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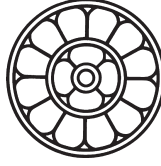
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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LILA

In us is the thousandfold Spirit who is one,
 An eternal thinker calm and great and wise,
A seer whose eye is an all-regarding sun,
 A poet of the cosmic mysteries.

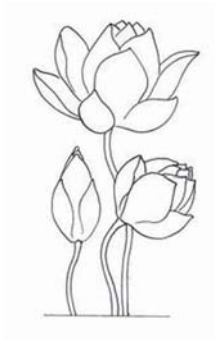
A critic Witness pieces everything
 And binds the fragments in his brilliant sheaf;
A World-adventurer borne on Destiny's wing
 Gambles with death and triumph, joy and grief.

A king of greatness and a slave of love,
 Host of the stars and guest in Nature's inn,
A high spectator spirit throned above,
 A pawn of passion in the game divine,

One who has made in sport the suns and seas
Mirrors in our being his immense caprice.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, p. 611)



EXPERIENCES AND REALISATIONS IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA

PART TWO THE OPENING OF THE INNER SENSES

SECTION ONE: VISIONS, SOUNDS, SMELLS AND TASTES

Chapter One: The Value of Visions

Vision, Experience and Realisation

When you see Light, that is vision; when you feel Light entering into you, that is experience; when Light settles in you and brings illumination and knowledge, that is a realisation. But ordinarily visions are also called experiences.

*

Sometimes a vision accompanies an experience and is as it were a visual rendering of it or accompaniment to it, but the experience itself is a separate thing.

*

Vision is something *seen* in the conscious state (whether with closed or open eyes) which is not of the physical plane. In “conscious state” I include the consciousness of Samadhi when one is unaware of outward things but conscious of things going on within.

Experience is a wide term which covers almost everything that happens in the inner consciousness — usually it indicates either a spiritual happening, e.g. the descent of peace, the feeling of the presence of the Mother, or an occult experience, e.g. a going into the other worlds in dream and seeing and doing things there. There are thousands of different kinds of experience. Visions are a special kind of experience in which the inner eye is active.

*

Visions do not come from the spiritual plane — they come from the subtle physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic or from planes above the Mind. What comes from

the spiritual planes are experiences of the Divine, e.g. the experience of self everywhere, of the Divine in all etc.

*

The Infinite is in all things and can be seen through them when the vision opens.

*

By going deep [*in meditation*] one person may see visions; another may fall in deeper consciousness but see no vision — and so on. The result varies with the nature.

*

Yes, it [*the higher consciousness*] can come down into the mind planes bringing peace, wideness, the cosmic consciousness, the realisation of the Divine, the sense of the cosmic forces and other things — without any breaking of the veil through vision. Ordinarily, however, with most people the inner vision comes first.

*

I said [*in the preceding letter*] the realisation of the Divine in the mind. If there is to be the total realisation, the breaking of the veil is indispensable.

*

Usually the visions precede realisation, in a way they prepare it.

*

Visions and voices have their place when they are the genuine visions and the true voices. Naturally, they are not the realisation but only a step on the way and one has not to get shut up in them or take all as of value.

*

The vision of the higher planes or the idea of what they are can be had long before the transformation. If that were not possible, how could the transformation take place — the lower nature cannot change of itself, it changes by the growing vision, perception, descent of the higher consciousness belonging to the higher planes? It

is through aspiration, through an increasing opening that these visions and perceptions begin to come — the realisation comes afterwards.

Sensing Supraphysical Things

No, it was neither optical illusion nor hallucination nor coincidence nor auto-suggestion nor any of the other ponderous and vacant polysyllables by which physical science tries to explain away or rather avoid explaining the scientifically inexplicable. In these matters the scientist is always doing what he is always blaming the layman for doing when the latter lays down the law on things about which he is profoundly ignorant, without investigation or experiment, without ascertained knowledge — simply by evolving a theory or *a priori* idea out of his own mind and plastering it as a label on the unexplained phenomena.

There is, as I have told you, a whole range or many inexhaustible ranges of sensory phenomena other than the outward physical which one can become conscious of, see, hear, feel, smell, touch, mentally contact — to use the new established Americanism — either in trance or sleep or an inward state miscalled sleep or simply and easily in the waking state. This faculty of sensing supraphysical things internally or externalising them, so to speak, so that they become visible, audible, sensible to the outward eye, ear, even touch, just as are gross physical objects, this power or gift is not a freak or an abnormality; it is a universal faculty present in all human beings, but latent in most, in some rarely or intermittently active, occurring as if by accident in others, frequent or normally active in a few. But just as anyone can with some training learn science and do things which would have seemed miracles to his forefathers, so almost anyone, if he wants, can with a little concentration and training develop the faculty of supraphysical vision. When one starts Yoga, this power is often though not invariably — for some find it difficult — one of the first to come out from its latent condition and manifest itself, most often without any effort, intention or previous knowledge on the part of the sadhak. It comes more easily with the eyes shut than with the eyes open, but it does come in both ways. The first sign of its opening in the externalised way is very often that seeing of “sparkles” or small luminous dots, shapes etc. which was your first introduction to the matter; a second is, often enough, the seeing of circles of light or colour round objects, most easily round luminous objects like a star; seeing of colours is a third initial experience — but they do not always come in that order. The Yogis in India very often in order to develop the power use the method of *trāṭak*, concentrating the vision on a single point or object — preferably a luminous object. Your looking at the star was precisely an exercise in *trāṭak* and had the effect which any Yogi in India would have told you is normal. For all this is not fancy or delusion; it is part of an occult science which has been practised throughout the historic and

prehistoric ages in all countries and it has always been known to be not merely auto-suggestive or hallucinatory in its results, but, if one can get the key, veridical and verifiable. Your first scepticism may be natural in a “modern” man plunging into these lasting things of the past, present and future, — natural but not justifiable because very obviously inadequate to the facts observed; but once you have seen, the first thing you should do is to throw all this vapid pseudo-science behind you, this vain attempt to stick physical explanations on supraphysical things, and take the only rational course. Develop the power, get more and more experience — develop the consciousness by which these things come: as the consciousness develops, you will begin to understand and get the intuition of the significances. Or if you want their science too, then learn and apply the occult science which can alone deal with supraphysical phenomena. As for what showed itself to you, it was not mere curious phenomena, not even merely symbolic colours, but things that have a considerable importance.

Develop this power of inner sense and all that it brings you. These first seeings are only an outer fringe — behind lie whole worlds of experience which fill what seems to the material man the gap (your Russell’s inner void) between the earth consciousness and the Eternal and Infinite.

The Importance of Visions

All visions have a significance of one kind or another. This power of vision is very important for the Yoga and should not be rejected although it is not the most important thing — for the most important thing is the change of the consciousness. All other powers like this of vision should be developed without attachment as parts and aids of the Yoga.

*

The particular things seen may be of no importance, but the power of seeing is of importance and can be of great help in the Yoga. It enables you to see things belonging to other planes (other than the physical) and get knowledge that is useful for sadhana — also to have concrete contact with the Mother in those planes (mental, vital, psychic worlds) etc.

*

Visions come from all planes and are of all kinds and different values. Some are of very great value and importance, others are a play of the mind or vital and are good only for their own special purpose, others are formations of the mind and vital

plane, some of which may have truth, while others are false and misleading, or they may be a sort of artistry of that plane. They can have considerable importance in the development of the first Yogic consciousness, that of the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical or for an occult understanding of the universe. Visions which are real can help the spiritual progress, I mean, those which show us inner realities: one can for instance meet Krishna, speak with him and hear his voice in an inner “real” vision, quite as real as anything on the outer plane. Merely seeing his image is not the same thing, any more than seeing his picture on the wall is the same thing as meeting him in person. But the picture on the wall need not be useless for the spiritual life. All one can say is that one must not attach oneself too much to this gift and what it shows us, but neither is it necessary to belittle it. It has its value and sometimes a considerable spiritual utility. But, naturally, it is not supreme, — the supreme thing is the realisation, the contact, the union with the Divine, bhakti, change of the nature etc.

*

Visions and experiences (especially experiences) are all right; but you cannot expect every vision to translate itself in a corresponding physical fact. Some do, the majority don't, others belong to the supraphysical entirely and indicate realities, possibilities or tendencies that have their seat there. How far these will influence the life or realise themselves in it or whether they will do so at all depends upon the nature of the vision, the power in it, sometimes on the will or formative power of the seer.

People value visions for one thing because they are one key (there are others) to contact with the other worlds or with the inner worlds and all that is there and these are regions of immense riches which far surpass the physical plane as it is at present. One enters into a larger freer self and a larger more plastic world; of course individual visions only give a contact, not an actual entrance, but the power of vision accompanied with the power of the other subtle senses (hearing, touch, etc.) as it expands does give this entrance. These things have not the effect of a mere imagination (as a poet's or artist's, though that can be strong enough) but if fully followed out bring a constant growth of the being and the consciousness and its richness of experience and its scope.

People also value the power of vision for a greater reason than that: it can give a first contact with the Divine in his forms and powers; it can be the opening of a communion with the Divine, of the hearing of the Voice that guides, of the Presence as well as the Image in the heart, of many other things that bring what man seeks through religion or Yoga.

Farther, vision is of value because it is often a first key to inner planes of one's own being and one's own consciousness as distinguished from worlds or planes of the cosmic consciousness. Yoga experience often begins with some opening of the

third eye in the forehead (the centre of vision in the brows) or with some kind of beginning and extension of subtle seeing which may seem unimportant at first, but is the vestibule to deeper experience. Even when it is not that, — for one can go to experience direct, — it can come in afterwards as a powerful aid to experience; it can be full of indications which help to self-knowledge or knowledge of things or knowledge of people; it can be veridical and lead to prevision, premonition and other openings of less importance but very useful to a Yogi.

In short, vision is a great instrument though not absolutely indispensable.

But, as I have suggested, there are visions and visions just as there are dreams and dreams, and one has to develop discrimination and a sense of values and kinds and know how to understand and make use of these powers. But that is too big and intricate a matter to be pursued now.

*

The visions he has between the eyebrows are not imaginations — they could be so only if he thought them first and his thoughts took shape, but as they came independent of his thoughts, they are not visual imagination but vision. This faculty is a useful one in Yoga and it can be allowed to develop; it should not be discouraged. I do not know what he means by not having *śraddhā* in them. What he sees now are probably only images of subtle (*sūkṣma*) scenes and objects; but, when developed, this can become a power of symbolic, representative or real vision, showing the truths of things or realities of this or other worlds or representations of the past, present or future.

If the concentration goes naturally to the centre between the eyebrows which is the centre of inner mind and its thought, will and vision, there is no harm in that.

*

These lights and visions are not hallucinations. They indicate an opening of the inner vision whose centre is in the forehead between the eyebrows. Lights are very often the first thing seen. Lights indicate the action or movement of subtle forces belonging to the different planes of being, — the nature of the force depending on the colour and shade of the light. The sun is the symbol and power of the inner or higher Truth — to see it in meditation is a good sign. The sea is also often symbolic, indicating usually the vital nature, sometimes the expanse of consciousness in movement. The opening of vision must be allowed to develop, but too much importance need not be given to the individual visions unless or until they become evidently symbolic or significant or shed light on things in the sadhana etc.

*

What was developed in you is a power of true inner vision — this will help you to enter through it into touch with the Divine; you have only to let it develop. Two other things have to develop — the feeling of the Divine Presence and power and inspiration behind your actions, and the inner contact with myself and the Mother. Aspire with faith and sincerity and these will come. I do not wish to give any more precise instructions until I see what happens in you during your stay here; for although the path is common to all, each man has his own way of following it.

*

The frequent seeing of lights such as those he writes of in his letter is usually a sign that the seer is not limited by his outward surface or waking consciousness but has a latent capacity (which can be perfected by training and practice) for entering into the experiences of the inner consciousness of which most people are unaware but which opens by the practice of Yoga. By this opening one becomes aware of subtle planes of experience and worlds of existence other than the material. For the spiritual life a still farther opening is required into an inmost consciousness by which one becomes aware of the Self and Spirit, the Eternal and the Divine.

