our Yoga it is only a passage through which one arrives at a more positive spiritual calm consciousness in which all experiences and all realisations become possible. The feeling of dullness is due probably not to this state which is in itself a condition of ease and release, but to the depressed condition of the bodily health and strength. That also is probably the cause why the more positive state does not come quickly. The forgetfulness you speak of comes sometimes in the period of change, but passes away afterwards; a new force of memory comes.

Voidness

The voidness is the best condition for a full receptivity.

*

The voidness (if by that you mean silence and emptiness of thoughts, movements etc.) is the basic condition into which the higher consciousness can flow.

*

The usual result of voidness is to quiet down any vital tumult although it does not, unless it is complete, stop the mechanical recurrent action of the mind.

*

Yes, it becomes like that.² In the end you feel as if you had no body, but were spread out in the vastness of space as an infinite consciousness and existence — or as if the body were only a dot in that consciousness.

*

2. *The correspondent wrote that in the state of voidness his body felt as light as cotton. — Ed.*

There is no reason why the void should be a dull or unhappy condition. It is usually the habit of the mind and vital to associate happiness or interest only with activity, but the spiritual consciousness has no such limitations.

*

Voidness can come from anywhere, mind, vital or from above.

*

Voidness may be of different kinds — a certain kind of spiritual voidness or the emptiness that is a preparation for new experience. But an exhaustion of life energy is a very different thing. It may arise from fatigue, from somebody or something drawing away the vital force or from an invasion of tamas.

Blankness

In the course of the sadhana a state of blankness, of “neutral quiet” like this often comes — especially when the sadhana is in the physical consciousness. It is not that the aspiration is gone, but that it does not manifest for the time being, because all has become neutrally quiet. This condition is trying for the human mind and vital which are accustomed to be in some kind of activity always and regard this as a lifeless state. But one must not feel disturbed or disappointed when this comes, but remain calm in the full confidence that it is a stage only, a ground that has to be crossed in the sadhana. In whatever condition, the faith and the fixed idea of surrender must be kept before the mind. As for the brief movements of restlessness, they will still down if this is kept and the quiet mind and vital reassert themselves quickly.

*

The physical does not get tired of the blankness. It may feel tamasic because of its own tendency to inertia, but it does not usually object to voidness. Of course it may be the vital physical — you have only to reject it as a remnant of the old movements.

*

Blankness is only a condition in which realisation has to come. If aspiration is needed for that, it has to be used; if the realisation comes of itself, then of course aspiration is not necessary.

Emptiness, Blankness and Silence

Silence of the being is the first natural aim of the Yoga. You and some others do not find satisfaction in it because you have not overcome the vital mind which wants always some kind of activity, change, doing something, making something happen. The eternal immobility of the silent Brahman is a thing it does not relish. So when emptiness comes, it finds it dull, inert, monotonous.

*

I do not quite gather what is the nature of this silence and this heat which makes you feel like that. An inner silence is a condition favourable to the sadhana even if for a time it means the cessation of all activity within, all thoughts, emotions or mental perceptions. But it is possible and it does happen that the unaccustomed physical consciousness feels the silence to be dull and a deprivation of intelligence rather than a release and repose, and the strangeness of this inactive condition causes it apprehension and an alarmed perplexity. As for the heat that also may be troublesome and difficult to bear to the physical consciousness because it is unaccustomed and gets alarmed and troubled. If it is that we must try to slow down and diminish the intensity of the force that is acting.

But in any case try to dismiss any alarm that may be suggested to you and keep the faith which you express in the last part of the letter.

*

I cannot have written that it is only you who feel the silence as empty, as there are plenty who do so feel it at first. One feels it empty because one is accustomed to associate existence with thought, feeling and movement or with forms and objects, and there are none of these there. But it is not really empty.

*

Certainly, the vital cannot take an interest in a blank condition. If you depend on your vital you cannot prolong it. It is the spirit that feels a release in the silence empty of all mental or other activities, for in that silence it becomes self-aware. For the blankness to be real one must have got into the Purusha or Witness consciousness. If you are looking at it with your mind or vital, then there is not blankness, — for even if there are no distinct thoughts then there must be a mental attitude or mental vibrations — e.g. the not feeling interest.

*

The silence can remain when the blankness has gone. All sorts of things can pour in and yet the silence still remains, but if you become full of force, light, Ananda, knowledge etc. you can't call yourself blank any longer.

*

Every kind of realisation — infinite self, cosmic consciousness, the Mother's Presence, Light, Force, Ananda, Knowledge, Sachchidananda realisation, the different layers of consciousness up to the Supermind — all these can come in the silence which remains but ceases to be blank.

*

The emptiness, silence and peace are the basic condition for the spiritual siddhi — it is the first step towards it. It enables the Purusha to be free from the movements of Prakriti, to see and know where they come from since they no longer rise from within the mind, heart etc., these being in a state of quietude, and to reject the lower movements and to call in the knowledge, will etc. of the higher Consciousness which is above.

Emptiness, Voidness and the Self

Emptiness is a state of quietude of the mental or vital or all the consciousness not visited by any mind or vital movements, but open to the Pure Existence and ready or tending to be that or already that but not yet realised in its full power of being. Which of these conditions it happens to be depends on the particular case. The Self state or the state of pure Existence is sometimes also called emptiness, but only in the sense that it is a state of sheer static rest of being without any contacts of mobile Nature.

*

Emptiness as such is not a character of the higher consciousness, though it often looks like that to the human vital when one has the pure realisation of the Self, because all is immobile, and for the vital all that is not full of action appears empty. But the emptiness that comes to the mind, vital or physical is a special thing intended to clear the room for the things from above.

*

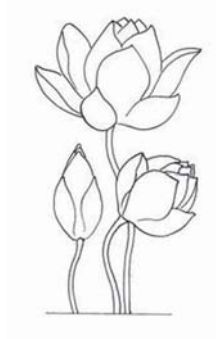
The void is the condition of the Self — free, wide and silent. It seems void to the mind, but in reality is simply a state of pure existence and consciousness, Sat and Chit with Shanti.

*

There is no such thing as *néant*. By “void” is meant emptiness clear of all contents except existence pure and simple. Without that one cannot realise the silent Brahman.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Letters on Yoga – III*, CWSA, Vol. 30. pp. 55-81)



**‘ . . . THY WORK WILL BE DONE, I KNOW,
AND THY VICTORY IS CERTAIN ’**

May 13, 1914

THIS somnolence of my thought, O Lord, Thou wilt shake off so that I may have the knowledge and understand the experience Thou hast given to my being. When something in me questions Thee, always Thou repliest, and when it is necessary for me to know something, Thou teachest it to me, whether directly or indirectly.

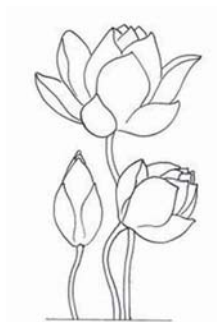
I see more and more that all impatient revolt, all haste would be useless; everything is slowly organised so that I may serve Thee as I should. What is my place in this service? For a long time I have stopped asking myself this. What does it matter? Is it necessary to know whether one is at the centre or on the circumference? Provided that entirely consecrated to Thee, living only for Thee and by Thee, I carry out better and better the task Thou givest me, all the rest has no importance at all. I would say more: provided Thy work is accomplished in the world as well and as completely as it can be, does it matter which individual or group realises this work?

O my sweet Master, in peace, serenity, equanimity, I give myself to Thee and merge in Thee, my thought calm and tranquil, my heart smiling; Thy work will be done, I know, and Thy victory is certain.

O my sweet Master, grant to all the sovereign boon of Thy illumination!

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 141)



“A LIVING FACT, A REALITY”

REFLECTIONS APROPOS THE MESSAGE OF 24 APRIL 1956

It was on April 24 in 1920 that the Mother came finally to settle in Pondicherry by the side of Sri Aurobindo and work with him to establish on earth what he called the Supermind or Truth-Consciousness. It was on April 24, 1937, that she described her “return to Pondicherry” as “the tangible sign of the sure Victory over the adverse forces”. And it was on April 24 in 1956 that she at last announced the event which had taken place nearly two months earlier: the manifestation of the Supermind in the earth-atmosphere — that is, in the subtle-physical layer of terrestrial existence — as a new Power permanently settled to evolve the Divine Superman. In her message she called it “a living fact, a reality” and said that a day would come when even the blindest would recognise the presence of this Power.

Several years have passed, and the question has often been put: “No mahatma anywhere in India has felt the supramental manifestation. How is it that what the blindest in the future will recognise is unperceived by the spiritual seers of today? Are we to hold that the great Yogis are no seers at all? A scepticism either about spiritual faculty or about spiritual phenomenon threatens the unbiased inquirer.”

The answer is that the problem is founded on a wrong conception. The Supermind is a Power on whose quest Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were launched for almost three decades after compassing all the realisations of traditional spirituality and finding those indubitable splendours still inadequate to bring about a complete transformation of earth-life. It is a supreme Creativity of which only rare glimpses have been caught in the past: the bringing down of it for a new collective divine world was never envisaged, though the vague drive that has always been in human history towards entire knowledge of the world-process, towards unflinching energy of earthly achievement, towards secure stability of the embodied being was the secret Supermind’s in an indirect and secular instead of a direct and spiritual way. The Supermind, in *persona propria*, has been a stranger, a magnificent X.

Its presence, therefore, in the earth-atmosphere is a special vibration, as it were, to which not even the usually developed spiritual sense is responsive. It is the ultra-violet which transcends the traditional mahatma’s vision of light. Whether the ultra-violet be far away in some remote star or down here in our own radiation-field, the vibration remains the same and hence equally elusive in essence to spiritual sight unless that sight has been in some manner *en rapport* with the Supermind above.

The great Yogis God-realised in the old ways are sensitive as much as the consciousness of the highest spiritualised mind allows; and each of them is further

conditioned by his own specific mode and sphere of inner experience, the particular infinity opened to a particular finite door. Each has a sympathetic connection with other experiences and realisations, other expanses of truth attained by Godward turns similar in general to his own. But when a Truth that is beyond the past ranges makes its appearance, it cannot be perceived until those who are familiar with the Spiritual on the mental plane extend their sensitivity and scope or until the new Truth itself breaks upon them and makes them see. If neither of these two possibilities has become actualised as yet, we must not conclude that the non-supramental Yogis are no Yogis. Their authenticity cannot be impugned. But much less can we conclude from their non-perception that there is no Supramental Truth or no manifestation of it.

One may add that the manifestation of the Supermind cannot remain hidden for long. The supreme dynamic Creativity cannot long seem as if static. The common saying "Truth will out" is all the more applicable when the Supramental Truth is concerned. Even now there is action, an intensely effective one, but mostly *incognito* and through natural-looking circumstances. So we may legitimately hope that before the blind of the future recognise it the seers of today will at least feel its heavenly heat and infer its luminosity.

But let not those who are followers of Sri Aurobindo forget in the midst of the Supermind's unlimited potentialities that the demand of all evolutionary process in man, the conscious soul, is conscious consent and co-operation. The need of a vigilant personal effort is a law inevitable: nothing can become organic in its absence — a superimposed and therefore impermanent miracle will be even the Supermind if the mental does not give itself to the Supramental. What, however, the new manifestation may have altered even in the law of evolution is that the effort required is an endeavour less to do things oneself than to let the Supermind do all. In other words, formerly one had to put in one's own work side by side with the larger movements of the higher Consciousness: now one may have merely to stop resisting and the higher Consciousness will do its miraculous work without depending on our smaller movements. Here is indeed a great difference, but even to stop resisting is a serious and all-time occupation and cannot be taken up as if just the thought of it were enough. Just the thought of it is insufficient not only for those who are still aspirants: it is so for those too who are spiritually advanced. Compared to the Himalaya of the Supermind, all mountains and valleys of soul-accomplishment are grades of one and the same abyss.


AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

(Reprinted from *Mother India*, April 1977, pp. 261-62)

24th April 1956

The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality.

It is at work here, and one day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognise it.



SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of March 2015)

Chapter: XLI

The Empire Strikes (2)

When I was asleep in the Ignorance, I came to a place of meditation full of holy men and I found their company wearisome and the place a prison; when I awoke, God took me to a prison and turned it into a place of meditation and His trysting-ground.¹

Sri Aurobindo

NEWS of the arrest of Sri Aurobindo and the youths at the Gardens immediately after the attempt on Kingsford's life at Muzaffarpore created waves of stir in the political and social atmosphere of the country. The pro-colonial Indian newspapers found in this a ready occasion to speak patronisingly about the Moderates. Even the Press in England, if found lacking in differentiating between the militants and the conservatives, was criticised by their Indian counterparts. *The Statesman*, the foremost voice of the ruling class, accused the *Times* of London of misrepresenting the facts when it described the Muzaffarpore incident as an item in "the carnival of sedition and incitement in which agitators in Bengal have for so long indulged". It was easy for a section of the Press in Britain to see the entire political movement in India as unwelcome and to dismiss it in its entirety. But the pro-British Press in India naturally understood the ground-reality and knew that the empire's existence depended on how much the Moderate bulk of the Congress could retain its sway on the native masses.

The Statesman went on to comment:

The impression which will naturally be given to the reader will be that all agitation in India is violent and mischievous. Even in this country writers are found who appear to be unable to distinguish between Mr. Gokhale and Mr. Bepin Chandra Pal, between Dr. Rashbehari Ghose and Mr. Arabindo Ghose. To talk of the "legitimate aspiration of the people" is, we are told, to encourage a dangerous propaganda. Against such ignorant and malicious vilification of the true Nationalist movement we strongly protest.²

Needless to say, by “true Nationalist movement” and an earlier used phrase, “the legitimate Nationalist movement”, the paper meant the sedate and debate-based Congress, as opposed to the group the people identified as Nationalists.