*

From what he writes it is apparent that he has a capacity [*for Yoga*], and it is probable that he would have made more progress if he had not shut the door that was opening. Evidently, he made a mistake when he stopped the visions that were coming. Vision and hallucination are not the same thing. The inner vision is an open door on higher planes of consciousness beyond the physical mind which gives room for a wider truth and experience to enter and act upon the mind. It is not the only or the most important door, but it is one which comes readiest to very many if not most and can be a very powerful help. It does not come easily to intellectuals as it does to men with a strong life-power or the emotional and the imaginative. It is true that the field of vision, like every other field of activity of the human mind, is a mixed world and there is in it not only truth but much half-truth and error. It is also true that for the rash and unwary to enter into it may bring confusion and misleading inspirations and false voices, and it is safer to have some sure guidance from those who know and have spiritual and psychic experience. One must look at this field calmly and with discrimination, but to shut the gates and reject this or other supraphysical experiences is to limit oneself and arrest the inner development.

*

Visions and voices are not meant for creating faith; they are effective only if one has faith already.

Visions Not the Most Important Thing

Visions are not indispensable — they are a help, that is all, when they are of the right kind.

*

Anybody with a predisposition can develop the power of seeing visions like that. People are mistaken in thinking it is a sign of great Yogashakti. Apposite and effective visions, those that reveal movements in the occult workings of the nature or help the spiritual growth, are another matter.

*

Well, it is difficult to explain [*what kind of visions help one's spiritual growth*]. I might give the example of St. Paul's vision on the way to Damascus as an example of a vision which really meant business. You have yourself given the Kurukshetra example. But all visions need not be so stupendous as that — small ones can also be useful.

But the predisposition I spoke of was for visionary display, not for spiritual growth. There are people who can see visions by the hundred and there are those who cannot. But it does not follow that the non-visionary cannot have decisive spiritual experiences or the realisation.

*

The kind of vision you want comes only if the general visual power opens and develops. It is not the greatest form of experience; many advance very far and have high experiences and change of consciousness without it. The important thing is to feel the Presence of the Mother with one and in one, her Light, her Power working, her Ananda. The form can be there, if the vision develops, but only as one element of the experience.

*

I did not quite understand from your letter what is the nature of these sights and objects that pass like a cinema film before you. If they are things seen by the inner

vision, then there is no need to drive them away — one has only to let them pass. When one does sadhana an inner mind which is within us awakes and sees by an inner vision images of all things in this world and other worlds — this power of vision has its use, though one has not to be attached to it; one can let them pass with a quiet mind, neither fixing on them nor driving them away.

*

This kind of vision [*seeing water, a rose, a tiger*] almost anybody can have except those who live too much in the mind. For others it is very near to the surface, this faculty of vision. Many have it in this elementary way without doing any Yoga at all.

*

The power of occult seeing is there in everyone, mostly latent, often near the surface, sometimes but much more rarely already on the surface. If one practises *trāṭak*, it is pretty certain to come out sooner or later, — though some have a difficulty and with them it takes time; those in whom it comes out at once have had all the time this power of occult vision near the surface and it emerges at the first direct pressure.

No Reason to Fear Visions

Such visions [*of human figures*] often happen when the inner sight is open. These were evidently two powers of the supraphysical world. One has to see quietly whatever comes of this kind — there is no reason to fear them, any more than if you saw a picture or moving figures in the cinema.

Wrong Visions and Voices

When the sadhana progresses, one almost always gets the power of vision; what one sees is true if one remains in the right consciousness. There are also wrong voices and experiences. The people who have gone mad, went mad because they were egoistic, began to think themselves great sadhaks and attach an exaggerated importance to themselves and their experiences; this made them get a wrong consciousness and wrong voices and visions and inspirations. They attached so much importance to them that they refused to listen to the Mother and finally became hostile to her because she told them they were in error and checked their delusions. Your visions and experiences are very true and good and I have explained to you

what they signify — the wrong ones tried to come but you threw them away, because you are not attached to them and are fixed on the true aim of sadhana. One must not get attached to these things, but observe them simply and go on; then they become a help and cannot be a danger.

* * *

Chapter Two: Kinds of Vision

The Inner Vision

There is an inner vision that opens when one does sadhana and all sorts of images rise before it or pass. Their coming does not depend upon your thought or will; it is real and automatic. Just as your physical eyes see things in the physical world, so the inner eye sees things and images that belong to the other worlds and subtle images of things of this physical world also.

*

Everything not physical is seen by an inner vision.

*

When the inner vision opens, there can come before it all that ever was or is now in the world, even it can open to things that will be hereafter — so there is nothing impossible in seeing thus the figures and the things of the past.

*

The inner vision can see objects — but it can also see instead the vibration of the forces which act through the object.

*

This realm (whose centre is between the eyebrows) is the realm of inner thought, will, vision — the motor-car indicates a rapid progress in this part of the consciousness. The motor-car is a symbolic image, these images do not refer to anything physical.

These things take place in the inner mind or inner vital and usually there is a truth behind them, but the form in which they come into the mind may be imperfect — i.e. the meaning may be something not perfectly revealed in the words.

*

Things inside can be seen as distinctly as outward things whether in an image by the subtle vision or in their essence by a still more subtle and powerful way of seeing; but all these things have to develop in order to get their full power and intensity.

Stages in the Development of the Inner Vision

It is the inner vision that is opened or opening in you. When that opens, the first thing that you see is colours or lights moving or small or vague shapes or objects — afterwards flowers etc., then figures of people, scenes, landscapes, things happening etc. Often by the power of this subtle vision the sadhak can see the image of the Divine he worships in his heart and so feel more concretely the presence.

*

The seeing of colours is the beginning of inner vision, what is called *sūkṣmadṛṣṭi*. Afterwards this vision opens and one begins to see figures and scenes and people. It is good that the seeing began with an image of the Mother.

*

When one tries to meditate, the first obstacle in the beginning is sleep. When you get over this obstacle, there comes a condition in which, with the eyes closed, you begin to see things, people, scenes of all kinds. This is not a bad thing, it is a good sign and means that you are making progress in the Yoga. There is, besides the outer physical sight which sees external objects, an inner sight in us which can see things yet unseen and unknown, things at a distance, things belonging to another place or time or to other worlds; it is the inner sight which is opening in you. It is the working of the Mother's force which is opening it in you, and you should not try to stop it. Remember the Mother always, call on her and aspire to feel her presence and her power working in you; but you do not need, for that, to reject this or other developments that may come in you by her working hereafter. It is only desire, egoism, restlessness and other wrong movements that have to be rejected.

*

The visions you describe are those which come in the earliest stages of sadhana. At this stage most of the things seen are formations of the mental plane and it is not always possible to put on them a precise significance, for they depend on the individual mind of the sadhak. At a later stage the power of vision becomes important for the sadhana, but at first one has to go on without attaching excessive importance

to the details — until the consciousness develops more. The opening of the consciousness to the Divine Light and Truth and Presence is always the one important thing in the Yoga.

The Diverse Nature and Significance of Visions

Your visions are not mental images but significant symbols. The white dove is the higher divine or spiritual Consciousness above the mental surrounded by the golden lightnings of the Truth. The lamb is the psychic aspiring to the Truth. When one has a thought or feeling and creates a mental form of it, that is a mental image — or when not so positively or consciously self-created forms arise either in meditation or sleep, which correspond to mental thoughts or vital feelings, one's own or those of others, those also are simply mental images or vital formations. The true significant ones are those that come of themselves and correspond to things, states of consciousness or a play of forces that are actual and not determined mainly by one's ideas, will or feelings.

*

Visions are of all kinds — some are merely suggestions of what wants to be or is trying to be, some indicate some approach of the thing or movement towards it, some indicate that the thing is being done.

*

Nothing has to be done to develop them [*images seen in vision*]. They develop of themselves by the growing practice of seeing, — what was faint becomes clear, what was incomplete becomes complete. One cannot say in a general way that they are real or unreal. Some are formations of the mind, some are images that come to the sight of themselves, some are images of real things that show themselves directly to the sight — others are true pictures, not merely images.

*

No rule of a general character can be given. Each vision or dream has to be taken by itself; some are mental constructions, symbols or indications, some are vital possibilities truly or falsely represented, some are representations of physical facts — but this last is more rare.

*

The seeing of the body (at least one's own) in its internal parts is a Yogic power developed by the Raja and Hathayogins — I suppose it could be extended to the body of others. There is also the sense of subtle smells and I have noticed that sometimes one smell persists.

*

Subtle images can be images of all things in all worlds.

*

There is no criterion [*for distinguishing visions from dreams of a deeper origin*], but one can easily distinguish if one is in the inward condition, not sleep, in which most visions take place by the nature of the impression made. A vision in dream is more difficult to distinguish from a vivid dream-experience, but one gets to feel the difference.

*

Vision in trance is vision no less than vision in the waking state. It is only the condition of the recipient consciousness that varies — in one the waking consciousness shares in the vision, in the other it is excluded for the sake of greater facility and range in the inner experience. But in both it is the inner vision that sees.

*

The physical things¹ are simply an occasion or starting-point for the inner vision to work through the open eyes and bring in the significant inner things.

Representative and Dynamic Visions

It depends on the nature of the symbolic vision whether it is merely representative, offering to the inner vision and nature (even though the outer mind has not the understanding, the inner can receive its effect) the thing symbolised in its figure or whether it is dynamic. The Sun symbol, for instance, is usually dynamic. Again among the dynamic symbols some may bring simply an influence of the thing symbolised, some indicate what is being done but not yet finished, some a formative experience that visits the consciousness, some a prophecy of something that may or

1. *The correspondent saw the lights on a pier at night as sparkling diamonds. — Ed.*

will or is soon about to happen. There are others that are not merely symbols but present actualities seen by the vision in a symbolic figure.

*

When the colours begin to take definite shapes [*in one's visions*], it is a sign of some dynamic work of formation in the consciousness — a square for instance means that some kind of creation is in process in some field of the being; the square indicates that the creation is to be complete in itself while the rectangle indicates something partial and preliminary. The waves of colour mean a dynamic rush of forces and the star may in such a context indicate the promise of the new being that is to be formed. The blue colour must here be the Krishna light — so it is a creation under the stress of the Krishna light. All these are symbols of what is going on in the inner being, in the consciousness behind, and the results well up from time to time in the external or surface consciousness in such feelings as the awareness of a softening and opening which you had, devotion, joy, peace, Ananda etc. When the opening is complete, there is likely to be a more direct consciousness of the working that is going on behind till it is no longer behind but in the front of the nature.

*

When you see a square, that is a symbol of complete creation; when you see a buffalo rushing upon you and missing and feel you have escaped a great danger, that is a transcription. Something actually happened of which the buffalo's ineffectual rush was your mind's transcription — the rush of some hostile force represented by the buffalo.

Seeing Forms of the Divine and Other Beings

Subjective visions can be as real as objective sight — the only difference is that one is of real things in material space, while the others are of real things belonging to other planes down to the subtle physical; even symbolic visions are real insofar as they are symbols of realities. Even dreams can have a reality in the subtle domain. Visions are unreal only when these are merely imaginative mental formations not representing anything that is true or was true or is going to be true.

In this case the thing seen [*a vision of Krishna, silvery blue in colour, standing in a dance pose playing the flute*] can be taken as true since it has been seen by many and always in the same relation and still more because it has been confirmed by what was seen by Yashodabai and Krishnaprem. It means obviously that your singing by the power of the bhakti it expresses can and does bring the presence of

Krishna there. It is not that Krishna “shows himself”, but simply that he is there and some who have the power of vision catch sight of him and others who have not the power fail to do so. This power of vision is sometimes inborn and habitual even without any effort of development, sometimes it wakes up of itself and becomes abundant or needs only a little practice to develop; it is not necessarily a sign of spiritual attainment, but usually when by practice of Yoga one begins to go inside or live within, the power of subtle vision awakes to a greater or less extent; but this does not always happen easily, especially if one has been habituated to live much in the intellect or in an outward vital consciousness.

I suppose what you are thinking of is “darshan”, the self-revelation of the Deity to the devotee; but that is different, it is an unveiling of his presence, temporary or permanent, and may come as a vision or may come as a close feeling of his presence which is more intimate than sight and a frequent or constant communication with him; that happens by deepening of the being into its inner self and growth of consciousness or by growth of the intensity of bhakti. When the crust of the external consciousness is sufficiently broken by the pressure of increasing and engrossing bhakti, the contact comes.

*

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

*

These things [*the seeing of Buddha, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Shankaracharya in vision*] are the result of past thoughts and influences. They are of various kinds — sometimes merely thought-forms created by one’s own thought-force to act as a vehicle for some mental realisation — sometimes Powers of different planes that take these forms as a support for their work through the individual, — but sometimes one is actually in communion with that which had the name and form and personality of Buddha or Ramakrishna or Vivekananda or Shankara.

It is not necessary to have an element akin to these personalities — a thought, an aspiration, a formation of the mind or vital are enough to create the connection — it is sufficient for a vibration of response anywhere to what these Powers represent.

Cosmic, Inner and Psychic Vision

Cosmic vision is the seeing of the universal movements — it has nothing to do with the psychic necessarily. It can be in the universal mind, the universal vital, the universal physical or anywhere.

What do you mean here by psychic vision? Inner vision means the vision with the inner seeing as opposed to outer vision, the external sight with the surface mind or the surface eyes. Psychic in the language of this Yoga is confined to the soul, the psychic being — it is not as in the ordinary language in which if you see a ghost it is called a psychic “vision”: we speak of the inner vision or the subtle sight or the occult sight — not the psychic vision.

*

The “sight” spoken of [*in passages of the Upanishads*] is not a sense vision but an experience in the inner consciousness which is more true and living and dynamic than the experiences given to the external consciousness by the material senses.

There is also a psychic vision by which one can see the forms of the Gods or one of the many forms in which the Ishwara reveals himself to the Bhakta.

There is too an inner or subtle sense and sight by which one can see and experience forms and happenings which are not present to the physical eye and also those which belong to other planes than that of the physical world. There are many supraphysical worlds and one can get into contact with these worlds and their beings only by an awakening or developing of this inner sense.

Mental Visions

The mental visions are meant to bring in the mind the influence of the things they represent.

*

Inner vision is vivid like actual sight, always precise and contains a truth in it. In mental vision the images are invented by the mind and are partly true, partly a play of possibilities. Or a mental vision like the vital may be only a suggestion, — that is a formation of some possibility on the mental or vital plane which presents itself to the sadhak in the hope of being accepted and helped to realise itself.

*

The visions and experiences you have described are all of the mental plane and show a great openness and purity of the inner mental being free from unfavourable influences. But it is difficult to tell the precise significance of those that are in the nature of colours, lights, a star etc., because they depend on contacts which are personal to the sadhaka. The first five are of this kind and appear to indicate contact with powers, influences, personalities (godheads), etc. of the higher mental plane. E.g. the light of pink colour might be that of some influence or godhead of love or bhakti in contact with the mental being. In some cases it may be the figure of a formation of the mental being itself. The flowers, diamonds and gems etc. would seem to indicate contact with Radha, Mahalakshmi and Mahakali influences. The vision of writing is also frequent on the mental plane — it is known by us as the *lipi*, and if it organises itself so as to be legible and intelligible, it can embody many things such as intuitions, messages from one or other of the mental planes — the voice you heard was probably one of these messages. There is no necessity to explain the vision of the form of the Mother and mine — for that is clear.

Vital Visions

The dream was on the vital plane. Dreams or visions on the vital plane are usually either

- (1) symbolic vital visions
- (2) actual occurrences on the vital plane
- (3) formations of the vital mind, either of the dreamer or of someone else with whom he contacts in sleep or of powers or beings of that plane. No great reliance can be put on this kind of experience.

*

These are visions of the vital world and the vital planes and one sees hundreds of them there.² Those of the type of the first have no significance; they are only things seen just as on earth you may see a man bathing in water. The other seems to indicate a being or else simply a Force given form entering into the consciousness. All the parts of the consciousness are like fields into which forces from the same planes of consciousness in the universal Nature are constantly entering or passing. The best thing is to observe without getting affected in either way or without attaching too much importance — for these are minor experiences and one's concentration must call the major ones.

*

2. The correspondent had two visions in dream — one of a young lad standing waist deep in water, another of a woman's face which looked at the correspondent and then entered his chest. — Ed.

Most of these visions are the result of your getting into contact with a certain field of forces in the vital world which are at present creating the pressure for war and revolution and all catastrophic things in Europe. It was from here that these menacing visions were coming. There is no coherence or reality in them. Chhinnamasta is a symbol of this kind of force, feeding as it were the world with her own blood.

They have to be at once rejected. It was not meant that you should be inactive, but that there was sufficient Force gathering to carry on the sadhana as if by an automatic action. But the consent of the sadhak, his rejection of all that comes against is always necessary.

*

It is the vital plane — probably the vital physical. It is mostly there that the beings of the vital world appear with animal heads or features. A human figure with a dog's face means a very coarse and material sexual energy. Of course, all such energies can be transformed and cease to be sexual — turned into material strength of some kind, just as the seminal force can be turned by brahmacharya into ojas.

*

This gazing on a flame or a bright spot is the traditional means used by Yogis for concentration or for awakening of the inner consciousness and vision. You seem to have gone by the gazing into a kind of surface (not deep) trance, which is indeed one of its first results, and begun to see things probably on the vital plane. I do not know what were the “dreadful objects” you saw but that dreadfulness is the character of many things first seen on that plane, especially when crossing its threshold by such means. You should not employ these means, I think, for they are quite unnecessary and besides, they may lead to a passive concentration in which one is open to all sorts of things and cannot choose the right ones.

Subtle Physical Visions

All that can be seen with closed eyes can be seen with open eyes also; it is sufficient that the inner sight should extend to the subtle physical consciousness for that to happen.

*

One can see [*visions*] either with open or closed eyes or both. It is a matter of temperament or idiosyncrasy which one starts with.

*

The world you see is in some subtle physical plane where men see the gods according to their own ideas and images of them.

*

As you were concentrating your attention on the electric light, it may have been the god of electricity you saw, Vaidyuta Agni. There is no reason why he should have many faces — the many-headed or many-armed figures belong usually to the vital plane — and it may not have been in his vital form that he was manifesting. As for the colours, colours are symbols of forces and Agni need not be pure red — the principle of Fire can manifest all the colours and the pure white fire is that which contains in itself all the colours.

*

The gods in the overmental plane have not many heads and arms — this is a vital symbolism, it is not necessary in other planes. This figure [*of Vaidyuta Agni, mentioned in the preceding letter*] may have belonged to the subtle physical plane.

*

(1) It [*the vision of a flower*] was seen through the physical eyes but by the subtle physical consciousness; in other words there was an imposition of one consciousness upon another. After a certain stage of development, this capacity of living in the ordinary physical consciousness and yet having superadded to it another and more subtle sense, vision, experience becomes quite normal. A little concentration is enough to bring it; or, even, it happens automatically without any concentration.

As the flower was a subtle physical object, not entirely material in the ordinary sense of the word (though quite substantial and material in its own plane, not an illusion), a camera would not be able to detect it — except in the case of one of those abnormal interventions by which a subtle form has been thrown upon the material plate.

It could be sensed in a dark room, though not so easily, and it would not then have so vivid an appearance — unless you are able to bring out something of the light of the subtle physical plane to surround it and give it its natural medium.

If seen with the eyes shut, it would be no longer a subtle physical form, but an object or formation of the vital, mental or other plane. Unless, indeed, the inner consciousness had progressed so far as to be able to project itself into the physical planes; but this is a rare and, in most cases, a late development.

(2) It is not, usually, the object that vanishes; it is the consciousness that changes. Owing to lack of sustained capacity or lack of training, one is not able to keep the

subtle physical vision which is what was really seeing the object. This subtle physical vision comes easiest in the moment between light sleep and waking — either when one just comes out of the sleep or when one is just going into it. But one can train oneself to have it when one is quite wide awake.

At first when one begins to see, it is quite usual for the more ill-defined and imprecise figures to last longer while those which are successful, complete, precise in detail and outline are apt to be quite momentary and disappear in an instant. It is only when the subtle vision is well developed that the precise and full seeing lasts for a long time. This results from the difficulty of keeping what is still an abnormal consciousness and also, in this case, from the difficulty of keeping the two momentarily superimposed consciousnesses together.

(3) There are all kinds in the experiences of each plane — symbolic forms, figures of suggestion, thought-figures, desire formations or will-formations, constructions of all kinds, things real and lasting in the plane to which they belong and things fictitious and misleading. The haphazardness belongs to the consciousness that sees with its limited and imperfect way of cognizing the other worlds, not to the phenomena themselves. Each plane is a world or a conglomeration or series of worlds, each organised in its own way, but organised, not haphazard; only, of course, the subtler planes are more plastic and less rigid in their organisation than the material plane.

* * *

Chapter Three: Subtle Sights, Sounds, Smells and Tastes

Sights and Sounds of Other Planes

The sounds of bells and the seeing of lights and colours are signs of the opening of the inner consciousness which brings with it an opening also to sights and sounds of other planes than the physical. Some of these things, like the sound of bells, crickets etc., seem even to help the opening. The Upanishad speaks of them as *brahmavyaktikarāṇi yoge*. The lights represent forces — or sometimes a formed light like that you saw may be the Light of a being of the supraphysical planes.

*

When the inner senses open, or any of them, one sees or hears things belonging to the other planes automatically. What one sees or hears depends on the development of the inner sense. It depends on what you hear whether these are the symbol sounds only which have a connection with the sadhana or simply other-plane sounds of an ordinary character.

*

It depends on the nature of the sounds. Some have a connection [*with sadhana*], others are merely sounds of the other planes.

Subtle Sounds

When the mind becomes quiet, there are certain sounds that are heard, which are supposed to be signs of the awakening of the subtle senses and the inner consciousness.

*

Sounds in the ear indicate a pressure to open the inner consciousness.

*

The sound is a very good sign. It comes when the inner consciousness is opening or preparing to open to the Yoga-force and the deeper experiences it brings.

*

They [*subtle sounds*] are the signs of a working going on to prepare something — but as that is a general thing, it cannot be said from the sounds themselves what the preparation is.

*

The sounds or voices you hear are like the sights (persons, objects) you see. As there is an inner sight other than the physical, so there is an inner hearing other than that of the external ear, and it can listen to voices and sounds and words of other worlds, other times and places, or those which come from supraphysical beings. But here you must be careful. If conflicting voices try to tell you what to do or not to do, you should not listen to them or reply. It is only myself and the Mother who can tell you what you should or should not do or guide or advise you.

*

Such sounds (bells, bees, crickets etc.) are stated in the Upanishad to be signs of realisation approaching. They come very commonly when the inner or subtle consciousness is awake.

*

The hearing of the bells has always been considered a sign or a premonition of the opening of the inner being to spiritual experience.

*

It [*the sound of the conch*] is one of the many symbol sounds one hears in Yoga. The conch shell is the sound of victory.

*

Both of these [*the sound of OM and of church bells*] are usually sounds that indicate the opening or attempt to open to the cosmic consciousness.

*

The music you heard was the music of the divine call to the soul — like the flute of Krishna.

Subtle Smells and Tastes

It [*experiencing subtle smells and tastes*] was not an opening of occult knowledge and powers, but simply an opening of the inner consciousness.

*

Subtle smells of that kind [*sweet smells*] are a common feature of occult experience. Their exact nature and *provenance* varies, but they have no gross physical cause.

*

The smell [*coming from a person*] is due to something in the person's vital-physical. That something may not be prominent at all times. When it is, the smell is there.

*

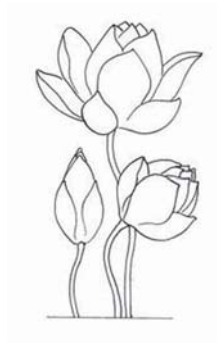
I wrote [*in the preceding letter*] that the something may be of different kinds in different cases and one cannot give a rule that it is this or it is that. What has the dirtiest smell is sex.

*

Every man has a different smell; also there is a particular smell that goes with different states of the vital-physical. Animals (like the dogs) recognise a man and his character by the smell. The human sense has lost this acuteness, but it can be recovered by a development in the sense consciousness. That is what probably has happened in your case. There are others in the Asram who have the same experience.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Letters on Yoga – III, CWSA, Vol. 30, pp. 83-113)



‘AT ONCE MULTIPLE AND ONE’

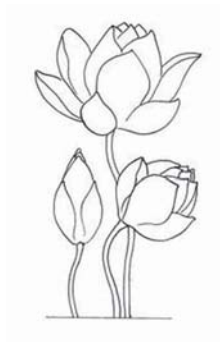
May 15, 1914

As on reaching a summit, one discovers a vast horizon, so, O Lord, when one’s consciousness is identified with that intermediate domain between Thy Unity and the manifested world, one participates both in Thy Infinitude and in the realisation of the world. It is as though one were at a centre where the consciousness, wholly steeped in Thy effective Power, could direct the ray of Thy forces upon the lowly instrument moving among its brother instruments. From the height of these transcendent regions the unity of physical substance is clearly visible, and yet the body which serves as a particular instrument in the material field seems specially precise and distinct like a stronger point amidst this whole, at once multiple and one, in which the forces circulate evenly.