There were meetings and demonstrations in several towns expressive of sympathy and respect for those arrested. A confidential report by Mr. F. C. Daly, D.I.G., Special Branch of Bengal, says:

The arrest of the Maniktolla garden conspirators caused intense excitement among the Extremists throughout India. The papers, and in particular *Jugantar*, became more violent than ever and when their publication was eventually put an end to, they continued to appear in the form of secretly printed leaflets — openly and boldly inciting every conceivable form of violence.³

Indeed, the *Jugantar* had achieved a record in braving prosecution. As if the conventional punishments such as fine, search, hauling up its staff to the police station and the court and imprisonment were not enough, a few days after the arrest of Sri Aurobindo and others, the *Jugantar* office was raided by the police for the seventh time and this time they literally decamped with the hand-setting type and galleys. The meagre quantity of type the printing press was left with would be sufficient for composing matters on only one side of the paper! Nevertheless, it was marketed in that unusual appearance and the people bought it at a price enhanced to two paise from one! However, by and by it became impossible for the paper to run and the staff called it a day after its issue dated the 6th of July 1908.⁴

With Sri Aurobindo and the Maniktolla group locked up, the police had hardly any respite from the labour of its newly discovered love: the Gardens. Even ten days later *The Statesman* carried this news item:

The police are still busily pursuing their investigations, and emptying of the tanks at Maniktolla and searching of the garden itself were proceeded with yesterday, and it is said that certain books and papers have been discovered.⁵

The senior officials concerned spent sleepless nights editing and lining up the innumerable facts and fiction they had amassed to serve as evidence against the conspirators. Unknown to the Nationalists the police had not missed any chance to gather information about the activities of the accused. We have learnt earlier, from the memoirs of an eminent inmate of the Gardens, Upendranath Bandopadhyay, how the blushing policeman who was assigned the task of tying his hands was the fellow who worked as a servant in the *Bande Mataram* office!

If one policeman had been planted at the *Bande Mataram*, many more were employed to shadow the youths, even though the latter were under the impression of acting most stealthily. Let us take another look at the report prepared by the

Special Branch D.I.G:

It was in the beginning of 1908 that the Bengal C.I.D. first obtained information that led to enquiries regarding the garden at No. 32, Muraripukur Road, which was the property of Arabindo Ghose and his brother Barindrakumar Ghose. Watch on the garden was organised by the C.I.D., and several members tracked from there to different houses and from one house to another. It was while this watch was actually going on that certain of the conspirators were followed to Chandernagore. They were lost sight of there, however, and the following day the news of the attempt to murder the Mayor of Chandernagore by throwing a bomb through his window while he was at his dinner betrayed the object with which they had gone there. This was on the 10th April. At the end of April the C.I.D. received intimation that two members of the conspiracy had gone to Muzaffarpur, with a view to murdering Mr. Kingsford. An officer of the C.I.D. was sent to Muzaffarpur. A search in the town by the local police failed to reveal any suspicious Bengalis and the C.I.D. officer was on his way back to Calcutta at the request of the District Superintendent of Police when the bomb outrage took place . . . The Bengal C.I.D. decided to wait no longer. They had been watching the Maniktolla Garden for nearly two months. The existence of the garden was unknown to the Calcutta local police; the other houses to which Barindra Ghose, Hem Das and other habitués of the garden had been traced, were also kept under watch. A conference was held in the house of the Commissioner of Police on the night of the 1st May and the searches commenced on the morning of the 2nd. . . . It was towards the end of March 1907, just before I proceeded on leave, that Inspector Shoshibhushan Dey, since deceased, who was then assisting me in political enquiries, reported having received information of a mysterious garden somewhere in suburbs of Calcutta where arms were being collected. Up to the time of my departure on leave Inspector Shoshibhushan Dey had been unable to get any definite information or fix the locality of the garden, but there can be little doubt I think that the story he had heard related to the institution that had been started by Barindrakumar Ghose.⁶

In the previous chapter we had left Sri Aurobindo with the Presidency Magistrate Mr. Thornhill. From there he and a few others were led to the Alipore Court. The Magistrate of this court did not meet them, but gave some instruction from an inner chamber. They had been ordered to be driven to the prison house. During this transition some unknown gentleman came closer to Sri Aurobindo and whispered to him the intelligence that he was to be detained in a solitary cell — the gentleman had seen the order; maybe Sri Aurobindo would not be able to meet anybody thereafter. Would he like to send any message home? Sri Aurobindo thanked him and informed him that he had already done that.

In this small gesture of the gentleman Sri Aurobindo felt the genuine warmth and sympathy of his countrymen.⁷ This reveals the spontaneously grateful attitude Sri Aurobindo himself nurtured towards men and events around him, an outlook that becomes vividly conspicuous as immensely compassionate when we read his *Kara Kahini (Tales of Prison Life)* and the *Uttarpara Speech*.

Along with a few others, Sri Aurobindo was handed over to the jail officials. After four days, the three enjoyed the “heavenly bliss of a bath”. Clothed in the attire of a prisoner, Sri Aurobindo was led into his small solitary cell. The door of the small room was shut. Thus began his life in the prison. That was the 5th of May 1908.

On the 19th of May Inspector P. C. Biswas filed the First Information Report:

In course of the investigation of the Narayangarh train wrecking case, Midnapur, which occurred on the morning of the 6th December last, a clue was obtained of existence of a secret society working with its headquarters at various places in Calcutta. The information thus received was followed up and a number of officers were detailed to watch its operations in plain clothes. The following are some of the important places where its members used to conspire together against the lives of rulers of the country with a view to overawe the Imperial and the provincial Governments in India by means of criminal force or show of criminal force to secure independence of their country.

1.32 Muraripukur Road (Garden House) which is the joint property of Arabinda Ghose, Barindra Ghose and their two brothers Monomohan Ghose and Benoy Ghose.

2.23 Scott’s Lane where Arabinda Ghose, Barindra Ghose and their friends Abinash Chandra Bhattacharjee and Sailendra Bose used to mess together.

3.38-A Raja Nava Kissen Street where explosives were prepared by accused Hem Chandra Das.

4.15 Gopi Mohan Datta Lane where some of the explosives were stored and manufactured by the members of this society.

5.4 Harrison Road where the ‘Yugantar’ book shop has been started.

6.30-2 Harrison Road where the members of this society used to congregate from time to time in view of carrying on correspondence with its other members working or employed at other places.

7.134 Harrison Road where some of the explosives and ammunition were stored.

8. Navasakti Office, 48 Grey Street, where Arabinda Ghose, his brother Barindra Ghose and their friends Abinash Chandra Bhattacharjee and Sailendra Bose were removed on the 30th April, last.

On the 1st instant information was received of the bomb outrage at Muzaffarpur necessitating immediate action and warrants were taken out for simultaneous

house searches in Calcutta.

On the 2nd instant at 5 a.m. the searches commenced at different centres and arrests were made with the results noted below:

1. At the Muraripukur Road garden centre 18 persons were arrested. Their names are:

1. Barindra Kumar Ghose, 2. Indu Bhusan Rai, 3. Ullaskar Dutt, 4. Upendra Nath Banerjee, 5. Shisir Kumar Ghose, 6. Nalini Kumar Gupta, 7. Sachindra Kumar Sen, 8. Poresh Chandra Maulik, 9. Kunja Lal Sinha, 10. Bijay Kumar Nag, 11. Narendra Nath Bakshi, 12. Purna Chandra Sen, 13. Hemendra Nath Ghosh, 14. Bibhuti Bhusan Sirkar, 15. Nidhi Uria, 16. Panu Uria, 17. Sachindra Nath Chatterjee, 18. Indu Bhusan Bose.

The last four have subsequently been released on bail.

Voluminous correspondence, explosives, guns, rifles, revolvers, dynamite and articles used in the manufacture of explosives were recovered from the Garden House, from the grounds of the house and buried underground as per list enclosed. Some of the underground hiding places were pointed out by the accused Barindra Kumar Ghose. . . .

At the Navasakti office were arrested accused Arabinda Ghose, Abinash Chandra Bhattacharjee and Sailendra Kumar Bose of 24-Pargannas. With them was found a quantity of incriminating correspondence as per list enclosed. . . .

Of the persons thus arrested, the following have confessed.

1. Upendra Nath Banerjee, to the existence of the secret society and his being a member of it.

2. Barindra Kumar Ghose to the above fact and also to his participation in the preparation for derailing His Honour's special between Mankundu and Chandernagore Railway Stations, the Narayangarh derailment case in December last, the French Chandernagore bomb outrage case in April last and to the abetment of the Muzaffarpur murder case, on 30-4-08.

3. Indu Bhusan Rai to the existence of the secret society and to his participation in the French Chandernagore bomb outrage case.

4. Bibhuti Bhusan Sirkar to the existence of the secret society and to his complicity in the preparation for derailing His Honour's special between Chandernagore and Mankundu Railway Stations and to his participation in the Midnapur train wrecking case.

5. Ullaskar Dutt to the existence of the secret society, to his complicity in the attempt at derailing His Honour's special near Chandernagore Railway Station at or about the last Dewali, preparation for the same during the last winter between Chandernagore and Mankundu Railway Stations and to the abetment of the Narayangarh train wrecking case, the French Chandernagore bomb outrage case and the Muzafferpur murder case.

6. Noren Gossain to the existence of the secret participation in the attempt at

wrecking His Honour's special near Chandernagore Railway Station at or about the last Dewali and to his complicity in the French Chandernagore bomb outrage case.

7. Hrishikesh Kanjilal to his being a member of the secret society and his participation in the attempt at wrecking His Honour's special near Chandernagore Railway Station.

8. Sudhir Kumar Sirkar to his being a member of the secret society.

9. From the above it will appear that altogether five cases occurred as the outcome of the conspiracy of this society. These cases are:

1. Attempt at wrecking His Honour's special train between Mankundu and Chandernagore Railway Stations at or about the last Dewali. Accused Ullaskar Dutt, Hrishikesh Kanjilal and Noren Gossain who took part in it, are under arrest. They have all confessed to their participation in it.

2. Preparation for blowing up His Honour's special between Mankundu and Chandernagore Railway Stations during the last winter. Accused Barindra Kumar Ghose, Bibhuti Bhushan Sirkar and Ullaskar Dutt who were concerned in it and have confessed to their share of the job, are under arrest.

3. Attempt at wrecking His Honour's special near Narayangarh Railway Station in Midnapur on 6-12-07. Accused Barindra Kumar Ghose, Bibhuti Bhushan Sirkar and Profulla Chaki who actually laid the mine and accused Ullaskar Dutt who manufactured it, are under arrest, excepting Profulla who committed suicide after the Mozafferpur murder case.

4. The French Chandernagore bomb outrage case on 11-4-08. In it were concerned Barindra Kumar Ghose, Narendra Gossain, Indu Bhushan Rai who have all confessed. The bomb used in this case was the handiwork of accused Hem Chandra Das and Ullaskar Dutt of whom the latter has confessed. There were two other persons of French Chandernagore concerned in this case.

5. Mozafferpur murder case on 30-4-08. The bomb made use of in this case was the handiwork of Hem Chandra Das and Ullaskar Dutt. Ullas has confessed to this fact. This plot was organised by accused Barindra Kumar Ghose who has confessed to his complicity in the crime. Of the two persons actually concerned in the murder of Mrs. and Miss Kennedy, namely Khudhiram of Midnapur and Profulla Chaki of Bogra, the former has been arrested and confessed and the latter committed suicide when an attempt of arresting was being made . . .

On 12-5-08, Kristo Jiban Sanyal and on 14-5-08, Birendra Nath Ghose were arrested. Both of them confessed to being members of the secret society.

On 13-5-08, accused Soroj Kumar Mazumdar was arrested. He has since been enlarged on bail.