This perception has not left me since yesterday. It has settled in as something definitive, and all the outer activity which apparently continues as usual, has become mechanical like a marvellously articulated and animated toy moved by the consciousness from the height of its seat which though no longer individual is still universal, that is, which is not yet completely merged in Thy Oneness. All the laws of individual manifestation have become clear to me, but in so synthetical, so global, so simultaneous a way, that it is impossible to express this in our ordinary language.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 142)



THE MOTHER'S REPLIES TO SOME QUESTIONS ON INDIA

1. If you were asked to sum up, just in one sentence, your vision of India, what would be your answer?

India's true destiny is to be the Guru of the world.

2. Similarly, if you were asked to comment on the reality as you see it, how would you do so in one sentence?

The present reality is a big falsehood — hiding an eternal truth.

3. What, according to you, are the three main barriers that stand between the vision and the reality?

(a) Ignorance; (b) fear; (c) falsehood.

4. Are you satisfied with the over-all progress India has made since Independence?

No.

5. What is our most outstanding achievement in recent times? Why do you consider it so important?

Waking up of the yearning for Truth. Because without Truth there is no reality.

6. Likewise, can you name our saddest failure? On what grounds do you regard it as so tragic?

Insincerity. Because insincerity leads to ruin.

Published 26 January 1964

(Words of the Mother – I, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 13, pp. 358-59)

**“IN TERRAM” —
CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO**

Sri Aurobindo —

I have tried to transform a poem written some months ago? How would you describe the inspiration now — both in word and rhythm? Is the thought too involved?

IN TERRAM

Why this indignity that from the brave
Height of soul-lustre into a broken grave
Man's yearning flesh should drop and all his drouth
Of planet-passion kiss the worm's cold mouth?
What treasure yet unknown draws down his mood,
Whose heart is fashioned for infinitude?
Surely some God-abyss calls out to him! . . .
We die and all our wingèd senses dim
Because we have not dreamed the goal of birth,
The arcane ~~eternities~~ eternity coring dull earth.
O omnipresent Light, break from below
As in the constellate seasons of our mind:
Rise up and ~~bloom-within~~ flower in these cells of woe,
Flush the wan nerves, breathe your immense gold-breath,
And make our limbs no longer grope to find
A heaven of quiet through world-weary death!

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

It is very fine. The thought is clear enough. Illumined mind + intuitive inspiration.

19 August 1935

[Version from *The Secret Splendour* —
Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna (Amal Kiran), 1993, p. 172:]

IN TERRAM

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 Height of soul-lustre into a broken grave
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 And make our limbs no longer grope to find
 A heaven of quiet through world-weary death!

AMAL KIRAN
 (K. D. SETHNA)

We must look existence in the face in whatever aspect it confronts us and be strong to find within as well as behind it the Divine.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 191)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of April 2015)

Chapter: XLII

The Empire Strikes (3)

Once Keshavananda told Mother*, “How much Swamiji** would have done for the country if he were alive now.” Mother at once replied, “If Naren were here today, would the Company (the British) have left him in peace? They would have locked him up in jail. That would have been too much for me to bear.” About Sri Aurobindo, the young revolutionary, the Mother said, “He is my brave son.”¹

*(*Sarada Devi; **Swami Vivekananda.)*

Wondering if Barindra Kumar had “grown crazy”, as Sri Aurobindo did, was too mild a censure of the weird hero’s decision to make a clean breast of his group’s activities. He was endangering not only his own life but also of those of his young compatriots who did not subscribe to his bravado despite the idealism it projected — that it was designed to save the skin of many more.

Barindra Kumar’s statement was a strong basis, among other evidences on which the case known as The Alipore Conspiracy Case or The Alipore Bomb Case, was rested. To feel a whiff of the socio-political climate of the time it is worth having a look at the statement of Barindra Kumar, “aged about 28 years, made before L. Birley, Magistrate of the 1st class at Alipore, on the 4th day of May 1908, in the English language” as it was documented then:

My name is Barindra Kumar Ghose. My father’s name is Doctor Krishnadhan Ghose. I am by caste Kayastha, and by occupation formerly contributor to *Jugantar*. I was born at Croydon in England. I reside at 32 Muraripukur Road, Maniktola.

Do you wish to make a statement before me?

Yes.

Do you understand that your statement being made before a Magistrate will be admissible in evidence against you?

Yes.

Is your statement being made voluntarily or has any pressure been put upon you to make it?

No. It is quite voluntary.

Will you tell me what you have to say?

Whatever I had to say I have said in a written statement.

Have you any objection to making that statement to me here?

Shall I begin from the very beginning?

Yes.

In my statement I shall be a little vague about time because it is difficult to remember dates. I passed my entrance examination from the Deoghar School.

At what age did you come to India?

When I was one year old. After passing the entrance examination I went to Dacca where my brother Manomohan Ghose was Professor and I read up to the First Arts there. After that I gave up my studies and went to Baroda where my brother Aurobindo Ghose was a Professor in the Gaekwar's College. There I devoted myself to the study of History and Political Literature. After being there for a year I came back to Bengal with the idea of preaching the cause of independence as a political missionary. I moved about from district to district and started gymnasiums. There young men were brought together to learn physical exercises and to study politics.

I went on preaching the cause of independence for nearly two years. By that time I had been through almost all the Districts of Bengal I got tired of it and went back to Baroda and studied for one year. I then returned to Bengal convinced that a purely political propaganda would not do for the country and that people must be trained spiritually to face dangers. I had an idea of starting a religious institution. By that time the *swadeshi* and boycott agitation had begun. I thought of taking men under my own instruction to teach them and so

I began to collect this band which has been arrested. I started with my friend Abinash Bhattacharjee (now under arrest) and Bhupendra Nath Dutta (now in jail). I started the *Jugantar* paper. We managed it for nearly one-and-a-half years and then gave it over to the present managers.

After I gave it up, I again took to recruiting. I collected altogether 14 or 15 young men from about the beginning of 1907 until now. I educated the boys in religious books and politics. We are always thinking of revolution and wished to be ready for it, so we were collecting weapons in small quantities. Altogether I have collected 11 revolvers, four rifles and one gun. Among other young men who came to be admitted to our circle was Ullaskar Dutta; I don't remember exactly when but about the beginning of this year. He said that he wanted to come among us and be useful as he had learnt the preparation of explosives.

He had a small laboratory in his house without his father's knowledge and he experimented there. I never saw it . . . he told me of it. With his help we began preparing explosives in small quantities in the Garden House at 32 Muraripukur Road. In the meantime another friend of ours, Hem Chandra Das of Kundrui in Midnapur District, after I think selling part of his property, went to Paris to learn mechanics and, if possible, explosives.

When did he go?

Approximately in the middle of 1907.

When did he return?

Three or four months ago, when he came back to join Ullaskar Dutt in preparing explosives and bombs.

Where did he do it?

At 38-4 Raja Nabakrishna Street, Calcutta, and at a house which he had rented in Bagh Bazar — 15 Gopi Mohan Dutta Street. About five or six months ago, that is after press prosecution became numerous, we began to think of using explosives and wherever we went for money we were encouraged to use explosives. Thinking that to be the voice of the nation, we submitted and began serious preparations. The first attempt which we made was in French Chandernagore when the Lieutenant Governor was going to Ranchi. Ullaskar Dutt went to Chandernagore with a small dynamite mine and some fuse and detonators and tried to place it on the [railway] line just before the Special came. He was disturbed at the first place where he began by people coming

out of their houses. He tried another place and could not place it properly and the Special came and he hurriedly dropped two or three cartridges and went away. There was a futile explosion.

What is your authority for this statement?

I sent him. I, Ullaskar and Upendranath Banerji used to do these things in consultation. I heard the account from Ullaskar. When the Lieutenant Governor was coming back from Cuttack two others started with a similar object — Prafulla Chandra Chaki of Bogra and Bibhuti Bhusan Sarkar (of Santipur, I believe). I went with them. We thought he would come back via Asansol. We went to Chandernagore.

What had you with you?

A mine and fuse. We waited but he did not come that way.

Did you lay the mine?

Yes.

Where?

Between Chandernagore and Mankundu Stations. As he did not come we picked it up and brought it away; we inquired at Chandernagore Station and we were told that the Lieutenant Governor was not coming that way. The third time we went on a similar errand to Kharagpur.

Who went?

The same three — I, Prafulla and Bibhuti. We left the train at Kharagpur at 10 a.m. In the afternoon we went by train to Narayangarh where we waited on the road which is parallel to the railway line. When it was dark we went to the railway line and waited till 9 p.m.

We waited at a spot about a mile from Narayangarh on the Kharagpur side. Here I shall give minute details because innocent people have been punished for this offence. We had with us a mine made of six pounds of dynamite charged in a thick iron vessel with a lid at the top. The lid had a hole in the centre. We had a fuse made of picric compound and powder was placed in a paper tube; we used a leaden pipe in case it should get choked by ballast. While we were placing the mine, the leaden pipe was found too long so we cut

a piece off and threw it down there.

We had a dark lantern with candles. We had various things wrapped up in paper and we had copies of *Englishman* and of *Bande Mataram*; we also left them behind. They had stains of picric acid on them because the fuse was wrapped up in them. We had a cardboard shoe box that we left behind. We put cotton in the cardboard box and then a fuse and placed more cotton over it. We left the pieces of cotton behind.

We ate sweets there, near some bushes below the line, we left some *sal* leaves with the remnants of the food. We placed the mine there and, between 11 and 12 at night, I alone went back to Narayangarh and went by the last down passenger to Calcutta. I left behind the two boys and they placed the fuse on the line when the Special came. They said they were about one-and-a-half miles away when the explosion took place. We took no assistance from any *coolie* or anyone else.

After that there was a bomb outrage at Chandernagore. Hem Chandra Das prepared the bomb. Indu Bhusan Rai of Jessore and I and Narendra Nath Gossain of Serampore went to Chandernagore together. We left the train at Mankundu Station at sunset. We went straight to Chandernagore Strand and waited till 10 p.m. We did not see the Mayor that night. We went and stayed the night under a tree near the station and the next morning Indra and Narendra went to Serampore to Narendra's place. Naren is the son of Nando Lal Gossami, Zamindar. I returned to Calcutta. We three went to Chandernagore again the same evening. I left the train there and Indra and Naren left at Mankundu. We met in the Strand and Indra undertook to throw the bomb.

He went to the window of the dining room where the Mayor was dining with his wife, which was on the ground floor in a by-lane. He threw the bomb through the window gratings. We three went to Telinipara Ghat and crossed the river to Shamnagar and then to Calcutta. The bomb did not work; we came to the conclusion that the picric acid was bad. I was at a little distance when Indra threw it.

There is one more incident at Muzaffarpur and I shall explain it. Prafulla Chandra Chaki insisted on going with a bomb to Muzaffarpur to do away with Mr. Kingsford because he had tried the cases against the nationalist papers. The people in the country demanded his death. Hem Chandra and Ullaskar prepared the bomb at 15 Gopi Mohun Dutt's Lane. It was made of dynamite, put in a tin case with a wooden handle.

Upendranath and I consented to Prafulla going and Hem Chandra recommended Khudiram Bose of Midnapur. He was also allowed to go. I gave them two revolvers because they wanted to kill themselves if they were caught. Khudiram was an outsider. He did not know of the Garden House or of 15 Gopi Mohun Dutt's Lane.

He was staying with Hem Chandra Das. I took Prafulla from the Garden House, 32 Muraripukur Road to 15 Gopi Mohun Dutt's Lane and there he packed the bomb in a canvas bag and placed a revolver with it.

Where did you get the revolvers?

I do not wish to say. I took Prafulla to Hem's place and left him with Khudiram. I was told that they began the same night.

When were you arrested?

The day before yesterday, early in the morning.

Where?

At 32 Muraripukur Road.

Who else was there?

Ullaskar Dutt, Upendra Nath Banerji, Indra (Indu) Bhusan Rai, Bibhuti Bhusan Sarkar, Paresh Chandra Moulik, Nalini Kanta (Kumar) Gupta, Kunjo Lal Saha, Sachindra Nath Sen, Purna Chandra Sen, Hemendra Nath Ghose, Sisir Kumar Ghose, Bijoy Chandra Nag and others.

What were they doing there?

They are being instructed by me and Upendra Nath in religious and political books.

Do they live there?

Yes, they were staying there with us.

How was this household supported?

I collected money from different people for supporting them. The object was to teach them and send out missionaries, and for this anarchical work.

What did the police find?

They found the weapons which I have mentioned and a quantity of dynamite and some bottles of nitric acid, sulphuric acid and picric acid. These things were buried in two iron tanks in the ground and in an earthen pot. The police found one and I pointed out the other two. There is one other thing which I can't tell you — the supporters' names.

Are any people out now on similar errands?

No. I also want to say that we are not responsible for shooting Mr. Allen nor for the Kustia shooting case.

Have you planned to destroy anyone else?

No. We have discussed destroying the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief but the plans took no practical form. We never believed that political murder will bring independence.

Then why do you do it?

We believe the people wanted it.

Stating the motive for disclosing the facts, Barindra Ghose said that his party was divided as to the propriety of disclosing these facts. He said: "Some thought they would deny everything and take the consequences but I persuaded them all to give written and oral statements to Inspector Ramsaday Mukerji because I believe that as this band was found out, it was best not to do any other work in the country, and because we ought to save the innocent." The Magistrate, Mr. L. Birley signed that the confession was voluntarily made; that it was taken in his presence and hearing and was read over to the person making it, and admitted by him to be correct and that it contained a full and true account of the statement made by him.

Barindra Ghose's statement was recorded in open court between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. The accused was guarded by two constables of the Bengal Police and not by the Calcutta Police constables who brought him. No other police officer was in Court. It is also pointed out that Barindra Ghose or Barin, as he was popularly known, had been in custody from the morning of Saturday 2 May to the night of Sunday 3 May and had written out a statement for the police too.²

Barindra Kumar's statement is unparalleled in importance so far as a certain chapter of the history of India's freedom movement is concerned. While on one hand it

reveals the irony that lies in mighty ideals of revolutions being reduced to essays and actions in futility, as Barindra Kumar himself realised, on the other hand it still reveals the kind of spirit that ennobles an individual's action that sets examples in selfless courage and love for a great cause. Time cannot deny them their role in the totality of the achievement of their lofty goal — liberating the country from the octopus grip of imperialism. As a recent chronicler of that period observes:

At one time or another every human being relives his or her history. But almost as easily the march of time ensures that certain memories grow hazy and are soon lost forever.

As we move from one day to the next caught up in the race to outdo the other, we often forget that perhaps we would not have been where we are had someone, somewhere — maybe sometime way back in the past — not made a huge sacrifice for us. That someone could be our parents, our ancestors, or even a dear friend . . . someone who took that one defining step that helped to place us on the highway of success.

Imagine forgetting the contribution of such a person as we bask in the halo of our new-found achievements. Similarly, imagine a considerable part of the nation forgetting the contribution of an entire generation of brave-hearts who were instrumental in giving back to us our first and foremost right . . . our freedom!

Kanai Dutt, Satyendranath Bose, Charu Charan Bose, Upendra Nath Banerjee, Indu Bhushan Roy, Ullaskar Dutt, Basant Biswas and Ratan Hiri were bright young men who sacrificed their lives for India. Yet today, except for the renaming of Muraripukur Lane (the street where the Ghose family's house *Bagan Bari* or Garden House lay) to "Barin Ghose Sarani", these martyrs are sadly forgotten.³

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

References and Notes

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN — NOBLE AND RESOLUTE

(Continued from the issue of April 2015)

14. More battles and Lincoln's leadership

Late in January 1863 there was a risk of a breakdown of army command as two Generals got into a quarrel. General Joseph Hooker had ridiculed General Ambrose E. Burnside, a superior officer, and even called Lincoln "a played-out imbecile". It must be noted that a month earlier Burnside erred at the Battle of Fredericksburg, suffering one of the worst defeats with 12,000 casualties. In order to avoid a crisis, Lincoln had to relieve Burnside as Commander of the Army of the Potomac and replaced him with Hooker. Though affronted by a subordinate a few ranks below him, Lincoln was above insult. He then had a cordial meeting with Hooker and then handed him a letter where Lincoln's forbearance and exemplary sense of restraint, besides his excellent command of the English language, comes to the fore. It also reflects Lincoln's leadership skills in motivating a troublesome General yet guiding him by gently pointing out his excesses:

General,

I have placed you at the head of the Army of the Potomac. Of course I have done this upon what appears to me sufficient reasons and yet I think it best for you to know that there are some things in regard to which I am not quite satisfied with you. I believe you to be a brave and a skilful soldier, which, of course, I like. I also believe that you do not mix politics with your profession, in which you are right. You have confidence in yourself, which is a valuable, if not an indispensable quality.

You are ambitious, which, within reasonable bounds, does good rather than harm. But I think during General Burnside's command of the Army, you have taken counsel of your ambition, and thwarted him as much as you could, in which you did a great wrong to the country and to a most meritorious and honourable brother officer. I have heard in such way as to believe it, of your recently saying that both the Army and the Government needed a Dictator. Of course it was not for this, but in spite of it, that I have given you the command. Only those generals who gain successes can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship. The Government will support you to the utmost of its ability, which is neither more nor less than it has done and will do for all commanders. I much fear that the spirit which you have aided to infuse into the Army, of criticising your commander and with-

holding confidence from him, will now turn upon you. I shall assist you as far as I can to put it down. Neither you nor Napoleon, if he were alive again, could get any good out of an Army when such a spirit prevails in it. And now beware of rashness. Beware of rashness, but with energy and sleepless vigilance go forward, and give us victories.

Yours very truly
A. Lincoln¹

Though a wee bit aggrieved Hooker was moved by the kind-hearted tone of the letter. He read it to various people, including Noah Brooks and Dr. Henry, who thought it should be printed in gold letters. Hooker then told Brooks: "That is just such a letter as a father might write to his son." He continued: "It is a beautiful letter, and, although I think he was harder on me than I deserved, I will say that I love the man who wrote it."²

In another instance a promising young officer had used unbecoming language whilst addressing a superior officer and then publicly derogated the superior's achievements. Lincoln sent a gentle reprimand to the young officer, yet counselled:

You have too much of life yet before you, and have shown too much of promise as an officer, for your future to be lightly surrendered. No man resolved to make the most of himself, can spare time for personal contention. Still less he can afford to take all the consequences, including the vitiating of his temper, and the loss of self-control. Yield larger things to which you can show no more than equal right; and yield lesser ones, though clearly your own. Better give your path to a dog, than be bitten by him in contesting for the right. Even killing the dog would not cure the bite.³

After Lee's great victory at the battle of Fredericksburg, his strategy was to gain further military victories, hoping to demoralise the Northerners and create a revolution in the North and then subsequently persuade the British to support the Confederate cause. From April 30 to May 6, 1863 a battle was fought at Chancellorsville, Virginia between General Lee and General Hooker. Facing an enemy force nearly twice the size of his own, Lee surprised Hooker by daringly splitting his troops in two. Had Hooker committed all his troops, as Lincoln had directed him to do, the course of the battle might have been different. Hooker was forced to retreat across the Rappahannock River losing about 17,000 men to Lee's 12,000. The Battle of Chancellorsville is considered to be Lee's greatest victory during the Civil

1. Website: www.nps.gov

2. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 514.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 570.

War. A stunned Lincoln burst out, “My God! my God! What will the country say? Oh, what will the country say?” Noah Brooks was with Lincoln when the news came. “I shall never forget that picture of despair,” he later wrote. “Had a thunderbolt fallen upon the President he could not have been more overwhelmed.”⁴ Lincoln felt that this loss would be very injurious. He told Stanton, “My God, Stanton, our cause is lost! We are ruined, we are ruined, and such a fearful loss of life! My God! This is more than I can endure.”⁵

With his tail up Lee decided to invade the North for a second time and drove into Maryland. With another victory or two Lee hoped to strengthen the cause of northern “Copperheads” who favoured peace and then gain recognition of the Confederacy by Britain and France. Lincoln ordered Hooker to repel the invasion but Hooker did not attack and instead asked for reinforcements despite his army outnumbering Lee’s. When Henry Halleck, Lincoln’s General in Chief, clashed with Hooker, he offered his resignation which Lincoln finally accepted and replaced him with General George Gordon Meade. Amongst Meade’s assets was that he stayed out of army feuds and obeyed orders even if he disagreed with them. The two armies met at Gettysburg and the bloodiest fighting broke out. The battle took place from 1 to 3 July 1863 and more men fought and died here than in any other battle in American history — Confederate casualties were 28,000, a third of Lee’s army, whilst the Union were 23,000. His hopes of a victorious invasion of the North dashed, Lee waited for a Union counterattack on July 4, but it never came. That night, in heavy rain, the Confederate general withdrew his decimated army toward Virginia. On 4 July Lincoln proclaimed that the Union army had fought with “the highest honour” at Gettysburg. The battle at Gettysburg was a great success for Lincoln and when he heard that Lee was on the retreat, he was joyous and ordered Meade to follow Lee and destroy the exhausted Confederate army. But Meade did not pursue Lee, contented that he had driven the invader away from his soil. Like McClellan at Antietam, Meade was too cautious and did not know the importance of following a defeated retreating army and annihilating it. During the retreat Lee was unable to cross the Potomac river for three days due to its high swollen waters. Lincoln knew that if Meade attacked Lee’s army at this opportune moment Lee would be obliterated. Yet the wary Meade did not attack Lee’s tired and demoralised army. Finally when the waters subsided Lee was able to cross the river and escape into Virginia. Lincoln was distressed and sorrowful at this grave error of Meade’s; a golden opportunity to effectively end the war was lost (the war continued for almost two more agonising years). Lincoln later told his son Robert that if he “had gone up there, I could have whipped them myself.”⁶ Never had Lincoln been seen so visibly

4. *Ibid.*, p. 520.

5. Don Edward Fehrenbacher, Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 416.

6. Donald T. Phillips, *Lincoln on Leadership*, p. 132.

upset, and a few days later, a friend observed that Lincoln's "grief and anger were something sorrowful to behold."⁷ When Meade, aware of Lincoln's unhappiness, offered his resignation, Lincoln demonstrated his maturity by placating him, yet frankly vented his feelings in a letter to Meade:

Executive Mansion
Washington, July 14, 1863

Major General Meade,

I have just seen your despatch to Gen. Halleck, asking to be relieved of your command, because of a supposed censure of mine. I am very very grateful to you for the magnificent success you gave the cause of the country at Gettysburg; and I am sorry now to be the author of the slightest pain to you. But I was in such deep distress myself that I could not restrain some expression of it. . . . You fought and beat the enemy at Gettysburg; and, of course, to say the least, his loss was as great as yours. He retreated; and you did not, as it seemed to me, pressingly pursue him; but a flood in the river detained him, till, by slow degrees, you were again upon him. You had at least twenty thousand veteran troops directly with you, and as many more raw ones within supporting distance, all in addition to those who fought with you at Gettysburg; while it was not possible that he had received a single recruit; and yet you stood and let the flood run down, bridges be built, and the enemy move away at his leisure, without attacking him.

Again, my dear general, I do not believe you appreciate the magnitude of the misfortune involved in Lee's escape. He was within your easy grasp, and to have closed upon him would, in connection with our other late successes, have ended the war. As it is, the war will be prolonged indefinitely. If you could not safely attack Lee last Monday, how can you possibly do so South of the river, when you can take with you very few more than two thirds of the force you then had in hand? It would be unreasonable to expect, and I do not expect you can now effect much. Your golden opportunity is gone, and I am distressed immeasurably because of it.

I beg you will not consider this a prosecution, or persecution of yourself. As you had learned that I was dissatisfied, I have thought it best to kindly tell you why.