In consideration of the facts already disclosed, I submit this First Information Report, charging the members of this Secret Society under Sections 143, 145, 150, 157, 121, 121-A, 122, 123 and 124 I.P.C. (7).⁸

As the report shows, Barindra Kumar, in keeping with his unpredictable, if not erratic mood, had made a clean breast of his group's activities before the Magistrate L. Birley, on the 4th of May. Some other youths too did the same under his influence. Barindra Kumar did so in the same carefree spirit in which he had pointed to the police party the spots where arms and ammunition lay hidden. Records Mr. Daly:

The first of the arrested persons to make a confession was Barindra Kumar Ghose himself. He related how he came from Baroda and moved about the country as a political missionary, starting gymnastics and endeavouring to get the young men together to study physical exercises and politics. He described the failure of that mission and how he had returned to Baroda and studied for another year and then came back once more to Bengal determined to make young men up spiritually to face the danger. He related how with aid of his friends, Abinash Bhattacharji (also arrested) and Bhupendra Nath Datta (then in jail, having been convicted for sedition in the publication of the *Jugantar*), he had collected some 14 or 15 men. He had commenced this work, he said, about the beginning of 1907.⁹

Though deplorable, Barindra Kumar taking such a decision without consulting Sri Aurobindo was not much of a surprise. Probably he would have gone his way despite Sri Aurobindo advising him otherwise. Hence instead of wondering as to *how* he could commit such a blunder, we can focus on the question *why* did he do so and read how his action was interpreted by the amused enemy. Wrote Mr. Daly in his report:

Barindra's object in making a confession was doubtless to lead the police into believing that the revolutionary plot did not extend outside the party which had been arrested. The device has been tried in other cases since. The anarchists have an idea that the police will be easily satisfied with a confession. It was, therefore, formerly an accepted rule of the party that on any number of them being arrested under circumstances that left little hope of escape from conviction, someone should make a confession in which he should not divulge any information against persons other than those who had been arrested, the idea being always to make a check on police activity, and to lead the authorities to believe that the part at work was very small one. These confessions, made on arrest, have rarely contained one-half of what the persons making them really knew."¹⁰

What was Sri Aurobindo's reaction to this strange conduct of Barindra Kumar? When the C.I.D. told Sri Aurobindo, Sailen and Abinash Bhattacharya about this bonanza their valued prisoner had granted them, the three did not believe it. Writes

Abinash Bhattacharya (they were on their way from the Magistrate's court to the Alipore Central Jail):

As directed by the Police we three had just boarded a horse-drawn carriage when, infiltrating the police force and the huge crowd my younger brother Upendra reached us and throwing a daily newspaper near us walked away quietly. He was then twelve or thirteen years of age. We read the paper and realised that Barin having made a confessional statement was a fact. All Aurobindo Babu said was, "Had Barin grown crazy?"¹¹

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

References and Notes

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2. *The Statesman*, Kolkata, 13 May 1908.
3. *Terrorism in Bengal* Vol. 1, p. 24; Collected & Edited by Amiya K. Samanta, Director, Intelligence Branch, Government of West Bengal. 1995.
4. *Agniyuger Agnikatha* (Bengali); Collected & Edited by Ansuman Bandopadhyay; Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, Pondicherry, and *The Statesman*, 19 June 1908.
5. *The Statesman*, 11 May 1908.
6. *Terrorism in Bengal*, Vol. 1.
7. Sri Aurobindo: *Writings in Bengali*; SABCL, Vol. 4, p. 264.
8. A. G. Noorani: *Indian Political Trials 1775-1947*; Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
9. *Terrorism in Bengal*, Vol. 1.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Abinash Bhattacharya: "Aurobindo"; originally published in *Galpa Bharati*, Kolkata.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN — NOBLE AND RESOLUTE

(Continued from the issue of March 2015)

11. Lincoln's crises in the first year of his Presidency

ON the first day of his Presidency the greatest burden that fell on Lincoln's shoulders was dealing with the secession of the Southern states. The Southerners further condemned his address as a declaration of hostilities. Lincoln scholar Harry V. Jaffa wrote: "No political leader in all human history began his office in the midst of more profound difficulties."¹

Amongst the first documents Lincoln read on 5 March 1860 was a severe military crisis; a report from Major Robert Anderson, commander of the U.S. troops holding Fort Sumter, South Carolina — one of a string of forts built along the American coast after the War of 1812, to protect the coast against attack by European navies. The fort was under a siege with less than a six-week supply of food left and if it wasn't re-supplied urgently, then Anderson would be forced to surrender to the surrounding rebels. Further, to hold Sumter would require reinforcements of 25,000 men. General Scott, Chief of the Army, felt that it was too late to save Sumter and Seward, too, was emphatic in wanting to evacuate. The situation was so inflammable that any aggressive act would put an end to the ideal of Unionism and provoke a civil war. In acute anxiety he consulted his Cabinet and the senior-most officers of the army and navy. The majority felt it was best to surrender Sumter in order to prevent a civil war. This was distressing news to Lincoln for he had publicly said that he would defend Sumter and was even resoundingly cheered for it. Sumter symbolised the Union and any evacuation could demoralise many who wanted that Lincoln be tough with the rebels and protect federal property as promised earlier. The pressure on Lincoln was unbearable, for the fate of the nation hinged on his decision. His personal secretaries observed that his mental stress was acute. Finally he sent an emissary to South Carolina to get an exact field report. When the emissary reported that the South Carolinians had "no attachment to the Union", Lincoln realised surrendering Sumter would embolden the rebels to demand other forts. Acting cautiously he let the authorities in South Carolina know that he was provisioning the fort, as was his right but there would be no effort made to send troops or weapons unless the supply ships met with resistance. Lincoln's response to the crisis was brilliant and decisive. If he took no action to reinforce Fort Sumter, then he would be accused of weakness in the North. If he sent more troops or armaments to the

1. William W. Freeling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant*, Vol. 2, p. 514.

fort, then he would become the aggressor. Despite five cabinet members opposing the resupplying of Fort Sumter and only one in favour, Lincoln's iron hand decided to send supplies, but no military reinforcements. The Confederate government was now faced with the problem. If they allowed this attempt to peacefully re-supply Fort Sumter then their secession would lose credibility. If they fired on the supply ships, then they would be the aggressor. Lincoln would be gifted with a united North. The Confederates then decided they would not bow to federal authority and began bombarding the fort on 12 April. That evening the supply fleet appeared outside the bay, but heavy seas prevented them from supplying the fort. Fort Sumter fell on April 13, 1861, its food and ammunition nearly exhausted, to the superior power of the Rebels. The Confederates allowed Anderson and his men to board a boat that ferried them to the Union ships outside the harbour. They were greeted as heroes on their return to the North. The Civil War had begun.

Lincoln later confided to a friend that "of all the trials that I have had since I came here, none begin to compare with those I had between the inauguration and the fall of Fort Sumter. They were so great that could I have anticipated them, I would not have believed it possible to survive them."² Following Sumter, Seward ultimately admitted to his wife, "Executive force and vigour are rare qualities. The President is the best of us."³ Much earlier Lincoln's law partner had commented: "Lincoln is as firm as the base of the Rocky Mountains."⁴

Once the war broke out, French republicans supported the North as "defenders of right and humanity." In England, John Stuart Mill said, "Confederate success would be a victory for the powers of evil which would give courage to the enemies of progress and damp the spirits of its friends all over the civilised world." Conversely, some European monarchists and conservatives, due to vested interests, made no secret of their hope that the Union would fall. The majority opinion in Europe, though, supported Lincoln's view that the survival of democracy was at stake in the Civil War.⁵

Lincoln was in despair that his election was the cause of a calamity in the country. He remarked that the war was a supreme irony of his life: that he who sickened at the sight of blood, abhorred war and physical violence was caught in this tornado of blood, hate and destruction.⁶ His secretary John Nicolay said it was impossible to describe "the strain of intellect and the anguish of soul he endured."⁷

Lincoln called for volunteers to serve for three months in the army, determined to put down the rebellion. Lincoln's call for volunteers turned several states towards

2. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 340.

3. See Donald T. Phillips, *Lincoln on Leadership*, p. 30.

4. Donald M. Potter, *Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis*, p. 352.

5. See website: www.neh.gov (lecture by James M. McPherson).

6. See Stephen B. Oates, *Abraham Lincoln — The Man Behind the Myths*, p. 86.

7. Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 259.

the Confederacy. On 17 April, Virginia joined the rebel Confederates. By May 20, Arkansas, North Carolina and Tennessee also seceded, with Maryland, Missouri, and Kentucky contemplating to go out as well. For many tortuous months Lincoln was anxious that these three latter border states may also separate. Finally, in all, eleven states seceded.

It was one thing to call for volunteers, and another to get them to Washington. On April 19, riots broke out as troops heading to Washington marched through pro-secessionist Baltimore. Finally the regiment reached Washington but the Mayor of Baltimore and Governor of Maryland both wired the President not to route any more troops through Baltimore. Lincoln then asserted himself: "I have no desire to invade the South; but I must have troops to defend this Capital. Geographically it lies surrounded by the soil of Maryland . . . Our men are not moles, and can't dig under the earth; they are not birds, and can't fly through the air. There is no way but to march across, and that they must do. But in doing this there is no need of collision. Keep your rowdies in Baltimore and there will be no bloodshed. Go home and tell your people that if they will not attack us, we will not attack them; but if they do attack us, we will return it, and severely."⁸

There were reports that nearby rebel forces might strike and that the government may fall. Washington was in a panic as it was wedged between a secessionist Virginia and a hostile Maryland and the Sixth Massachusetts volunteer army had not yet arrived. On 23 April, Lincoln, fearful that troops from the North would not reach on time to save Washington, agonisingly exclaimed, "Why don't they come! Why don't they come!" On 24 April Lincoln gloomily announced, "I don't believe there is any North. The Seventh regiment [then reportedly *en route* to Washington from New York] is a myth." Fortunately, to Lincoln's delight and relief, the troops arrived next day, at long last.⁹

Lincoln then received reports that mobs intended to destroy rail tracks to prevent volunteers from reaching Washington. Reacting firmly Lincoln authorised the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus*. This meant that the military authorities could detain suspected secessionists indefinitely without judicial hearing. Chief Justice Roger Taney warned that the Chief Executive had acted unlawfully. Lincoln's response was that the laws of the nation were being resisted in nearly one-third of the States and affirmed that the Constitution was clear when it stated that it *could* be suspended in a "dangerous emergency", and this rebellion qualified as just such an emergency. However, unlike others, Lincoln would not use the term 'traitor' when talking about Southerners.

Now the problem arose of the possibility that Maryland, a slave state, might secede from the Union. Due to its geographical proximity to Washington it was critical

8. Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. 4, pp. 341-42.

9. See Harold Holzer, *Lincoln on War*, p. 91, and Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, pp. 232-34.

that Maryland should not fall into rebel hands. The Cabinet debated whether to arrest members of the Maryland legislature. Lincoln wisely decided that it would not be justifiable. To Lincoln's great relief Maryland never seceded.

Of equal importance to the Union was the slave state of Kentucky, with its Ohio River connection to the vital Mississippi. Lincoln's leadership qualities came to the fore when he used the politics of restraint to keep that state within the Union.

At the outbreak of the war Lincoln established a naval blockade of the Confederate coast. The blockade remained throughout the war and the rebels were unable to export their cotton from their large plantations to the British mills. This meant that millions of dollars which could have funded the Confederate war effort were lost.

On July 4, 1861, Lincoln delivered his Independence Day message. Earlier, Lincoln read this message to historian John L. Motley. Motley observed, Lincoln was "a man of the most extraordinary consciousness."¹⁰

12. A personal tragedy and Civil War Battles

The war began in earnest on July 21, 1861 at the Battle of Bull Run, just 25 miles from Washington. Lincoln was under pressure to quickly end the rebellion although his troops were not yet adequately trained. At the battle's climax the Virginia Confederate cavalry sent the Union army into retreat. Retreat quickly transformed into mindless rout as the Northern troops rushed head-long back to Washington. The Battle of Bull Run convinced Lincoln that the Civil War would be a long and costly affair.¹¹

The reverse at Bull Run was labelled as a national disgrace by the newspapers and the politicians. The responsibility fell on Lincoln and Senator Lyman Trumbull accused Lincoln of not being decisive enough and calling him a weak and irresolute President. Lincoln's confidence was badly shaken.¹² Realising that the retreat was due to disorder and breaking of ranks Lincoln called for the army to be constantly drilled, disciplined and instructed. Besides, the army grew from 16,000 in March to 670,000 in December.

Lincoln then visited his troops under the command of William T. Sherman and motivated them with his unequivocal support: "that as President, he was commander-in-chief; that he was resolved that the soldiers should have everything that the law allowed; and he called on one and all to appeal to him personally in case they were wronged."¹³

10. Richard N. Current, *Lincoln and the First Shot*, pp. 52-53.

11. See websites: www.civilwar.org, www.history.com and www.eyewitnesstohistory.com

12. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, pp. 256-57.

13. See Don Edward Fehrenbacher, Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 403.

Lincoln studied late into the night, perusing books on the science and strategy of military warfare to get a deeper understanding on how to command an army and then discussed with his Generals and suggested strategies.

There was also the danger of Britain favouring the Confederacy, for a divided U.S. would weaken its commercial clout, enabling mighty industrial Britain to have a monopoly of the world's markets. Further, British interests were hurt by the blockade of Southern cotton plantations as it meant loss of jobs for thousands of textile workers. Thus the Confederacy was hoping that Britain would officially support their independence.

Indeed, two Southern officials had embarked on a diplomatic mission to plead for recognition and aid from France and Britain. On 8 November 1861 a US warship intercepted a British Steamer 'Trent' carrying these two officials and removed these officials despite the ship's captain protesting that the men were under the protection of the English flag. This breach of international law provoked a diplomatic row and a war with Britain appeared imminent for about seven weeks. Though Lincoln and Seward resolved the crisis it was a particularly stressful period for Lincoln as he could not win the Civil War if Britain had allied with the Confederates.

On 20 February 1862, Lincoln's favourite son, Willie, died. According to Mary's seamstress Elizabeth Keckley, Lincoln "buried his head in his hands, and his tall frame was convulsed with emotion." Though Keckley had observed Lincoln more intimately than most, she "did not dream that his rugged nature could be so moved." Lincoln then burst into John Nicolay's office. "Well, Nicolay," he said, "my boy is gone — he is actually gone!" He began to sob.¹⁴ Many of Lincoln's colleagues were so touched by Lincoln's suffering that even the discourteous General McClellan sent a note expressing his sorrow and thanking Lincoln for standing by him. Mary suffered a nervous breakdown and a stunned Lincoln had the added burden to care for her for several months. Willie's death left a permanent emotional scar on Lincoln and Mary.

In April 1862, the Confederates attacked the Union forces under Ulysses S. Grant at Tennessee in what is known as the Battle of Shiloh. It was the second great battle of the American Civil War and both sides suffered heavy losses, with more than 23,000 total casualties. The Civil War would indeed be a prolonged grinding affair.¹⁵

In end August 1862, Confederate General Robert E. Lee won an important victory against the Union army twice the size of his own at the Second Battle of Bull Run inflicting almost 14,000 Union fatalities against 9000 for the Confederates. The Union morale in the army and the public sank to new depths. A disheartened Lincoln gloomily told his secretary, John Hay, "Well John, we are whipped again."¹⁶

14. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 419.

15. See website: www.americanhistory.about.com

16. Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 315.