Abraham Lincoln⁸

7. Richard R. Duncan, *Lee's Endangered Left: The Civil War In Western Virginia, Spring of 1864*, p. 3.

8. Website: www.historyplace.com

Later Lincoln desisted from sending the letter as he knew it would leave Meade disconsolate. When upset or angry Lincoln would check himself and let his emotions settle down before making a final decision. He rejected Meade's resignation and told his secretary, John Hay that while Meade had made a grave mistake, "Still I am very grateful to Meade for the great service he did at Gettysburg."⁹

One is reminded of an interesting incident between Lincoln and War Secretary, Edwin Stanton. An officer had disobeyed, or failed to comprehend an order. "I believe I'll sit down," said Stanton, "and give that man a piece of my mind." "Do so," said Lincoln, "write him now while you have it on your mind. Make it sharp. Cut him all up." Stanton did not need a second invitation. It was a "bone-crusher" that he read to the President. "That's right," said Lincoln, "that's a good one." "Whom can I send it by?" mused the Secretary. "Send it!" replied Lincoln, "send it! Why, don't send it at all. Tear it up. You have freed your mind on the subject, and that is all that is necessary. Tear it up. You never want to send such letters. I never do."¹⁰

Lincoln was so anxious during the battle of Gettysburg that he felt he was being crushed. He related to General Sickles how he prayed during the battle of Gettysburg: "went to my room and got down on my knees in prayer. Never before had I prayed with so much earnestness. I wish I could repeat my prayer. I felt I must put all my trust in Almighty God. He gave our people the best country ever given to man. He alone could save it from destruction. I had tried my best to do my duty and had found myself unequal to the task. The burden was more than I could bear. I asked Him to help us to victory now. I was sure my prayer was answered. I had no misgivings about the result at Gettysburg."¹¹

Following the victory at Gettysburg, General Ulysses S. Grant won a great battle at Vicksburg. The capture of Vicksburg would yield Union control of the entire course of the Mississippi river, thus enabling it to isolate those Confederate states that lay west of the river from those in the east. The capture of Vicksburg divided the Confederacy and proved the military genius of Grant. Lincoln exclaimed: "I cannot, in words, tell you my joy over this result. It is great."¹² Lincoln was ecstatic with these simultaneous victories — coincidentally both on Independence Day, July 4 — for these turned the tide of the Civil War in the Union's favour. Grant was Lincoln's joy and favourite General for he was a fierce, fighting commander who determinedly went after the rebels and fought bravely without asking for reinforcements. Further, he was a disciplined soldier, and unlike some of the other Generals did not question Government policy but followed orders to win the war.

9. James F. Rhodes, *History of the United States*, p. 297.

10. Website: www.coachwhipbooks.com

11. Website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org and see Don Edward Fehrenbacher, Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 406.

12. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 533.

Following Grant's victory at Vicksburg, Lincoln expressed his gratitude in a letter, at the same time revealing his acquired skills in military strategy and his sincerity in admitting a misjudgement:

[To Major-General Grant:]

MY DEAR GENERAL: — I do not remember that you and I ever met personally. I write this now as a grateful acknowledgement for the almost inestimable service you have done the country. I wish to say a word further. When you first reached the vicinity of Vicksburg, I thought you should do what you finally did — march the troops across the neck, run the batteries with the transports, and thus go below; and I never had any faith, except a general hope that you knew better than I, that the Yazoo Pass expedition and the like could succeed. When you got below and took Port Gibson, Grand Gulf, and vicinity, I thought you should go down the river and join General Banks, and when you turned northward east of the Big Black, I feared it was a mistake. I now wish to make the personal acknowledgement that you were right and I was wrong.

Yours very truly

A. Lincoln¹³

In September when General Burnside made a blunder, Lincoln wrote a letter reprimanding him; but later did not send it, as censuring him would achieve nothing for the damage had already been done.¹⁴ Despite grave errors by his Generals, Lincoln showed remarkable self-restraint in not admonishing them strongly for he felt that any discouragement in the midst of the war was a delicate matter with potentially grave repercussions. This perhaps explains his tolerance towards his Cabinet Secretaries and Generals and his reluctance to summarily fire incompetent subordinates and ineffective Generals. Instead, he gave them a chance to learn from their mistakes. He never liked personal confrontations or animosities of any kind. His leadership was more based on empathetic understanding, on positive rather than negative reinforcement, yet gently guiding an erring subordinate when required. This greatly encouraged and motivated the administration and the military. Indeed, he had in abundance the three qualities a leader should have, i.e. skill with one's hands, goodness at heart and a calm mind. Lincoln was a kind but firm leader. There were demands of cabinet members, congressmen, state politicians, who regularly sought the President's approval for their agendas. When a demand was made that Postmaster General, Montgomery Blair, should be dismissed from the cabinet, Lincoln firmly responded that he should be the sole judge of when and for what to dismiss a cabinet officer.¹⁵

13. Albert Deane Richardson, *A Personal History of Ulysses S. Grant*, p. 337.

14. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, pp. 361-62.

15. Theodore Pease, editor, *Diary of Orville Hickman Browning*, Vol. I, p. 677.

In a letter Lincoln reveals his singlemindedness to the task at hand and his broadmindedness: “I shall do all I can to save the government, which is my sworn duty as well as my personal inclination. I shall do nothing in malice. What I deal with is too vast for malicious dealing.”¹⁶

There were allegations of Grant’s drinking binges (on the odd occasion he may have enjoyed one too many) and a delegation of politicians demanded that Lincoln fire Grant because he drank too much. Lincoln sent investigators to observe Grant’s behaviour and they reported that his drinking did not affect his unmatched ability to plan, execute and win battles. Lincoln reportedly said that if they could find out Grant’s brand of whiskey he would send every General a barrel of it. When queried on the authenticity of the statement, Lincoln laughed and said, “That would have been very good if I had said it; but I reckon it was charged to me to give it currency.” Lincoln later promoted Grant to Lieutenant General, a rank seldom given, and appointed him as General in Chief of all Union armies.¹⁷ Similarly when various Republicans demanded the removal of Kirby Benedict, Supreme Court Chief Justice of New Mexico on charges of drunkenness, Lincoln responded, “Well, gentlemen, I know Benedict. We have been friends for thirty years. He may imbibe to excess, but Benedict drunk knows more law than all the others on the bench in New Mexico sober. I shall not disturb him.”¹⁸

On 19 November 1863, Lincoln delivered his famous Gettysburg address, a speech which the Mother had appreciated.¹⁹ He was invited to say a few words to consecrate the cemetery grounds at Gettysburg. Lincoln’s speech lasted only two minutes. The audience was in rapt attention followed by an awe-struck silence when the speech was over. This classic piece ran:

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that “all men are created equal.”

Now we are engaged in a great Civil War, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it, as a final resting place for those who died here, that the nation might live. This we may, in all propriety do. But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate — we can not consecrate — we can not hallow, this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have hallowed it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here; while it can never forget what they did here.

16. Ronald C. White, Ronald C. White Jr., *Lincoln’s Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural*, p. 170.

17. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, pp. 354, 383.

18. Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, Vol. II, pp. 63-64.

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

It is rather for us, the living, we here be dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that, from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here, gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve these dead shall not have died in vain; that the nation, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people by the people for the people, shall not perish from the earth.²⁰

Senator Charles Sumner — the person who pressurised Lincoln more than anybody else to emancipate the slaves — called the speech a “monumental act”. He said Lincoln was mistaken that “the world will little note, nor long remember what we say here”. Rather, he remarked, “The world noted at once what he said, and will never cease to remember it. The battle itself was less important than the speech.”²¹

In early December Lincoln’s kindness was extended to his Confederate sister-in-law, Emilie Helm. He invited her to stay at the White House despite slander directed at him from certain newspapers for this act. At the outbreak of the war her husband Ben had disappointed Lincoln when he refused Lincoln’s offer to join the Union army and instead joined the Confederates. Ben was then fatally wounded in battle and when the news reached Lincoln that his brother-in-law, barely 32 years of age, had been killed Lincoln’s friend David Davis observed, “I saw how grief-stricken he was . . . so I closed the door and left him alone.” Emilie was now a widow, alone and in a period of crisis. The Lincolns received her with the warmest affection. The three of them, were “all too grief-stricken at first for speech.” The Lincolns had lost Willie, Emilie had lost her husband and the two sisters had lost three brothers in the Confederate army — Sam Todd at Shiloh, David Todd from wounds at Vicksburg, and little Alexander, Mary’s favourite baby brother, at Baton Rouge. Families torn apart by the Civil War abounded in the border states such as Missouri or Kentucky, the ancestral home of the Todds. The sight of brother fighting brother was one of the horrendous realities of the war.²²

One night in February 1864 the President’s stables caught fire and Lincoln raced to the scene. When he reached there was a hedge; a member of his bodyguard, Robert McBride, recalled, “he sprang over it like a deer.” Learning that the horses were still inside, Lincoln “with his own hands burst open the stable door.” The fire was so intense that a rescue was hopeless and six horses were burned to death. “Notwithstanding this,” McBride observed, “he would apparently have tried to enter the burning building had not those standing near caught and restrained him.”²³

20. Website: www.visit-gettysburg.com [americancivilwar.com]

21. Website: www.showcase.netins.net

22. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 591.

23. See *Ibid.*, p. 603.

15. Re-election bid and Lincoln as a tough war-time President

In early 1864 the question of re-nominating Lincoln for President arose. When Lincoln's old friend Leonard Swett asked if he was thinking about getting re-elected, Lincoln replied, "Swett, how did you know that the bee was buzzing about my ears? Until very recently I expected to see the Union safe and the authority of the government restored before my term of service expired. But as the war has been prolonged, I confess that I should like to see it out in this chair. I suppose that everybody in my position finds some reason, good or bad, to gratify or excuse their ambition."²⁴

When Treasury Secretary, Salmon P. Chase had aspirations of replacing Lincoln in the 1864 elections, he made light of Chase's ambitions. When friends brought news of Chase's intrigues Lincoln waived them aside and tongue-in-cheek, said, "I know meaner things about Governor Chase than any of those men can tell me." Lincoln resented the tactics of the anti-Chase campaigners stating, "He had been mortified at some of our friends who urged him not to appoint Chase because he had abused him at a public table at Newport — and other occasions." Lincoln took offence at the implication that he was "capable of being influenced in making an appointment of such importance to the country by mere personal considerations." People denigrated Chase but Lincoln replied, "Chase is a very able man" who happened to be "a little insane" on the Presidency and who "has not always behaved very well lately." When people recommended that "now is the time to crush him out," Lincoln replied, "Well I'm not in favour of crushing anybody out! If there is anything a man can do and do it well, I say let him do it. Give him a chance." Mary warned Lincoln not to trust Chase but Lincoln continued to insist that Chase was a "patriot". In February 1864, a news report appeared criticising Lincoln, declaring that his re-election as President was impossible, and Salmon Chase was the best man for the White House. Many believed that the attack was orchestrated by Chase himself, but he denied knowledge of the report and offered to resign. Though a wee wary, Lincoln still gave Chase the benefit of doubt and rejected the offer of resignation.²⁵ Later when Chase sent him a letter of resignation once too often, Lincoln accepted, stating to someone "this is the third time he has thrown this resignation at me, and I do not think I am called on to continue to beg him to take it back, especially when the country would not go to destruction in consequence."²⁶ Treasury Registrar Lucius Chittenden expressed to Lincoln his distress for Chase was irreplaceable. Lincoln responded: "I will tell you, how it is with Chase. It is the

24. Don Edward Fehrenbacher, Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 465.

25. See Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, Vol. 1, p. 735 and see Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, pp. 381-82.

26. Website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org

easiest thing in the world for a man to fall into a bad habit. Chase has fallen into two bad habits. . . . He thinks he has become indispensable to the country. . . . He also thinks he ought to be President; he has no doubt whatever about that.” These two unfortunate tendencies, Lincoln explained, had made Chase “irritable, uncomfortable, so that he is never perfectly happy unless he is thoroughly miserable.” At this point, according to Chittenden, Lincoln paused. “And yet there is not a man in the Union who would make as good a chief justice as Chase,” he continued, “and if I have the opportunity, I will make him Chief Justice of the United States.” Chittenden concluded that this extraordinary want of vindictiveness toward someone who had caused him such grief proved that Lincoln “must move upon a higher plane and be influenced by loftier motives than any man” he had ever known.²⁷ Soon after, when the position of Chief Justice fell vacant, Lincoln, though still concerned about Chase’s political ambitions, selected him.

Keeping to his open door policy of non-partisanship, Andrew Johnson, a war Democrat, became Lincoln’s second Vice Presidential running mate in 1864. The Democratic Party was unscrupulous in trying to bring him down during the election campaign. Lincoln told John Hay that it was ironic that though he was not a vindictive man, almost all his elections were marked with great rancour and bitterness. There were several critics and the immense responsibility of a President, by its very nature, creates its own enemies as he cannot satisfy everybody.