Pressing his advantage after the Second Bull Run, Lee invaded the Union state of Maryland, for a victory in a Union state might influence the British to demand a truce to end the war and guarantee Confederate independence. On September 17, 1862, both armies faced each other near Antietam creek, the first battle of the American Civil War to be fought on northern soil. Several Cabinet Secretaries wanted Lincoln to relieve the field commander Gen. McClellan, for he was not only a Democrat but had a history of being very hesitant to confront the enemy. Edward Bates observed at a meeting that Lincoln seemed so upset with the criticism that he appeared “almost ready to hang himself”.¹⁷ Lincoln recognised that despite McClellan’s shortcomings the troops were devoted to McClellan and he had the ability to train, organise and discipline them. At this crucial hour Lincoln decided not to give the command to a new commander and encouraged McClellan to save the country, aware that if McClellan failed it would be a national calamity that the Union may never forgive him for. Although outnumbered two-to-one, Lee committed his entire force. McClellan was able to check the Confederate incursion but was so cautious that he kept one corps in reserve in the event he had to retreat. Had he thrown that into the battle he would have gravely crippled Lee’s army. The battle remains the bloodiest single day in American history, with more than 22,000 casualties. Though he had gained a great tactical victory he made another grave blunder by not pursuing and destroying Lee’s retreating wounded army. Lincoln was aghast that McClellan had allowed Lee’s tired and depleted army to escape. It was one of the great blunders of the Civil War and pained Lincoln immensely.

Lincoln then asked McClellan to invade Virginia to fight Lee but he took his time and kept giving excuses. Finally, Lincoln removed the hesitant McClellan from command and appointed Ambrose Burnside to his post. Lincoln then said of McClellan, “He is an admirable engineer but seems to have a special talent for a stationary engine.”¹⁸

The Union victory at Antietam was crucial to Lincoln, and the British Government, which was seriously considering recognising the Confederate States, now had doubts about Southern dominance and decided to postpone the recognition.¹⁹

As the war wore on, Lincoln at times felt a force was moving him as if he was an instrument, sensing a hand of God in the conflict. A personal statement of 2 September 1862 reveals his openness, sincerity and lack of self-righteousness:

The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance to the will of God. Both may be, and one must be wrong. God can not be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present Civil War it is quite

17. Website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org

18. Frank J. Williams, Harold Holzer, John Y. Simon, *Judging Lincoln*, p. 103.

19. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 321.

possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party. I am almost ready to say this is probably true — that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By his mere quiet power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun He could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds.²⁰

Elsewhere he said: "I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day."²¹

On December 13, 1862, contrary to Lincoln's advice, Gen. Ambrose Burnside led the largest concentration of troops in any Civil War battle with more than 120,000 troops to Fredericksburg where Gen. Lee's 80,000-strong Confederate Army waited on heavily fortified high ground. Caught in a trap the Union suffered one of its worst defeats sustaining more than 13,000 casualties, more than twice those of Lee. Lincoln broke down in tears: "Oh those men! Those men over there!"²² For days after this loss, Lincoln battled with depression. Matters became worse when a section of the Cabinet demanded Seward's removal and he in turn offered his resignation. But Lincoln did not want him to go. He confided to a friend: "Anyway the senators really wished to get rid of me and I am sometimes half disposed to gratify them. We are now on the brink of destruction. It appears to me the Almighty is against us, and I can hardly see a ray of hope."²³ Publicly Lincoln faced harsh criticism, one Senator stating that Lincoln "had neither dignity, order, nor firmness."²⁴

13. Lincoln's emancipation of slavery

After a string of Union defeats, the tactical victory at Antietam provided Lincoln the political cover he needed to issue his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in which he warned the Confederates that if the rebellion did not cease by 1 January 1863 the proclamation act would come into effect that would abolish slavery from all rebel states. Lincoln realised that the war could not be won through forbearance to the Confederates. Liberating the slaves had now become the paramount concern. Indeed, two months earlier he told Seward and Naval Secretary Gideon Welles that after much thought he had decided that "we must free the slaves or be ourselves subdued."²⁵

20. James Tackach, *Lincoln's Moral Vision*, p. 96.

21. *Lincoln Observed: The Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks* edited by Michael Burlingame, p. 210.

22. Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 327.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 328.

24. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 489.

25. Don Edward Fehrenbacher, Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 468.

In the following state by-elections in autumn 1862 Lincoln faced a crushing blow as the North's five most populous states, converse to the 1860 Presidential elections, voted for the Democrats. The emancipation of the slaves in rebel-held territory was abhorrent to many Northern voters, particularly in the industrial states where competition among immigrants for jobs could be fierce. Lincoln accepted that the preliminary Proclamation was the cause of the defeat but refused to retract a single word from it.²⁶

On January 1, 1863 Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation Act that freed slaves in the Confederate States. The proclamation declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free." The proclamation was shocking and revolutionary in scope for in a single stroke it superceded legislation on slavery and property rights that was prevalent in eleven states for seven decades. The Emancipation Proclamation had its limitations for it initially applied only to states that had seceded from the Union, leaving slavery untouched in the loyal border states. Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not end slavery in the nation — for it could come into effect only if the Union won the war — it captured the hearts and imagination of millions of Americans and fundamentally transformed the character of the war i.e. the Civil War now became a war to free the slaves. It added moral force to the Union cause and strengthened the Union militarily for it allowed it to recruit black troops. The Emancipation Proclamation has assumed a place among the great documents of human freedom and as a milestone along the road to abolition of slavery.²⁷ Lincoln observed, "If my name ever goes into history, it will be for this act, and my whole soul is in it."²⁸ He told his friend Joshua Speed, "I believe that in this measure . . . my fondest hopes will be realised."²⁹ The Act also perhaps emancipated Lincoln personally and morally, for human bondage, since a very early age, struck a discordant note in him especially after he saw chained Negroes being traded like animals. Unfortunately this Act was controversial as thousands of Democrats revolted, accusing Lincoln to be a radical abolitionist dictator.

Lincoln's attitude towards blacks and slavery further evolved over time. One must remember that racial superiority was deep-rooted and pervasive, even amongst the anti-slavery activists — the Radicals and Abolitionists. Lincoln always hated the institution of slavery and as a young boy had heard his father denounce human bondage. He realised that it was morally wrong but as there was an acute racial prejudice he was cautious what he expressed, for any outspokenness on this issue

26. See Stephen B. Oates, *Abraham Lincoln — The Man Behind the Myths*, p. 108 and website: www.claremont.org

27. See website: www.archives.gov

28. Harold Holzer and Sarah Vaughn Gabbard, *Lincoln and Freedom: Slavery, Emancipation, and the Thirteenth Amendment*, p. 74.

29. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 501.

would have effectively terminated his political career besides being assailed and reviled by most of the Whites. Lincoln had to be practical and work within the system, since public opinion was against political rights for the Blacks and the time was not yet ripe to touch upon this delicate issue. On the other hand, the Abolitionists wanted an immediate emancipation of the Blacks but Lincoln did not agree with their aggressive tactics for they were too uncompromising and obsessed in condemning the Southerners. Lincoln believed that you won people on your side through “persuasion, kind, unassuming persuasion,” making friends with them, appealing to their reason, gently telling them that they were only hurting themselves by their follies. For it was “an old true maxim”, Lincoln contended, “that a drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall.” But if you assailed, damned, and vilified the misled, they would shut you off, lash back thereby delaying emancipation by decades. He believed that the Founding Fathers too had expected slavery to naturally die out. Why else had they outlawed the international slave trade and excluded slavery from the old Northwest territories? he argued.³⁰ The first step, Lincoln felt, was to stop the expansion of slavery, before one could eradicate it altogether.

As a young adult, Lincoln had seen twelve slaves chained together on a boat, torn away from their families and friends, being taken to the far south. The more he saw the image the more he brooded over their fate. Ironically, he was fascinated that though they were being sold to slavery — where the ruthless lash of the master can be terrifying — they seemed happier than anybody on board; singing, dancing, joking and playing cards. The sight of those chained Negroes so troubled him that years later he declared that the spectacle recurrently perturbed him. He said that Slavery “had the power of making him miserable.”³¹ In 1848 he saw the infamous “Georgia pen” where droves of Negroes were collected, temporarily kept in stables, and finally taken to Southern markets like animals. The sight deeply offended him and he resolved to do something about it. In 1849, Lincoln informed the House that he would introduce a bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia — something revolutionary in those days — but due to the explosive situation his colleagues dissuaded him. Further, he pursued a policy of equal opportunity for he felt free labour as opposed to coercion under slavery, would economically produce far more.

The economic organisation in the ‘North’ was ‘free labour’ of small farmers, artisans and waged workers, whilst in the ‘South’ the majority were the same ‘free labour’ but it was controlled by the owners of the slave-plantations. With large-scale cotton farming to cater to the English mills, the influential Southern planters not only wanted more slaves but also more land for the ever growing demand for raw cotton in England. They got some land when the US Government bought Florida

30. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 38 and See Stephen B. Oates, *Abraham Lincoln — The Man Behind the Myths*, p. 115.

31. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 60.

from Spain and Louisiana from France. They also grabbed land from the Red Indians, driving them further west, and from Mexico through the war. But now their insatiable appetite wanted further land. This would mean expansion of slavery, which Lincoln was strongly opposed to.³²

In 1854, the Democrats brought in the Kansas-Nebraska Act which allowed the Southerners to take slavery into Nebraska and Kansas. In effect, this northern region which was free of slavery would now be open to a pro-slavery invasion of the Southerners. It was feared that the plantation owners who then had influence with the Presidency, Congress and the Supreme Court would grab the whole of the West.³³

Lincoln was stunned and most upset about the Act as it had gone against the very grain of the Founding Fathers' statement that "all men are created equal". With this Act it was obvious that slavery was being allowed to grow and expand. "I hate . . . the monstrous injustice of slavery," he said in his famous Peoria speech of 1854. "I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world, enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites."³⁴ As the Whig party, for which Lincoln had worked all his political life, had refused to protest against the Act, Lincoln joined other anti-Nebraska leaders to launch the Republican Party in 1856, where Lincoln was asked to give a keynote address. He spoke extempore and had the audience so spellbound that even journalists forgot to take notes for they got so absorbed and entranced. As a result no script was ever recorded and it was referred to as the "Lost Speech". When Lincoln concluded his speech the audience cheered him repeatedly. Thus the Republican Party was born and the Whig party was dead. Lincoln became a Republican leader and worked to have the party focus on opposition to the expansion of slavery.

In 1854, about a month after the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Lincoln ferociously protected the idea of free labour and the abolishment of slavery. He wrote:

Equality in society alike beats inequality, whether the latter be of the British aristocratic sort or of the domestic slavery sort.

We know Southern men declare that their slaves are better off than hired labourers amongst us. How little they know whereof they speak! There is no permanent class of hired labourers amongst us. Twenty-five years ago I was a hired labourer. The hired labourer of yesterday labours on his own account to-day, and will hire others to labour for him to-morrow.

32. See Chris Harman, *A People's History of the World*, p. 346.

33. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, pp. 112-13 and See Chris Harman, *A People's History of the World*, pp. 347-48.

34. Website: www.neh.gov (lecture by James M. McPherson)

Advancement — improvement in condition — is the order of things in a society of equals. As labour is the common burden of our race, so the effort of some to shift their share of the burden on to the shoulders of others is the great durable curse of the race.

Free labour has the inspiration of hope; pure slavery has no hope. The power of hope upon human exertion and happiness is wonderful. The slave whom you cannot drive with the lash to break seventy-five pounds of hemp in a day, if you will task him to break a hundred, and promise him pay for all he does over, he will break you a hundred and fifty. You have substituted hope for the rod.³⁵

Indeed, slavery trapped the blacks into poverty, illiteracy and ill-health with no opportunity for upward mobility. The Southern economy favoured the few rich planters but prevented the creation of a sizable middle class. Unlike other antislavery orators, Lincoln did not condemn the people from the Southern states for he understood slavery had become deeply entrenched in their system. “They are just what we would be in their situation”, he said.³⁶

In a passage addressed to the reformers he had observed that it was the nature of man that when told that he should be “shunned and despised”, and condemned as the author “of all the vice and misery and crime in the land”, to “retreat within himself, close all avenues to his head and heart”. Though the cause be “naked truth itself, transformed to the heaviest lance, harder than steel,” the sanctimonious reformer could no more pierce the heart of the drinker or the slave owner than “penetrate the hard shell of a tortoise with a rye straw. Such is man, and so *must* he be understood by those who would lead him.” In order to “win a man to your cause,” Lincoln explained, you must first reach his heart, “the great high road to his reason.” This, he concluded, was the only road to victory — to that glorious day “when there shall be neither a slave nor a drunkard on the earth.”³⁷

In 1857, the Supreme Court, influenced by the South, handed down the notorious Dred Scott decision which decreed that Negroes were inferior beings who were not US citizens and that the Constitution was only a whites-only charter. Lincoln was devastated by this declaration.³⁸ In 1859, he stated: “This is a world of compensations; and he who would be no slave, must consent to have no slave. Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves; and, under a just God, can not long retain it.”³⁹

35. Website: www.historytools.org (By D. Voelker, Source: *Speeches & Letters of Abraham Lincoln*).

36. Website: www.nps.gov

37. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 168.

38. See Stephen B. Oates, *Abraham Lincoln — The Man Behind the Myths*, pp. 69-70.

39. Roy P. Basler, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (Website: showcase.netins.net).

After the declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln, in March 1863, appointed Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas to install a refugee programme. The able-bodied black refugees were absorbed in the army, in segregated outfits under white officers, and the rest were either employed as military labourers or hired on farms or plantations for wages determined by the government. Prior to the Emancipation Proclamation Lincoln recognised that Whites and Blacks living side by side was wholly unacceptable to the white population; and thus accepted the alternate proposal of colonisation of former slaves, i.e. after freeing the slaves they were to be sent to colonies like Haiti etc. where they could start afresh. However, Lincoln now realised that the Thomas refugee programme was a more viable solution to racial adjustment. As and when Union armies occupied rebel territories, slaves were liberated and absorbed in Thomas's programme.⁴⁰

In their quest for freedom many slaves who had access to Union lines abandoned the Confederate plantations and crossed over to the Union. The induction of black men into the Union Army and Navy, enabled the liberated to become liberators. Lincoln believed that the blacks would make good troops and they could soon end the war in favour of the Union. Almost 200,000 blacks, a majority of them emancipated slaves, were to fight for the Union. The Confederates threatened to execute any black found in Union uniforms and even white officers leading black troops. On July 30, 1863 Lincoln issued a retaliatory order that for every Union soldier killed in violation of the laws of war, he would reciprocate by executing a rebel prisoner. He cared for his troops and in order to save them he could be ruthless. It had its effect, for the Confederates never really carried out this threat. Later, Lincoln reportedly shied away from this "eye-for-an-eye" approach, so it seems it was more of a preemptive move. He later said, "I can't take men out and kill them in cold blood for what was done by others."⁴¹

In a letter Lincoln admits that more than his own personal will it was the play of forces that led to the abolishment of slavery, an event he did not foresee in his lifetime: "In telling this tale [on the emancipation of slaves] I attempt no compliment to my own sagacity. I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me. Now, at the end of three years' struggle the nation's condition is not what either party, or any man devised, or expected. God alone can claim it."⁴²

Lincoln was blessed with an intuitive sense and his entire Presidency had been a tale of patience and restraint, waiting for the right moment to make the critical decision, not too soon or too late. If the proclamation had been made a few months earlier the American public would not have accepted it as the general mood of the Northerners was to preserve the Union and they would have not gone to war just to abolish slavery.

40. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, pp. 340-42.

41. See *ibid.*, pp. 356-57.

42. Website: www.lettersofnote.com

On 10 August 1863 the most revered Black leader of the time, Frederick Douglass, met Lincoln. Whilst admitting that the blacks had come to admire and even love Lincoln, he protested that blacks in the army deserved the same pay and promotion avenues as the whites. Lincoln accepted that there was discrimination but realistically pointed out that there was already a great opposition amongst the whites to enlist blacks and many did not want to fight alongside them and so he had to accommodate their prejudice. He however assuaged Douglass' feelings by stating, "I assure you, Douglass, that in the end they shall have the same pay as white soldiers."⁴³ Before they parted Lincoln mentioned about a fiery speech of Douglass where he had lambasted the President for a "tardy, hesitating and vacillating policy". Whilst Lincoln accepted that there may have been measured deliberation on larger issues he disputed the allegation of vacillation maintaining, "I think it cannot be shown that when I have once taken a position, I have ever retreated from it."⁴⁴ Douglass left the White House with a deep respect for Lincoln stating that he was "the first great man that I talked with in the United States freely," and later added, "who in no single instance reminded me of the difference between himself and myself, of the difference of colour."⁴⁵

Nearly a year later, Douglass returned to the White House at the President's request. Douglass was impressed that President Lincoln prolonged their conversation despite the arrival of Connecticut Governor William A. Buckingham. Douglass recalled: "Mr. Lincoln said, 'Tell Governor Buckingham to wait, for I want to have a long talk with my friend Frederick Douglass.'" Douglass commented: "This was probably the first time in the history of this Republic when its chief magistrate found occasion or disposition to exercise such an act of impartiality between persons so widely different in their positions and supposed claims upon his attention. From the manner of the governor, when he was finally admitted, I inferred that he was as well satisfied with what Mr. Lincoln had done, or had omitted to do, as I was."⁴⁶

Douglass's life story is of interest. He was owned by several cruel slave owners. The wife of the second slave master was kind enough to teach him how to read. When the master found this out he warned his wife that this was unsafe as he will become unfit to be a slave and this would make him unhappy. Learning to read became a curse rather than a blessing to young Douglass and he wished to be dead or an animal. The slaves had been long degraded by total abolition of the family circle, living in artificial darkness and deliberately kept illiterate and ignorant. Only the remote hope of escaping to freedom kept Douglass alive. Six years passed before he got an opportunity to escape and during this time he secretly taught himself to write. After his escape he became a lecturer with an antislavery society. His

43. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 356.

44. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 552.

45. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, p. 357.

46. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, pp. 349-350.

subsequent autobiography made him a celebrity in antislavery circles, allowing him to edit his own monthly paper with the object and hope of securing a better future for blacks in America. He became an eloquent orator and a fine writer setting the precedent that a literate black could intellectually match the white European immigrant.⁴⁷ Indeed, amongst the blacks who were long free there were many who were intelligent and advanced in arts and knowledge.

By 1864 Lincoln approved limited suffrage (right to vote) in Louisiana for “the very intelligent” blacks, especially those “who have fought gallantly in our ranks”. In an age of acute racial prejudice that since continued for more than hundred years and even exists today in several forms, it was a revolutionary step, decades ahead of its time.⁴⁸

On 31 January 1865 the thirteenth amendment to abolish slavery was passed in the House, attaining the required two-thirds majority. Lincoln feared that the Emancipation Proclamation may later get rescinded on grounds of illegal use of power and thus sought the constitutional amendment. He campaigned and negotiated with Congressmen to get their votes. In celebration, the blacks gathered together and sang out of joy. Once the amendment was ratified, slavery would be abolished irrevocably and entirely in America.⁴⁹ Thereafter, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which like the Thirteenth were a direct consequence of the war, granted equal civil and political rights to African-Americans. Without the Civil War the United States would have developed into an even more racially divided society in the 20th and 21st centuries.⁵⁰

It is interesting to note that William Johnson, a black, worked for Lincoln as his barber and bootblack before accompanying him to Washington. However, there was antagonism toward Johnson from the existing White House staff, yet Lincoln supported him and sought other employment for him, attesting that he was “honest, faithful, sober, industrious and handy as a servant.” In a letter to Gideon Welles, the President wrote that “The difference of colour between him and other servants is the cause of our separation.” Lincoln successfully sought a position for Johnson in the Treasury Department. Johnson, however, continued to spend mornings in the service to the President. When Johnson died in 1864, Lincoln used his own funds for Johnson’s funeral costs.⁵¹ Curiously Mary Lincoln’s seamstress and confidante, Elizabeth Keckley, was a former slave.

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

47. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 331.

48. See Stephen B. Oates, *Abraham Lincoln — The Man Behind the Myths*, p. 143.

49. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, pp. 405-06.

50. See website: www.neh.gov (lecture by James M. McPherson)

51. See website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org

SAVITRI: THE YOGA OF TRANSFORMATION

A divine life in a divine body is the formula of the ideal that we envisage.¹
[Here lies] the greatness of the work to be done and of the splendour of the
victory to come.²

I

Transformation, its need:

Regarding the need of transformation for this earthly life and its evolutionary goal, Sri Aurobindo writes:

If one can remain always in the higher consciousness, so much the better. But why does not one remain always there? Because the lower is still part of the nature and it pulls you down towards itself. If on the other hand the lower is transformed, it becomes of one kind with the higher and there is nothing lower to pull downward.³

Continuing his statement, Sri Aurobindo writes:

There is a higher consciousness of the true self, which is spiritual, but it is above; if one rises above into it, then one is free as long as one remains there, but if one comes down into or uses mind, vital or body — and if one keeps any connection with life, one has to do so, either to come down and act from the ordinary consciousness or else to be in the self but use mind, life and body, then the imperfections of these instruments have to be faced and mended — they can only be mended by transformation.⁴

Transformation, its meaning:

In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

By transformation I do not mean some change of the nature — I do not mean, for instance, sainthood or ethical perfection or yogic siddhis (like the Tantrik's) or a transcendental (*cinmaya*) body. I use transformation in a special sense, a change of consciousness radical and complete and of a certain specific kind which is so conceived as to bring about a strong and assured step forward in

the spiritual evolution of the being of a greater and higher kind and of a larger sweep and completeness than what took place when a mentalised being first appeared in a vital and material animal world. If anything short of that takes place or at least if a real beginning is not made on that basis, a fundamental progress towards this fulfilment, then my object is not accomplished. A partial realisation, something mixed and inconclusive, does not meet the demand I make on life and yoga.

Light of realisation is not the same thing as Descent. Realisation by itself does not necessarily transform the being as a whole; it may bring only an opening or heightening or widening of the consciousness at the top . . . One may have some light of realisation at the spiritual summit of the consciousness but the parts below remain what they were. . . . There must be a descent of the light not merely into the mind or part of it but into all the being down to the physical and below before a real transformation can take place.⁵

A light in the mind may spiritualise it; a light in the vital may purify and enlarge its movements, ‘but leave the body and the physical consciousness as it was’. It is only when a strong descent of the Divine Consciousness with its Light, Peace, Power comes into the parts of man’s being and nature that the process of transformation begins:

A strong Descent leaped down. A Might, a Flame,
 A Beauty half-visible with deathless eyes,
 A violent Ecstasy, a Sweetness dire,
 Enveloped him with its stupendous limbs
 And penetrated nerve and heart and brain
 That thrilled and fainted with the epiphany:
 His nature shuddered in the Unknown’s grasp. (Savitri: 81)

“Our yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure”,⁶ writes Sri Aurobindo. In both poetry and yoga he is not one to walk on a beaten track. From the beginning of his yoga sadhana, Sri Aurobindo had an occult vision of the source from where his spirit came:

He knew the source from which his spirit came (Savitri: 34)

In another very significant and illuminating verse the poet not only reveals the occult knowledge regarding the birth of the dual avatars, the birth of the Eternal here on this earth, but also the high mission which they came to fulfil. The verse may be divided into two parts; the first part gives the occult source of their advent:

For not for ourselves alone our spirits came
 Out of the veil of the Unmanifest,
 Out of the deep immense Unknowable
 Upon the ignorant breast of dubious earth,
 Into the ways of labouring, seeking men,
 Two fires that burn towards that parent Sun,
 Two rays that travel to the original Light. (*Savitri*: 720)

In this part of the verse the yogi-poet presents the highest height (the Unmanifest, the Unknowable) from where their spirits came on this ignorant earth. In the latter part of the verse Sri Aurobindo reveals with what high mission the dual avatars came which none before dared nor even conceived of it:

To lead man's soul towards truth and God we are born,
 To draw the chequered scheme of mortal life
 Into some semblance of the Immortal's plan,
 To shape it closer to an image of God,
 A little nearer to the Idea divine. (*Ibid.*: 720)

This is Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of Transformation, to shape human life closer to 'an image of God', to raise human life to gnostic being. The aim of this yoga is 'a divine life in a divine body'. This is the "the greatness of the work to be done and of the splendour of the victory to come"⁷ as the Mother commented.

The aim of this yoga is not any individual salvation but growth of man's "still animal humanity into a diviner race . . . by opening all the parts of the being to a conversion or transformation through the descent and working of the higher still concealed supramental principle."⁸ The aim here is "Manifestation and organisation of the whole life for the divine work".⁹ To Sri Aurobindo the Descent from 'Truth's revealing Vault' is more significant for earthly transformation. Very emphatically he states:

I am concerned with the earth, not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits. All other yogas regard this life as an illusion or a passing phase; the supramental yoga alone regards it as a thing created by the Divine for a progressive manifestation and takes the fulfilment of the life and the body for its object.¹⁰

And the rationale of the need and necessity for transformation finds poetic expression in the epic:

To mould humanity into God's own shape
 And lead this great blind struggling world to light
 Or a new world discover or create.
 Earth must transform herself and equal Heaven
 Or Heaven descend into earth's mortal state. (*Savitri*: 486)

The vast yogic dimension of *Savitri* has two distinctive features. Of these two, the first is the ascent of consciousness to its higher levels beyond the mind consciousness.

An arrow leaping through eternity
 Suddenly shot from the tense bow of Time,
 A ray returning to its parent sun. (*Savitri*: 79)

The ascent of consciousness is a two-stage movement. In the first stage the ascent shall be in the many levels of mind consciousness of the lower hemisphere, 'a scale and series in the Ignorance'. In the second stage there must be an ascension to higher planes of consciousness if going upwards is 'to be at the same time a transformation'. The second movement of this yoga is to bring down the divine Light, Power, Peace from the highest plane of consciousness, the supramental plane. But transformation begins only when the divine Powers are firmly fixed in the consciousness of the race and humanity as a whole, till the whole being can live in the Divine.

To free the self is but one radiant pace;
 Here to fulfil himself was God's desire. (*Savitri*: 312)

The Yoga of Transformation shall stand fulfilled when

Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
 The Spirit shall take up the human play,
 This earthly life become the life divine. (*Savitri*: 710)

Merely to have experiences of the higher consciousness will not change the nature.¹¹

II

Transformation, its basic conditions:

Practice of this yoga is a very difficult proposition. One has to ascend to summit consciousness, realise divinity 'in the unfolding process of the Self'. Union with the Divine must be the 'master motive' of the sadhak. In every thought, in each feeling and sensation the Divine must be the sole pre-occupation of one's life, that one cannot live without the Divine. The yoga must be a conscious collaboration of the sadhak with the evolutionary process of Nature to evolve a being beyond the being of man, to 'awake and will', a willed mutation alone can hasten the next evolutionary stage of the gnostic being. This requires certain preparations of the adhar, a constant, vigilant and strenuous preparation of the base and its self-perfecting, then only the first movement of this yoga *i.e.* union with the Divine can be realised. Without this union, transformation is unthinkable, even a small step along the path of transformation cannot be taken. One can begin with a constant rejection and throwing out, Katharsis, of all that is not the Truth of the Divine. All interferences, resistances from the lower nature that would falsify the truth of higher action must be rendered powerless.