Lincoln was anxious to win the re-election, not for personal motives but on the impact it would have on the war if he were to be defeated. He wanted to remain in the Presidency until the war had been won. Some Union men suggested that Lincoln rescind the Emancipation Proclamation if he wanted to save his Presidency but Lincoln stuck to his principles. The Union now had black soldiers and Lincoln could not send them back to their former masters. He would be “damned in time and eternity” if he did.²⁸

During the re-election campaign, Journalist Noah Brooks, who had easy access to Lincoln, reported on his selflessness: “He is no seeker for a renewal of office, busies himself with no thought of his own future. . . . But patient, patriotic, persevering and single hearted, he goes right on with his duty, ‘pegging away,’ just as though, as he had said to me, his own life were to end with his official life, content to leave his earnest labours and conscientious discharge of duty to the disposal of God and his country.”²⁹

During the uncertainty of his re-nomination there was one encouraging development. In the spring of 1864 Lincoln found in William Tecumseh Sherman a dashing General. In Grant and Sherman, Lincoln found the right duo who could

27. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 634-35.

28. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, pp. 395-96.

29. Website: www.abrahamlincolnsclassroom.org

implement his military strategy of multi-pronged assaults thus using superior Union manpower to bludgeon the Confederacy. On September 2, 1864 Sherman captured Atlanta, a railroad hub and industrial centre that kept the Confederate army supplied with food and weapons. This was a significant and morale-boosting victory for Lincoln.

In the autumn of 1864, Sherman started a new warfare of wrecking enemy railroads, factories, burning corn and cotton fields, killing cows and chickens and destroying anything that might sustain the rebel army. Sherman's "total war" in Georgia was brutal and destructive, undermining Southern morale by making life unbearable for Georgia's civilians who sustained the rebels with material and moral support. Though the Union's scorched-earth warfare paid off, it earned Lincoln and Sherman intense hatred in the Southern states. Whilst detractors felt Lincoln at times was ruthless to achieve his goal, he endeavoured to shorten the war and thus reduce casualties.³⁰ Lincoln once ironically said, "Doesn't it strike you as queer that I, who couldn't cut the head off of a chicken, and who was sick at the sight of blood, should be cast into the middle of a great war, with blood flowing all about me?"³¹

Visiting Lincoln on 29 October 1864, Sojourner Truth, a former slave, told Lincoln that he was the best President yet, to which Lincoln modestly replied, "I expect you have reference to my having emancipated the slaves in my proclamation. But [mentioning Washington and several other Presidents] they were all just as good, and would have done just as I have done if the time had come. If the people over the river [pointing across the Potomac] had behaved themselves, I could not have done what I have, but they did not, and I was compelled to do these things."³²

Some Republicans had urged Lincoln to cancel or postpone the 1864 Presidential re-election on the ground that his victory was uncertain and an anti-war Democrat victory would sell out the Union cause but he refused. "The election," he said later, "was a necessity." "We cannot have free government without elections; and if the rebellion could force us to forego, or postpone a national election, it might fairly claim to have already conquered us."³³ Never before in history had a nation embroiled in a revolution staged a vote of the people.

Lincoln's sense of liberalness and fairness had come to the fore a year earlier too, when General Burnside, on his own authority, shut down the paper *Chicago Times* after it had made a very provocative coverage. The suspension was immediately revoked. Asked months later by a radical to "suppress the infamous *Chicago Times*", Lincoln replied, "I fear you do not fully comprehend the danger of abridging the *liberties* of the people. Nothing but the very sternest necessity can

30. See Stephen B. Oates, *Abraham Lincoln — The Man Behind the Myths*, pp. 134-36.

31. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 562.

32. Don Edward Fehrenbacher, Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 448.

33. See Stephen B. Oates, *Abraham Lincoln — The Man Behind the Myths*, pp. 91,125.

ever justify it. A government had better go to the very extreme of toleration, than do aught that could be construed into an interference with, or to jeopardise in any degree, the common rights of its citizens.”³⁴

On the evening of election day, 8 November, 1864, as the results started coming in, Lincoln was informed that Winter Davis — a Lincoln opponent — had lost in Maryland. He was detached but admitted that Davis had been very malicious to him. Yet Lincoln bore him no ill-will and said: “A man has not time to spend half his life in quarrels. If any man ceases to attack me, I never remember the past against him.”³⁵

Lincoln, to his relief, won the re-election by a comfortable majority.³⁶ He told a post-election serenade on November 10, 1864, “So long as I have been here I have not willingly planted a thorn in any man’s bosom.”³⁷

Lincoln faced criticism for being a tough wartime President employing emergency powers without taking a sanction from Congress. Lincoln justified that these emergency measures were a public necessity, trusting that Congress would readily ratify them. For instance, the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* provoked a strong objection from the Chief Justice but Lincoln asserted that the Constitution was clear when it stated that it *could* be suspended in a dangerous emergency. Lincoln justified the suspension by pointing out that arrests of civilians had been made to weaken the rebellion and shorten the war. Lincoln met force with force to show that the Government could suppress a rebellion to preserve a united country. Detractors have questioned these measures as dictatorial, and in the eyes of many Confederates Lincoln was a radical and they hated him for it. Nevertheless Lincoln abhorred bloodshed and the ravages of war: the wrecked homes, broken families, mounting casualties took a terrible toll on his health. Early in 1864 he confided to his friend Owen Lovejoy, “This war is eating my life out. I have a strong impression that I shall not live to see the end.”³⁸

The President’s secretary, John Hay was astounded how tough Lincoln had become. He was convinced that Lincoln was an instrument of God and in a letter to Nicolay dated August 1863, he observed:

The Tycoon is in fine whack. I have rarely seen him more serene and busy. He is managing this war, this draft, foreign relations and planning a reconstruction of the Union, all at once. I never knew with what tyrannous authority he rules the Cabinet, till now. The most important things he decides and there is no

34. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 523.

35. Website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org

36. See website: www.abrahamlincolnsclassroom.org

37. Website: www.mrlincolnandfriends.org (Response to a Serenade, November 10, 1864)

38. Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years*, p. 467.

cavil. I am growing more and more firmly convinced that the good of the country absolutely demands that he should be kept where he is till this thing is over. There is no man in this country, so wise, so gentle, so firm. I believe the hand of God placed him where he is.³⁹

16. Lincoln under war strain yet his compassion flows

Following the election, the strain of 1864 taxed Lincoln so, that he looked beyond his fifty-five years. When Mary was congratulated on the Republican victory, she replied: “I almost wish it were otherwise. Poor Mr. Lincoln is looking so broken-hearted, so completely worn out, I fear he will not get through the next four years.”⁴⁰ As the inauguration approached, Lincoln’s health deteriorated and his friend Orville Browning observed that Lincoln “looked badly and felt badly — apparently more depressed than I have seen him since he became President.” Lincoln even admitted to his old friend Joshua Speed, “I am very unwell.” Right through his Presidency many politicians, generals, journalists, job seekers and relatives of Mary visited Lincoln seeking a promotion, a policy change, or a pardon. There was seldom any respite from the demands, thus taking a great toll on his health. On those rare occasions where it turned out that the visitor was seeking nothing, Lincoln reacted with relief and pleasure.⁴¹

Somehow, Lincoln found the inner strength to bear the endless pressures — the constant vitriol he suffered throughout his Presidency, the shattering loss of his cherished son Willie, the ensuing breakdown of his wife Mary, and above all, dealing with the ceaseless crises of an endless war with unprecedented high stakes. The war consumed and ate into him, demanding almost all his energy from dawn until late into the night. He had almost no time for his family, for recreation beyond a daily carriage ride, for meals and leisurely jokes and laughter with old friends, for government matters unrelated to the conflict. By mid-March 1865 Lincoln’s heavy work schedule and sleepless nights had almost utterly worn him down to the consternation of his friends. Once he was very ill but that did stop him from holding a Cabinet meeting in his bedroom. On the other hand John Hay discerned that an inner strength sustained Lincoln and he had never lost faith in himself. Through the worst days of disaccord and division Lincoln never lost his confidence, and in fact the four years as President had enormously enhanced his self-confidence. Indeed, he was the one who sustained the spirits and motivated his cabinet, administration staff and generals by his kindness, calm, good humour and sage guidance. He had

39. Michael Burlingame (ed.), *At Lincoln’s Side: John Hay’s Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings*, p. 49.

40. Website: www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org (Keckley, *Behind the Scenes*, p. 157)

41. See website: www.haroldholzer.com

learned from mistakes, transcended jealousy from rivals and detached himself from the bitterness of critics.

One of his distressing duties after the re-election was reviewing the court-martial cases. He consistently pardoned deserters on some pretext or the other stating, "There are already too many weeping widows in the United States", and, "For God's sake do not ask me to add to the number."⁴² Democrat Congressman Daniel Voorhees recalls Lincoln telling him, "No one need ever expect me to sanction the shooting of a man for running away in a battle. I won't do it. A man can't help being a coward any more than he could help a humpback, if he were born with one. . . . In any contest or controversy which arises between the head and the heels, I never knew the heels to get anything but the best of it. I'll never order a man shot for any such offence."⁴³

Lincoln was gracious to the hundreds of women who visited the White House seeking favours or pardons for husbands, brothers or sons. One woman described him as greeting her "with the kindness of a brother . . . When I was ushered into his presence he was alone. He immediately arose, and pointing to a chair by his side, said: 'Take this seat madam, and then tell me what I can do for you.'" Joshua F. Speed recalled two women who came to the White House to seek the release of a husband and a son who had been imprisoned for resisting the draft. He quickly understood their case and declared that "these fellows have suffered long enough and I have thought for some time and now that [my] mind is on it, I believe I will turn out the flock." The younger woman rushed to kneel at Lincoln's feet. The older woman approached Mr. Lincoln with tears in her eyes and declared: "I shall never see you again till we meet in Heaven."⁴⁴

When US district attorney in New York, Edward Smith, urged Lincoln to uphold a particular death sentence, he replied, "Mr. Smith, you do not know how hard it is to have a human being die when you know that a stroke of your pen may save him."⁴⁵ Similarly, he had told the Governor of Missouri that "he could not bear to have the power to save a man's life and not do it."⁴⁶ Responding to Senator Henry Wilson's (and later Vice President) plea to pardon a soldier, Lincoln expressed the difficult position he was constantly in, "My officers tell me the good of the service demands the enforcement of the law, but it makes my heart ache to have the poor boys shot. I will pardon him, and then you will all join in blaming me for it. You all censure me for granting pardons, and yet you all ask me to do so."⁴⁷ Even when a

42. See Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None*, pp. 401-02.

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

44. Website: www.mrlincolnanfriends.org (Letter from Joshua F. Speed to W. H. Herndon, Jan. 12, 1866).

45. Don Edward Fehrenbacher, Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 409.

46. Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*.

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

young woman of Confederate sympathies, separated from her fiancé for three years, wanted to rejoin him in Richmond, Lincoln said that he would give her a pass, if he could do a kindness of this sort, he was disposed to, unless Welles [Naval Secretary] advised otherwise.⁴⁸

After a draining day at the office a poignant plea from the mother of an imprisoned man was placed before Lincoln. His close friend Joshua Speed, who was present then, said, “Lincoln, with my knowledge of your nervous sensibility it is a wonder that such scenes as this don’t kill you.” He acknowledged ill health and said, “But things of that sort don’t hurt me. For to tell you the truth, that scene which you witnessed is the only thing I have done today which has given me any pleasure.”⁴⁹

Lincoln’s consideration for disconsolate visitors to the White House became well-known. Scores of friends, acquaintances and visitors spoke about his kindness and tenderness and though the episodes make engrossing reading they are too numerous to list. Lincoln was the quintessential gentleman and despite being the President there was no semblance of self-importance or arrogance in him. Grenville Weeks, Union military surgeon was wounded and sought an appointment in the army medical staff. He went to the White House to meet Lincoln but an officer blocked his entry and ordered him to go to the end of the line. Lincoln intervened saying, “Hereafter, whether the caller is an officer or a private, Major, be a gentleman.” Then turning to Weeks, he said, “You are wounded, sir. There’s place for you, however, if you can use your head.”⁵⁰

In June 1864 Lincoln decided to meet Grant and his troops in the field although he was advised not to make the trip due to personal risk to his life. Lincoln, however, needed contact with the troops to lift his own spirits and in turn those of his troops. When Grant introduced him to members of his staff, his *aide-de-camp* Horace Porter recalled the President “had for each one a cordial greeting and a pleasant word. There was kindness in his tone and a hearty manner of expression which went far to captivate all who met him.” Lincoln then took a ride to the front ten miles away. Porter recalls that on the return they passed a brigade of black soldiers who rushed forward to greet the President, “screaming, yelling, shouting: ‘Hurrah for the Liberator; Hurrah for the President.’” Their “spontaneous outburst” moved Lincoln to tears, “and his voice was so broken by emotion” that he could hardly reply.⁵¹

(To be continued)

GAUTAM MALAKER

48. *Ibid.*, p. 484.