In the texture of our bound humanity
 He felt the stark resistance huge and dumb
 Of our inconscient and unseeing base,
 The stubborn mute rejection in life's depths,
 The ignorant No in the origin of things.
 A veiled collaboration with the Night (Savitri: 317)

The practitioner of this yoga must

Rescue the preamble and the saving clause
 Of the dark Agreement by which all is ruled
 That rises from material Nature's sleep
 To clothe the Everlasting in new shapes. (Savitri: 75)

The resistances in the nature always rise again and again till one overcomes them; they must be faced with strength and patience.

Hard is it to persuade earth-nature's change;
 Mortality bears ill the eternal's touch:
 It fears the pure divine intolerance
 Of that assault of ether and of fire;

It murmurs at its sorrowless happiness,
 Almost with hate repels the light it brings;
 It trembles at its naked power of Truth (*Savitri*: 7)

And ‘inflicting on the heights the abysm’s law’,

Its thorns of fallen nature are the defence
 It turns against the saviour hands of Grace (*Ibid.*: 7)

In all the parts of the being — mind, vital and the body — there are tremendous resistances as they have arisen out of the inconscience of the material Nature and are difficult to get entirely free. Sri Aurobindo speaks of another resistance:

There is, moreover, the resistance of the Universal Nature which does not want the being to escape from the Ignorance into the Light. This may take the form of a vehement insistence in the continuation of the old movements, waves of them thrown on the mind and vital and body so that old ideas, impulses, desires, feelings, responses continue even after they are thrown out and rejected, and can return like an invading army from outside, until the whole nature, given to the Divine, refuses to admit them.¹²

Mind’s unexpected visitors from the Unseen
 Like far-off sails upon a lonely sea. (*Savitri*: 544)

To be egoless and desireless:

. . . a deliverance from the limiting and imprisoning ego is the first elementary step towards the being of the gnosis . . .¹³

The ego is by its nature a smallness of being; it brings contraction of the consciousness and with the contraction limitation of knowledge, disabling ignorance, — confinement and a diminution of power and by that diminution incapacity and weakness, — scission of oneness and by that scission disharmony and failure of sympathy and love and understanding, — inhibition or fragmentation of delight of being and by that fragmentation pain and sorrow. To recover what is lost we must break out of the walls of ego.¹⁴

Sri Aurobindo further writes:

The self of the man must be made one with the Self of all; the self of the finite individual must pour itself into the boundless finite and that cosmic spirit too

must be exceeded in the transcendent Infinite.

This cannot be done without an uncompromising abolition of the ego-sense at its very basis and source.¹⁵

A radical deliverance from egoism, ego-idea and ego-sense is needed if the aim of this yoga is to 'raise human into divine nature'.

In a talk on 8.2.1972 the Mother speaks on abolition of the ego, "but now that the birth of superhumanity is being prepared, the ego has to disappear and give way to the psychic being. . . ."¹⁶ In another talk on 2.4.1972 the Mother says, "We want a race that has no ego, that has in place of the ego the Divine Consciousness. It is that . . . which will allow the race to develop itself and the supramental being to take birth."¹⁷ Regarding the smallness of the ego, she writes, "For, to tell the truth, everybody is small, small, small, so small that there is not enough room to put any supramental in! It is so small that it is already quite filled up with all the ordinary little human movements. There must be a great widening to make room for the movements of the Supermind."¹⁸ A similar expression is given by Sri Aurobindo that widening or expansion of the consciousness is an effective method of abolition of the ego: "The supramental world has to be formed or created in us by the Divine Will as the result of a constant expansion and self-perfecting."¹⁹ Three are the major steps by which abolition of the ego is possible:

1. A constant giving of the whole consciousness into the being of the Supreme.
2. A constant inward movement of the consciousness, to draw back from the outer consciousness and awake within. The ingoing movement is indispensable. This will bring piercing of the veil between the outer and the inner being. Its effect is to break the egoistic crust. Then one is lost within to separate self.
3. There is yet another way, the supreme way, to absolve man of all his problems, carrying man to his deathless state through the Yoga of Transformation. This is the way of the 'sunlit path', way of the psychic. The psychic is the immortal element in man. If all the parts of the being, mind, life, body and its very cells offer themselves to the divine element within then much can be expected. When the outer parts of the being are centred round the psychic and are impressed and illumined by the psychic fire they 'sustain a bright metamorphosis'. The psychic takes up the governance of life. If the psychic is not achieved, nothing great can be achieved, no conquest of ignorance, no supramental transformation. When all the preliminary steps have been fulfilled, the soul soars high carrying the lower consciousness on its upward march:

Out of the chasm from which our nature rose.
The soul must soar sovereign above the form
And climb to summits beyond mind's half-sleep;

Our hearts we must inform with heavenly strength,
 Surprise the animal with the occult god.
 Then kindling the gold tongue of sacrifice,
 Calling the powers of a bright hemisphere,
 We shall shed the discredit of our mortal state,
 Make the abyss a road for Heaven's descent . . . (*Savitri*: 171-2)

Therefore Sri Aurobindo advocates:

Take the psychic attitude; follow the straight sunlit path, with the Divine openly or secretly upbearing you . . . do not insist on the hard, hampered, roundabout and difficult journey.²⁰

But we must develop a skill and habit to get things done by the Divine:

All can be done if the god-touch is there. (*Savitri*: 3)

Transformation, its governing laws:

The greatest discovery of Sri Aurobindo towards the fulfilment of his Yoga of Transformation — ‘a divine life in a divine body’, is his amazing discovery of spiritual evolution and ‘an ascending series of substance in the scale of Matter’. When the initial steps of purification and perfection have not only been achieved but also firmly established in the consciousness of the race and humanity, then the stage is set for transformation. But this will still be an initial step towards it. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given triple laws. These laws are,

1. Law of determinism in the being,
2. Law of ascending series of substance, and
3. Law of supramentalisation.

1. Law of determinism in the being:

Determinism is the occult law which states that the line of progression and activity is determined by the motive of the forces of consciousness from a particular plane on the will of the being. Consciousness has many levels and grades in the universal Nature as well as in the individual being.

Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution of consciousness explains the mystery of creation.

The word evolution carries with it in its intrinsic sense, in the idea at its root the necessity of a previous involution. . . . all that evolves already existed involved, . . . in the shell of material Nature.²¹

And

Evolution is the method by which it liberates itself; consciousness appears in what seems to be inconscient, and once having appeared is self-impelled to grow higher and higher and at the same time to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection.²²

The line of human progression and activity is thus determined by the motive of the forces of consciousness. Life energy from its own plane invaded Matter to awaken the involved consciousness; Mind Force invades living Matter. Life and Mind are to be looked upon not merely as a phenomenon in Matter but as energies with their own peculiar qualities, powers and workings. 'Evolution does not finish with mind, it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental.' This is the law of determinism by which man can ascend to divinity. But for this the lower determinism must get into harmony with the higher.

Many are the stages of ascending determinism; in the words of the Mother:

The physical existence has a determinism; the vital existence has a determinism; the mental existence has a determinism; the higher mental, the psychic have a determinism. And then the higher existences have determinisms — the supramental existence has a determinism. And the determinism of everyone comes from the combination of all these determinisms.²³

On the role of the law of determinism in transformation, the Mother writes:

If you do not make a higher determinism intervene, truly you can change nothing. That is the only way of changing your physical determinism. If you remain in your physical consciousness and want to change your determinism, you cannot . . .²⁴

2. Law of ascending series of substance in the scale of Matter:

Sri Aurobindo affirms that within the formula of the physical cosmos there is an ascending series of substance in the scale of Matter which takes us from 'the more to the less dense, from the less to the more subtle'. This gross, rigid and inert earth-matter is not all; there is an ascending series of substance in the scale of Matter. In the less dense or more ethereal and subtle state of substance, Matter is no longer

rigid and inert. When gross matter of our body ascends to subtler realms and the cells of the body open to the flame from the height, then the radiance in the cells gets joined with the eternal flame. This discovery of Sri Aurobindo is of great magnitude else the supreme adventure in Matter's field could never have reached its goal of attaining a divine body; a divine life in the very gross and seemingly undivine body can never be the aim of divinisation of earthly life as set before us by this yoga. Sri Aurobindo's yogic mission is directed towards the discovery of true Matter or 'pure spirit substance'. Each plane of consciousness has its own gradation of substance, and as one rises to higher planes of consciousness, one enters into subtler and subtler gradations of substance and goes beyond the formula of the material universe. The soul's expedition passes not only through the many planes of ascending consciousness but also entering subtler and subtler gradations of substance till the 'pure spirit substance' is reached to make a divine body. Thus the law of ascending determinism and the law of ascending series of substance in the scale of Matter together can achieve the initial goal of the Yoga of Transformation: 'a divine life in a divine body'.

3. Law of supramentalisation:

But the ultimate and permanent 'greatness of the work of transformation and its splendour of victory to come' can be attained by supramentalisation of the physical being and its consciousness. When the other two ways — the law of determinism and the law of ascending series of substance in the scale of Matter, have been sufficiently ingrained in the consciousness of the race and humanity, then man's gross material body and his physical consciousness get rarefied and become fit for the descent of supramental consciousness and supramental substance; then the 'formats of the primal Night' that inscribe the blueprint of our mortal life printed in 'inconscious's magic printing-house' are torn and shattered:

. . . in the Inconscious's magic printing-house
 Torn were the formats of the primal Night
 And shattered the stereotypes of Ignorance. (*Savitri*: 231)

There can be no transformation without supramentalisation.

Unless there is a change of consciousness [by the law of ascending determinism] and change of functionings [of the body by the law of ascending series of substance] it would be a very small gain.²⁵

Sri Aurobindo further writes:

To live in the Divine and have the divine Consciousness is itself immortality and to be able to divinise the body also and make it a fit instrument for divine works and divine life would be its material expression only.²⁶

A finer substance in a subtler mould
Embodies the divinity earth but dreams . . . (Savitri: 111)

Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother advise the sadhak of this yoga to take a psychic attitude and live in the psychic, for the psychic alone has a direct contact with the Divine. The psychic is the immortal element in man and if all the parts of the outer being are centred round the psychic and are illumined by the psychic fire, then much can be done. The psychic takes up the governance of life. If the psychic is not achieved, nothing great can be achieved, no conquest of ignorance, no supramental transformation.

III

“*Savitri* is a Mantra for the transformation of the world”²⁷ says the Mother. The poem takes up the process of transformation in two stages, one in the lower hemisphere of creation in Ignorance (*aparāprakriti*) as a mechanism for the working of evolutionary Ignorance, the second, the stage of transformation, is in the higher hemisphere, the divine Nature (*parāprakriti*) which is free from Ignorance and its consequences.

In the lower hemisphere the laws of determinism and the ascending series of substance in the scale of Matter play the major role. In this hemisphere of Ignorance the field covered is from emergence of life and its many layers of determinism, emergence of mind and its many grades till the Overmind determinism is reached. As we rise from one determinism to a higher determinism in the ‘World-Stair’, its substance becomes less dense and more subtle and ethereal.

Each plane of consciousness has its own gradation of substance; as one rises to higher planes of consciousness, one enters into subtler and subtler gradations of substance in the ladder. This is a ‘constructive principle’ necessitated by the intention of the Spirit to evolve in the world of Matter. Book Two (The Traveller of the Worlds) of *Savitri* sets forth the soul’s expedition not only through the many planes of ascending consciousness but also entering subtler and subtler gradations of substance in those planes. From gross earth-matter rise these planes and gradations.

As if from Matter’s plinth and viewless base
To a top as viewless, a carved sea of worlds
Climbing with foam-maned waves to the Supreme
Ascended towards breadths immeasurable . . . (Savitri: 98)

The principle of the ascending gradations of substance is a two-way system/arrangement. All the realms of consciousness involved in Matter shall emerge and material substance be moulded by them. Side by side the higher principles descend to uplift the lower gradation of material substance and its consciousness. Sri Aurobindo's epic is a poetical presentation of the growth of consciousness from plane to higher planes and ascension of material substance from subtle to subtler gradations.

At each pace of the journey marvellous
A new degree of wonder and of bliss,
A new rung formed in Being's mighty stair . . . (*Savitri: 277*)

As Sri Aurobindo says,

. . . the material creature must open to a wider and wider play of their activities in Matter, and all that is needed is a fit receptacle, medium, instrument.²⁸

In the lower hemisphere, the highest determinism is that of the Overmind,

A high vast peak whence Spirit could see the worlds (*Savitri: 297*)

Calm's wide epiphany, wisdom's mute home,
A lonely station of Omniscience,
A diving-board of the Eternal's power,
A white floor in the house of All-Delight. (*Ibid.*)

This is the region where ends the lower hemisphere, here the sadhak awaits 'the ascent beyond the world' and a 'descent the world to save'. 'The splendour of the spirit's realms' can be seen from this height.

Here was engendered the spiritual birth,
Here closed the finite's crawl to the Infinite.
A thousand roads leaped into Eternity
Or singing ran to meet God's veiless face. (*Savitri: 298*)

The Overmind determinism is the gateway to the higher hemisphere of Supramental determinism. The passage to the Supramental opens to those who have changed their nature by Overmind determinism, when 'Transcended was the human formula'.

The Supramental is 'the source of all things thought and done':

The fount of the creation and its works,
 It is the origin of all truth here,
 The sun-orb of mind's fragmentary rays,
 Infinity's heaven that spills the rain of God,
 The Immense that calls to man to expand the Spirit,
 The wide Aim that justifies his narrow attempts,
 A channel for the little he tastes of bliss. (Savitri: 705)

There is a 'fire on the apex of the worlds', 'a house of the Eternal's light', an infinite Truth, an absolute Power. And when this mightiness casts off its mask, 'Its greatness shall be felt shaping the world's course.'

But first high Truth must set her feet on earth
 And man aspire to the Eternal's light (Savitri: 708)

The descent of the Truth-Consciousness alone can transform;

Then shall the earth be touched by the Supreme (Savitri: 705)

A greater truth than earth's shall roof-in earth
 And shed its sunlight on the roads of mind (Savitri: 707)

and,

Creation's process change its antique front,
 An ignorant evolution's hierarchy
 Release the Wisdom chained below its base. (Savitri: 707-8)

and

Truth shall dictate their thought and speech and act, [and]
 They shall feel themselves lifted nearer to the sky,
 As if a little lower than the gods. (Savitri: 710)

Man's bodily substance, too, shall be transformed and divinised:

These senses of heavenly sense grow capable,
 The flesh and nerves of a strange ethereal joy
 And mortal bodies of immortality.
 A divine force shall flow through tissue and cell
 And take the charge of breath and speech and act

And all the thoughts shall be a glow of suns
And every feeling a celestial thrill. (*Savitri*: 710)

The supramental descent, thus, shall open earth to divinity and ‘common natures feel the wide uplift’. Such is the transformation Sri Aurobindo demands of his Supramental Yoga. When this transformation is achieved,

A Spirit gazed out upon destiny . . .
And cast into the heart of hurrying Time
A diamond light of the Eternal’s peace,
A crimson seed of God’s felicity;
A glance from the gaze fell of undying Love. (*Savitri*: 712)

And ‘Then from the unmanifest Spirit’

A wonderful face looked out with deathless eyes;
A hand was seen drawing the golden bars
That guard the imperishable secrecies.
A key turned in a mystic lock of Time. (*Ibid.*)

Here closes a new chapter in the cosmic history of the descent of Truth-Consciousness (the supramental) on earth from the higher hemisphere, and its efflorescence in our mortal state:

Over wide earth brooded the infinite bliss. (*Ibid.*)

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References

Note: All quotations from Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* are from CWSA, Vols. 33-34.

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2. The Mother, *Bulletin*, August 1984, p. 19.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1143.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 98.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
7. The Mother, *Bulletin*, August 1984, p. 19.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 548.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, CWSA, Vol. 35, p. 784.
10. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 22, p. 91.

11. *Ibid.*, Vol. 23, p. 892.
12. *Ibid.*, Vol. 24, p. 1616.
13. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23, p. 490.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 357-58.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 362-63.
16. The Mother, *Some Answers from the Mother*, CWM, 2nd ed., Vol. 16, p. 434.
17. The Mother, *Notes on the Way*, CWM, 2nd ed. Vol. 11, p. 307.
18. The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1956*, CWM, 2nd ed., Vol. 8, p. 205.
19. Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, CWSA, Vol. 15, p. 408.
20. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1362.
21. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 320.
22. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes*, CWSA, Vol. 36, p. 547.
23. The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1954*, CWM, 2nd ed., Vol. 6, p. 48.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
25. Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 24, p. 1234.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 1232.
27. The Mother to Udar (from *Collaboration* journal).
28. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21, p. 273.

Poetic Genius

Poetic genius — without which there cannot be any originality — is inborn, but it takes time to come out — the first work even of great poets is often unoriginal. That is in ordinary life. In Yoga poetic originality can come by an opening from within, even if it was not there before in such a way as to be available in this life.

22 March 1934

* * *

For poetry one must have a special inspiration or genius. With literary capacity one can write good verse only.

Genius usually means an inborn power which develops of itself. Talent and capacity are not genius, that can be acquired. But that is the ordinary rule, by Yoga one can manifest what is concealed in the being.

22 September 1934

Sri Aurobindo

(*Letters on Poetry and Art*, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 104)

JOURNEY TO INFINITY WITH 1, 2, 3 . . . STEPS

SAINTS, Sufis and Seers have proclaimed that the Divine invisibly dwells within every human being. Most of us are aware that each one of us has a noticeable psychological persona, a multi-faceted personality and diverse attributes. Each of us is also associated with a visible transient shadow. We all have something invisible, something noticeable and something visible. We seem to represent diversity; we are composed of an astounding number of attributes and propensities along with unimaginable potential as well as limitless possibilities.

Mankind may well be the master-creation intended by Nature, this assembling of the varied ingredients in a loosely-connected manner in order to work out innumerable possibilities and to determine desirable combinations in the evolutionary transmutation.

In evolution, mankind seems to be a paradoxical epitome fashioned by the Nature, and it is for the Divine to shape him further; it is as if man had been particularly made ready for the Divine to infuse life in his physical body, fill his heart with vital energy, charge his mind with mental power and all of these, collectively and integrally, integrated with his soul.

This seemingly barely-adequate functional instrument called man has, surprisingly, revealed glimpses of a virtually boundless scope. It can exist under dire circumstances and has uncanny instincts and the tenacity to survive in spite of its physically fragile and limited and mediocre capabilities. However, it has unique characteristics that can transform him, releasing in him the innate spiritual impetus, the emergence of the psychic being that supports the soul's seeking.

Is it not amazing how a seemingly simple creation contains such complexities of infinite possibilities!

The 'fire-bird', the Phoenix regenerating from its ashes for the attainment of immortality by a perpetual resurrection symbolises the Divine Will. It inspires, upholds and sustains the inborn human aspiration in man that seeks a something beyond its reach, that seems almost unattainable. The seemingly impossible, Immortality, becomes attainable through the process of perpetual resurrection. The phenomenon of the Phoenix's mythical periodic resurrection is deeply planted in humanity's psyche; it inspires us in our quest to belong, to progressively unite with the Supreme in His totality integrally.

Sri Aurobindo has revealed the Divine in his epic, *Savitri*: He is "One who is in us as our secret self". Thus, mankind's immortality is attained by an all-inclusive integral union with the Divine within.

For this to happen,

First, mankind has to integrally spiritualise itself through sincere and unconditional prayers, aspirations, sublimations and sadhana; focusing on the physical, vital, mental and subconscious constituents, it has to ascend to the Divine by corrective and evolutionary changes, progress and ultimately, achieve transformation

or

Second, the Divine has to descend into the human and enable a metamorphosis within mankind, either individually or collectively

or

Third, the ascending of a select section of mankind and the descending of the Divine happening together; the rate of progress would depend upon the readiness of humanity as a whole and the individuals involved.

Thus, the journey to the infinitely remote and seemingly impossible goal becomes merely 1,2,3 . . . steps in the spiritual odyssey, similar to the three steps of the Vamana Avatar of the Puranas.

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga says that "All Life is Yoga."

This simple expression implies that all the aspects and challenges of life are opportunities and steps in the sadhana. Our life's trials and tribulations are our opportunities for sublimation, to purify and uplift our mental, vital, physical and subconscious impulses. Thus, our perpetual holocaust enables us to progress integrally towards an all-encompassing spiritual transformation. This is our sacred journey to the Indwelling Divine. Our continuous and constantly renewed and reinforced self-offering resembles the recurring resurrection of the Phoenix from ashes.

The ascending spiritual journey of mankind is enabled and guided on the Sunlit Path charted by the teachings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo invites us not only to go within, aspire unreservedly and unflinchingly pursue the soul's innate quest; he also assures us of the great goal — the divine life upon evolutionary earth.

. . . Remember why thou cam'st:
Find out thy soul, recover thy hid self,
In silence seek God's meaning in thy depths,
Then mortal nature change to the divine.

Savitri (CWSA, p. 476)

Our aspiration transforms us; it becomes the burning incense for the Supramental New Dawn to arise within us.

We pray with utmost humility for the transformative union of our personal self with the indwelling Supreme Being.

Om Namo Bhagavate.

RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of March 2015)

XV

IN each of the three figures — Personification, Apostrophe and Invocation — we have growing degrees of complexity. In the first of these a somewhat abstract idea or the like is given human attributes; in the second, it is addressed directly; and in the third, it is also asked to do something. The last two, the address, can also be to beings, not only abstract ideas. An example now from our writer, from the same story:

Shall I not take thee, O Luilla, into those woods? Thou shalt pluck the flowers in the forests of night and death, thou shalt lay thy hands on the lion's mane.¹

The golden bird is not only addressing Luilla directly, it is also telling her what she will do.

It should be observed here that very few critics observe the difference between the two. Marlowe's famous "Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships" etc. has been called an apostrophe, but the discerning reader will notice that it is actually an invocation as Dr. Faustus asks Helen to "Make me immortal with a kiss." These finer distinctions, though, do not ordinarily matter much. It is only in a work of this kind that they should be pointed out.

Pathetic Fallacy is a modern figure, the term was invented by Ruskin. It has been included here because, after all, it is a species of personification. Ruskin says:

All violent feelings . . . produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would generally characterise as the "Pathetic Fallacy".²

Usually this term is applied to Poetry in which the poet imagines human reactions from objects of nature. There is a splendid succession of pathetic fallacies in the song by Tennyson "Come into the garden, Maud". Only four lines of the wonderful stanza are given here:

1. *Collected Plays and Stories*, CWSA, Vols. 3-4, p. 998.

2. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*.

The red rose cries, "She is near, she is near,"
 The white rose weeps, "She is late,"
 The larkspur listens, "I hear, I hear,"
 And the lily whispers, "I wait."³

Flowers are living things, but inanimate objects of Nature too can be endowed with feelings. This can be exemplified from the very first sentence of the story 'The Phantom Hour':

Sturge Maynard rose from the fireside and looked out on the blackish yellow blinding fog that swathed London in the dense folds of its amplitude.⁴

Incidentally it is the same fog as described by Eliot that literary critics went berserk about. He compares the fog with a cat in 8 lines.

Later in the story there are more examples. The hero hears the phantom chimes of a phantom clock and wonders:

. . . was it out of some past existence they challenged him, insistent and appealing, inviting him to remember some poignant hour of a form he had worn and discarded . . .⁵

Here it is the chimes of a clock (something not only inanimate but man-made) that is challenging, insisting, appealing and inviting.

The last figure in this group is Hyperbole. This is just an exaggerated way of saying a simple thing. Puttenham calls it "the over-reacher or the loud liar". Our writer is a highly economical writer and is not given to hyperbole. It is the opposite, the understatement, that he favours. A few examples however, are there:

. . . whole surroundings besieged by a brilliant atmosphere coruscating with violet lightnings.⁶

In the very next sentence he himself calls them "these extravagances" so one can be forgiven for calling them hyperboles.

All the figures chosen under this group have now been discussed. There is one however, that has not been mentioned — vision. In this figure the writer presents something as if he is really seeing it. It may be said that in the story 'The Phantom Hour' there are several visions seen by the hero (the phantom clock, the visions of

3. Williams, W. E. ed., *Tennyson Poems*, Penguin, p. 101.

4. *Collected Plays and Stories*, CWSA, Vols. 3-4, p. 953.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 956.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 953.

his previous life etc.) — these are really seen by him. The writer is not imagining them. They are real, corporeal visions, no figure of speech. An example of each will clarify the issue. There is Lamb's famous vision of Coleridge in his youth:

Come back into memory as thou wert in the day-spring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee, the dark pillar not yet turned — Samuel Taylor Coleridge — Logician, Metaphysician, Bard!⁷

This is imaginary vision. Lamb is not really seeing Coleridge. Sturge Maynard in the story really sees a scene:

Then it leaped on him — green grass, green trees, green-covered rocks, a green sea and on the sward a man . . .⁸

This is really seen by him. It cannot be called a figure of speech.

The figures of speech based on indirectness should now be taken up. Six figures of this group have been selected because all of these are to be found in our author: Irony, Dramatic irony, Innuendo, Sarcasm, Periphrasis, Euphemism and Allusion. All these are figures in which the direct statement is avoided. The writer hints at what he wants to say in an oblique manner. These are figures used more in prose than in poetry and are, even then, more plentiful in eloquent prose as in oratory than in discursive prose. There are many examples in the works we are reading.

Irony is a figure of speech in which the opposite is said of what is meant. The stock example is given, in all books of rhetoric, from Mark Antony's Forum speech. He is talking about Brutus:

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious
And Brutus is an honourable man.⁹

What he means is that Brutus is anything but honourable, but he does not say this directly. He repeats it five times in 19 lines. It is the cumulative effect that heightens the irony. These repetitions are what inflame the audience of Roman citizens.

(To be continued)

RATRI RAY

7. The sentence is in *Christ's Hospital*.

8. *Collected Plays and Stories*, CWSA, Vols. 3-4, p. 962.

9. *Julius Caesar*, III: ii: 99-100, in Craig, *op. cit.*, p. 834.

AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

(Continued from the issue of March 2015)

15. Shakespeare Stands Out Alone

I WAS introduced to William Shakespeare by my paternal grandmother. By the time I was eight I knew about ‘Amaladittan’ (Hamlet) who talked to a ‘Pisasu’ (ghost); ‘Ramyan’ (Romeo) who wanted to marry ‘Jolithai’ (Juliet); ‘Venice Vyapari’ (the Merchant of Venice) who wanted a pound of flesh (eiik!). When I was in my early teens, *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb became staple food for reading fiction. Whoever heard of Enid Blyton and Nancy Drew at that time? For me it was enough to remain lost in the tales retold with such effective simplicity and Puck became a friend to whom I returned often in my dreams:

Puck (or as he was sometimes called, Robin Goodfellow) was a shrewd and knavish sprite, that used to play comical pranks in the neighbouring villages; sometimes getting into the dairies and skimming the milk, sometimes plunging his light and airy form into the butter-churn, and while he was dancing his fantastic shape in the churn, in vain the dairymaid would labour to change her cream into butter: nor had the village swains any better success; whenever Puck chose to play his freaks in the brewing copper, the ale was sure to be spoiled. When a few good neighbours were met to drink some comfortable ale together, Puck would jump into the bowl of ale in the likeness of a roasted crab, and when some old goody was going to drink he would bob against her lips, and spill the ale over her withered chin; and presently after, when the same old dame was gravely seating herself to tell her neighbours a sad and melancholy story, Puck would slip her three-legged stool from under her, and down toppled the poor old woman, and then the old gossips would hold their sides and laugh at her, and swear they never wasted a merrier hour.

The Lambs were great “re-tellers”. These characters whom Puck irritated no end were not different from the friends and relations in my village home. So I never missed my Enid Blyton regulars like Mr. Pinkwhistle and Mr. Meddle who were staple intellectual food for my children when they were growing up. In any case, I had a Shakespeare-obsessed father at home with a shelf full of books on and by Shakespeare. I have inherited them and have had a wonderful life, often taking any one book at random and getting lost in it. Here is a tiny book from my Shakespeare shelf. It is my father’s, belonging to the days when he was a schoolteacher in Ceylon,

as he has signed it “K. R. Srinivasan”. It must be easily one hundred years old, the pages are gray and break at my touch but the binding holds them together. Probably he bought it at a second-hand book shop. It is a *Shakespeare Birthday Book*. The brief Preface has survived:

No single writer can furnish so many apt quotations for a Birthday Book as “the chief of all the poets”. Shakespeare’s language has entered into the very fibre of our English speech and people who perhaps never read a line of his works talk Shakespeare without knowing it. The wisdom and variety of sentiment expressed by the “myriad-minded” poet are not less widely recognised.

The rest of this volume is an array of sunny Shakespeare quotations, three days per page on the left: an identical but blank page on the right gives you a chance to add your own quotations for the birthday of the person whom you wish to greet. Occasionally my father has written down a quote on the blank side, usually these are parallel quotes from the Romantics. The handwriting of his college days is clear. Father as a young man was setting down inspirations for himself and this one, interestingly from Herrick, is set in the space for 15th August:

He lives, who lives to virtue: men, who cast
Their ends for pleasure, do not live, but last.

The Shakespeare quote for the same day is from ‘Venus and Adonis’:

Lo! Here the gentle lark, weary of rest
From his moist cabinet mounts up on high,
And wakes the morning.

I am sure in India itself there are thousands of such rare books hidden away somewhere as in my own small shelf. My only worry now is, “Who will care to receive these books and even turn their pages in this age of internet after my day is done?” But I shall not allow such thoughts to cloud the sheer joy of opening at random a book . . . aha, this is *The Secret History of Francis Bacon!* The superscription dated 7th September, 1942 has this:

To Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar for his extremely fair, unprejudiced and judicial review of *The Secret Shakespeare* from Alfred Dodd.

It all comes back to me. Dodd had argued in the book that Shakespeare was the founder of freemasonry and everything about the association is secretly detailed in the 1623 Folio of the bard’s plays. The fraternity of Masons was founded in

1723, which was the centenary of the Folio. This book on Bacon tries to argue that Shakespeare was the nom de plume of Francis Bacon! When our Professor (who was my father) mentioned it in our Honours class, we giggled. For we all knew the first few chapters of Bacon's *Essays* quite well — declamatory and moralistic; we memorised chunks of them to help us fill up our answer-papers in the examination. Far away and long ago? No! I remember the opening of 'Of Truth' in spite of the curtain of decades:

“What is Truth?” Said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer. Certainly there be that delight in giddiness; and count it a bondage to fix a belief; affecting free-will in thinking, as well as in acting. And though the sect of philosophers of that kind be gone, yet there remain certain discoursing wits which are of the same vein, though there be not so much blood in them as was in those of the ancients.

Did this writer create Benedick and Beatrice, Puck and Ariel? No! It was Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon for us and through the three years of the Honours course we went through several dramas as detailed texts and all of them as non-detailed with the poems thrown in. This was one subject that never made us sleepy. And dream too!

Later on, for me the final word in everything became Sri Aurobindo. And the Master held Shakespeare in the highest esteem, as we read in *The Future Poetry*:

Shakespeare stands out alone, both in his own age when so many were drawn to the form and circumstances were favourable to this kind of genius, and in all English literature, as the one great and genuine dramatic poet; but this one is indeed equal to a host. He stands out too as quite unique in his spirit, method and quality. For his contemporaries resemble him only in externals; they have the same outward form and crude materials, but not the inner dramatic method by which he transformed and gave them a quite other meaning and value. Later romantic drama, not only in England but elsewhere, though it has tried hard to imitate the Shakespearian motive and touch, has been governed by another kind of poetic mind; its intrinsic as distinguished from its external method has been really different.¹

Shakespeare's genius “labours simply for the joy of a multiple poetic vision of life.” There is a creative spontaneity about Shakespeare that is lacking in other Elizabethan dramatists, indeed all English dramatists of all time, one could add. In this expression of a total admiration, the critical apparatus in Sri Aurobindo has not

1. CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 78.

gone to sleep. He does speak of Shakespeare's limitations, that the Bard of Avon "is not primarily an artist, a poetical thinker or anything else of the kind." But what have I to do with artistry or thought-processes when there is such tremendous English poetry that curtains away the noises around, the worries and the problems and takes me away to the scenes in the "pleasant and conceited comedy of *Love's Labour Lost*? The very opening pinches my hand: look, Shakespeare's Berowne is describing you!

Small have continual plodders ever won
 Save base authority from others' books
 These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights
 That give a name to every fixed star
 Have no more profit of their shining nights
 Than those that walk and wot not what they are.
 Too much to know is to know nought but fame;
 And every godfather can give a name.

Everyone knows about Shakespeare so why should we worry about his life? It must have been colourful, and one of my dreams had been to visit Stratford-upon-Avon. The dream came true at last on an unforgettable day, 11th September, 2001! Here is the diary entry about my visit with my husband which was a couple of hours before we learnt of the WTC disaster:

Took Big Bus Tour (40 pounds for each of us!) to Warwick Castle, Stratford-upon-Avon and Oxford. Walked a lot, it was a two-hour drive to Castle and back, but most fulfilling for this trip was full of echoes from my student past. "Warwick the Kingmaker"! Stratford is a dream city. Appa (my father) had come here before and I felt fulfilled I was treading same ground. Saw Shak.'s birthplace and museum. Discovered a bust of Tagore in the garden. Presented by Viswabharati. The rose garden was pleasant . . .

So the Shakespeare magic endures. His sonnets continue to intrigue us because of the Dark Lady. There are his poems, 'Venus and Adonis', 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' and 'The Rape of Lucrece'. These do not detain us much except the Phoenix described as "the most mysterious poem in English" (I. A. Richards). The brief poem has been given various interpretations but it is agreed that it is an elegy. Presented as a fable describing the funeral of a dead phoenix and a turtledove, both being symbols of devoted love, the language of the poem enters the territory of the metaphysical. The conceits are welcome anyway, for a lover of English literature:

Reason, in itself confounded,
 Saw division grow together,
 To themselves yet either neither,
 Simple were so well compounded,

That it cried, How true a twain
 Seemeth this concordant one!
 Love hath reason, reason none,
 If what parts can so remain.

But, of course, ‘Shakespeare’ means ‘drama’. Entering this dramatic realm means entering a romantic world. Probably this is what keeps his plays young all the time, in spite of being peppered with words which we do not understand easily these days, making us automatically stretch out to get at *A Shakespeare Glossary* (first published, 1911) by C. T. Onions. Nothing is provincial or archaic or obsolete when it has been penned by Shakespeare, we exult enriching our own diction no end:

facenerious — infamous, vile. (*All’s Well that Ends Well*)

Cat-o’mountain — leopard or panther (*The Tempest*)

Once we do manage to remember all the meanings, we have a new problem, not daring to speak in our own English language. For, I do not sympathise with my friends, saying, “Oh dear! You’re looking haggard!” Onions assured me long ago that haggard is actually “a wild female hawk caught when in her adult plumage”! No wonder Shakespeare is part of our consciousness, especially the consciousness of an admirer of Sri Aurobindo, as Sri K. D. Sethna has demonstrated so effectively in his talks at the Annamalai University to mark the Quatercentenary celebrations of Shakespeare’s advent. Later on, these talks would be shaped into his brilliant *Sri Aurobindo on Shakespeare*. Each page in this slim book is a pointer to drawing closer to Aurobindonian criticism which saddles itself firmly on the statement: “Shakespeare was a supreme poet and, one might almost say, nothing else.”

There are the early plays, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* among the comedies; and *Romeo and Juliet* and *Titus Andronicus* are the tragedies. Comedy or tragedy, they are romances and make us sigh even in old age. *The Taming of the Shrew* is no favourite of the feminists, I am sure. But look at the poetry, the fun, if you realise that actually Shakespeare is making fun of men who think they are the ones who call the shots. Katherine, ‘the tamed shrew’ has the honour of the concluding speech:

I am ashamed that women are so simple
 To offer war where they should kneel for peace;
 Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway,
 When they are bound to serve, love and obey.
 Why are our bodies soft and weak and smooth,
 Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,
 But that our soft conditions and our hearts
 Should well agree with our external parts?

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar sees only sarcasm in the words:

Isn't she over-acting her part? Or is she really — adroitly — speaking with the tongue in her cheek? To take the speech at its face value is to view the play as an experiment in a laboratory followed by this formal announcement of the findings; but *The Shrew* is not scientific demonstration but a comedy, almost a dream-sequence!²

After all, women do not change so completely, do they? and Shakespeare knew it for sure. Sri Aurobindo has said that the Bard was unparalleled in having “an instinctive insight into women.” If we cannot defeat you, we will stoop to conquer! Oliver Goldsmith would later on write a famous comedy, *She Stoops to Conquer* on a similar theme. Whether we draw conclusions of a dream or Shakespeare himself presents his comedy as one, our vote is always for his poetry that seems just the right utterance for the context. Which of us, introduced to Shakespeare at an early age, has not loved his *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

Mistaken identity is a familiar dramatic device for Shakespeare. This play has divine variety: kings and queens, mortals too and the famous set of fairies, our companions down the centuries. Oberon, Titania, Robin Goodfellow (Puck), Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, Mustardseed . . . and the immortal passages!

The raging rocks
 And shivering shocks
 Shall break the locks
 Of prison gates;
 And Phibbus' car
 Shall shine from far
 And make and mar
 The foolish Fates.

2. *Shakespeare: His World and his Art* (1986 ed.), p. 149.

This is Bottom to Quince. Ah, yes, Shakespeare also taught us how to give names to characters! And speak as we will when the mood is on us to make people smile and sway in carefree joy. A fairy to Robin Goodfellow:

. . . are not you he
 That frights the maidens of the villagery;
 Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern
 And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;
 And sometime make the drink to bear no barm;
 Misdread night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
 Those that Hobgoblin call you and sweet Puck,
 You do their work, and they shall have good luck:
 Are not you he?

An Indian has no problem in accepting all this. This is our own Krishna in the cowherd settlement! Shakespeare's word magic in this play transforms even a list of flowers or birds into lovable poetry. Oberon on Titania's bed:

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
 Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
 Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
 With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:
 There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
 Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight . . .

Here is Bottom's song, equally felicitous:

The finch, the sparrow and the lark,
 The plain-song cuckoo gray,
 Whose note full many a man doth mark,
 And dares not answer nay — for, indeed, who would set his wit to so foolish
 a bird? who would give a bird the lie, though he cry
 'cuckoo' never so?

This is a dramatist who cannot be put aside easily. Even a tragedy has poetry perfectly suited to the mood, and generations have repeated the passages, remembering the scenes. You do not want to speak about the passages, discuss them or critically dissect them. You just want to listen as the English language gets "shapes at once of beauty and of concentrated power"³, demonstrated perfectly even in an early play like *Romeo and Juliet*. The power of single lines!

3. *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 54.

“That most are busied when they’re most alone...”

“My only love sprung from my only hate!”

“If love be blind, love cannot hit the mark.”

“A plague o’ both your houses!”

One could go on. The Shakespearian gift to the English language is measureless. So is the development of plots, and the manner in which he uses a received tale. But the way he transforms a story basing himself on what his people will understand, is unique. He writes for the common man, and so we draw closer to him with ease. These passions and reactions are what we can easily understand. Love is love and hate is hate. There are no subtle passage-ways in his tragedies. As Sri Aurobindo says:

His development of human character has a sovereign force within its bounds, but it is the soul of the human being as seen through outward character, passion, action, — the life-soul, and not either the thought-soul or the deeper psychic being, still less the profounder truth of the human spirit. Something of these things we may get, but only in shadow or as a partial reflection in a coloured glass, not in their own action. In his vision and therefore in his poetic motive Shakespeare never really either rises up above life or gets behind it; he neither sees what it reaches out to nor the great unseen powers that are active within it.⁴

But the early plays of Shakespeare are all about the emotions that sway us in our everyday life. The Capulet-Montague feud has been played out a million times in human history and India sees it happening all the time even today. For, after all, a great poet is certainly a *drashta*, he has ‘seen’, watched, prepared his database and realised that truth is stranger than fiction, after all. None of Shakespeare’s dramas can be categorised as fiction: this is the truth about life. Even dreaming, when you want to set aside your worries and anxieties, and take forty winks in the daytime, hearing Puck in the distance:

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber’d here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.



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