49. Website: www.mrlincolnandfriends.org (Letter from Joshua F. Speed to W. H. Herndon, Jan. 12, 1866)

50. Don Edward Fehrenbacher, *Virginia Fehrenbacher, Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 466.

51. See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, pp. 629-30.

THE LOTUS — ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Prologue

Obeisance to all seers, sages, saints and savants whose works have been consulted and deep salutations to the Master Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

This short piece is an attempt to succinctly examine the significance of the lotus. Numerous references have been found while researching for this essay. Bibliographical details are appended at the end.

Sanatana Dharma and the Lotus

The *Sanatana Dharma* has been practised since time immemorial in Bharat i.e. India. It is acknowledged as the Dharma embodying the eternal, universal and unchanging law, also known by its token name Hinduism. In it, the Lotus is the most prominent flower which has symbolic and esoteric connotations among other things. The lotus is called by various names in Sanskrit, such as *Kamala*, *Saroja*, *Padma*, *Pankaja*, *Jalaja*, *Aravinda*, *Nalini*, *Utpalam*, *Sarasijam*, *Abjam*, *Ambujam*, *Mahotpalam*, *Shatapatram*, *Sahasrapatram*, *Kusheshayam*, *Pankeruham*, *Maharuham*, *Tamarasam*, *Sarasam*, *Sarasiruham*, *Pushkaram*, *Rajeevam*, *Sitambhojam*, *Pundarikam*, *Raktopalam*, *Indeevaram*, *Neelopalam* etc. Some of these Sanskrit equivalents bear the expression *ja* or *jam* denoting ‘birth from’ or ‘born in’ or ‘emerging out of’, more as a daughter — i.e. born in, from or out of water/mud. There are frequent references to the lotus in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and other scriptures. The expression ‘lotus-eyed one’ is commonly employed while referring to the Avatars of Vishnu such as Rama and Krishna, apart from the seer Veda Vyasa. A place abounding in lotus flowers is called *Aravindini* or *Mrinalini*. The God sitting upon the lotus is the most frequent designation of Brahma, always shown seated upon the sacred lotus issuing from Vishnu’s navel. The *Amarakosha* of Amarasimha refers to Brahma by the name *Abjayoni* — ‘born of the lotus’. The name of Vishnu means that he has the lotus flower on his navel. The Puranic idea is that from that navel-lotus of Vishnu the god Brahma sprang. This idea seems to be derived from *ajasya nābhav ādhi ekam arpitam* in the Hiranyagarbha Hymn of the Rig Veda. Also the Yajur Veda, in the Taittiriya Aranyaka while laying down rules for sacrifice, says that before Agni is established in the pit of the sacrificial altar, a bed of lotus flowers is prepared in the pit.

The lotus is born in water and unfolds itself into a beautiful flower. It is taken as the symbol of the Universe coming out of the Sun. It rises from the navel of Vishnu, and is the seat of Brahma the creator, hence the sacredness associated with it. The centres in the body associated with the rising of the *Kundalini* power are pictured like lotuses.

The Lotus and ancient mythology

The lotus has found acceptance across the world and has been a subject of both adoration and adornment in ancient religions, worship and mythology. In Egyptian religious ceremonies, the lotus was used as a sacred flower to worship the Gods. The Chinese called it *Nelumbo*; it was their sacred flower. So was it with the ancient Greeks. According to Mohammed the Prophet, the lotus signifies a flower in the seventh heaven, on the right hand of the throne of God. As was done in India by the Hindus, the Egyptians pictured the flower as one on which God sat above the watery mud. The leaves and fruit of the lotus plant represent the motion of the intellect and its towering up through mud (in Yoga it is called the *Kundalini Shakti*). The eminence of the divine intellect over matter was the figurative representation apart from the deity sitting on it implying his intellectual sovereignty. In Indian mythology the goddess presiding over the intellect and elocution — Saraswati sits on a swan, *hamsa* or on a white lotus or while seated on the swan, with one of her legs resting on the lotus and her consort Brahma also has his seat on the lotus. This apart, Lakshmi the goddess presiding over wealth either sits or stands on a lotus and also holds one in her right hand. The God Ganesha who is the first to be worshipped, being the leader and remover of obstacles to any spiritual or secular endeavour, is seen holding a lotus in his left upper hand (when pictured with four hands). Also in Buddhism, the word '*padma*' is often employed to refer to the lotus. *Padmasambhava* in Tibetan Buddhism is shown seated on a lotus. The lotus is considered to be the purest of flowers, and therefore it is commonly called the 'spotless flower'.

According to classical Greek myth the lotus is the daughter of Neptune, fleeing from Priapus, who was changed into a plant called *lotis*. The expression 'lotus eater' 'Lotophagi' would mean a person who forgets his friends and home and desires not to return but to live in ease and luxury.

Yoga and the Lotus

In the *Yoga Shastra* or the science of Yoga, the lotus has a predominant position in the movement of energy or *prana* from the lowest of the chakras, viz. the *muladhara* to the highest viz. the *sahasrara*. The coiled-up energy down below would ascend upwards in consciousness as the intellect becomes more and more refined through Yogic practices. The Divine Mother *Tripurasundari* is the dweller in the six *padmas* or lotuses of the *Yogins*, called '*shada chakras*' in *Kundalini Yoga*, ever flashing like lightning in the heart of the perfected ones. The chakras in sequence are the *muladhara*, *swadhishtana*, *manipura*, *anahata*, *vishuddha* and *ajna*, which have 4, 6, 10, 12, 16 and 2 'petals' respectively. The *sahasrara chakra* or thousand petalled *chakra* is the final abode of the Lord Siva. It corresponds to the *Satyaloka*.

The *āsana* or posture preferred in yogic meditation is the *padmāsana* or lotus-posture, which enables breathing to take place systematically with control of breath in any of the chakras, vehicles of upward and downward movement of the breath,

while also assisting the person who undertakes the exercise of Pranayama. This enables the ascent of *Shakti* or *Kundalini* which results in freedom from bondage in the aspiring Yogi when he enters the state of bliss, through *samadhi* and *kaivalya*. The *padmāsana* is also known by the name *kamalāsana*. Amongst the four poses prescribed for *japa* and *dhyana*, *padmāsana* comes foremost. It is the best *āsana* for contemplation. Rishis like Gheranda, Sandilya and others speak very highly of this vital *āsana*. This is highly agreeable for householders. Even ladies can sit in this *āsana*, which is suitable for lean persons and youth. Variations of the *padmāsana* are *ardha*, *virāsana*, *parvatāsana*, *samāsana*, *karmukāsana*, *utthita*, *baddha*, *urdhva*, *lolāsana*, *kukkutāsana*, *tolangulāsana*.

Bhagavad Gita, Dhammapada and Lotus

The Bhagavad Gita, *The Song Celestial* refers to the beautiful lotus and its leaf repeatedly. It says that a Yogi should be and remain like a lotus leaf, untouched by water though in water, untouched by dirt though springing from dirt — *padmapatramivambasah*. It gives the example of the leaf on which water cannot accumulate, but has to drop off, or collect but only to drop down like mercury. In the Dhammapada, the sacred Buddhist scripture, the very same analogy is found in Aphorism 336 of the Tanhavaggo, “But whoever overcomes craving, so difficult to overcome, from him sorrows fall away as water from a lotus leaf.”

Temple architecture

Temple architecture in India has employed the lotus motif in trusses, purlins, columns, beams, foundations, doors, thresholds and every prominent structure forming part thereof as enjoined by the science of architecture and iconography. The *padmapitha* or pedestal is of the shape of a *padma* or lotus. There may be one lotus or two; in the latter case they are abutted against each other, the lower one being inverted. Recently during a visit to the Dilwara Temple in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, I found that the most prominent symbol and carving — extremely delicate and intricate but exquisitely executed with surgical precision — was the lotus which permeated the entire temple complex with roof carvings of marble, hanging like chandeliers.

Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and the Lotus

Sri Aurobindo, the greatest mystic, scholar, sage and nationalist of his times, had a lotus at the centre of his symbol. Regarding the central square in the symbol formed by the descending and the ascending triangles, the Mother said,

The junction of both — the central square — is the perfect manifestation having at its centre the Avatar of the Supreme — the lotus. (CWM, Vol. 13, p. 29)

We also know that “the Mother designated the red lotus as the flower of Sri Aurobindo and the white lotus as her own”:

Red lotus — symbol of the manifestation of the Supreme upon earth.
White lotus — symbol of the Divine Consciousness. (*Ibid.*, p. 32)

And on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo’s centenary, the Mother said,

The red lotus is the flower of Sri Aurobindo, but specially for his centenary we shall choose the blue lotus, which is the colour of his physical aura, to symbolise the centenary of the manifestation of the Supreme upon earth. (*Ibid.*, p. 16)

About her own symbol, the Mother explained,

It is the symbolic design of the white Lotus of Supreme Consciousness, with the Mahashakti (the form of the Mother as universal creation) at the centre in her four aspects and twelve attributes. (*Ibid.*, p. 64)

Sri Ramakrishna Order and the Lotus

The emblem of the Sri Ramakrishna Order designed by Swami Vivekananda reflects the motto of the Order — *atmano moksartham jagaddhitaya ca* (‘For the liberation of the Self and service to the society’). It consists of an elegant swan against the backdrop of the rising sun, surrounded by wavy waters from which has arisen a beautiful lotus flower with a couple of leaves. This whole picture is encircled by a hooded serpent.

Conclusion

To conclude, the lotus signifies the emergence and manifestation of purity, beauty, truth, consciousness, radiance, intellect — all being manifestations of the Supreme Self, who is the beginning, goal and culmination of cosmic creation and evolution of everything created in the universe.

K. S. RAVI SHANKAR

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But on that which as yet we know not how shall we concentrate? And yet we cannot know the Divine unless we have achieved this concentration of our being upon him. A concentration which culminates in a living realisation and the constant sense of the presence of the One in ourselves and in all of which we are aware, is what we mean in Yoga by knowledge and the effort after knowledge. It is not enough to devote ourselves by the reading of Scriptures or by the stress of philosophic reasoning to an intellectual understanding of the Divine; for at the end of our long mental labour we might know all that has been said of the Eternal, possess all that can be thought about the Infinite and yet we might not know him at all. This intellectual preparation can indeed be the first stage in a powerful Yoga, but it is not indispensable: it is not a step which all need or can be called upon to take. Yoga would be impossible, except for a very few, if the intellectual figure of knowledge arrived at by the speculative or meditative Reason were its indispensable condition or a binding preliminary. All that the Light from above asks of us that it may begin its work is a call from the soul and a sufficient point of support in the mind. This support can be reached through an insistent idea of the Divine in the thought, a corresponding will in the dynamic parts, an aspiration, a faith, a need in the heart.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 81-82)

RHETORIC IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PROSE

(Continued from the issue of April 2015)

XVI

Looking at the use of irony in Mark Antony's Forum Speech we saw that he had repeated the word 'honourable' five times in nineteen lines. But then, we are not an uneducated Roman mob to need this kind of repetition. The term "mob" is an abbreviated form of the phrase "mobile vulgus" — commoners in motion. Mark Antony knew that the hammer-blows of repetition were necessary for them. A pin-prick however, is enough for the modern reader:

General consent seems indeed to have sanctioned the name of poetry for any kind of effective language set in a vigorous or catching metrical form . . .¹

What the writer means here is that such things are not poetry at all. But instead of saying it he allows us to infer it.

Dramatic irony is very different from irony as a figure of speech. It has nothing to do with the latter, and can hardly be classed as a figure of speech. All the same, it has been included, as I have seen people being misled by the word "irony" and as a result getting confused. It does not necessarily have to be confined to drama, it can exist elsewhere too. It refers to a situation in which the author and the reader know the truth but the character in the play, novel or story does not. It can be prolonged over a long period of time as in *As You Like It*. The audience or the reader knows that Ganymede is really Rosalind in disguise but the other characters do not know that. It occurs in *Twelfth Night* too. Our author specifically mentions dramatic irony in *The Phantom Hour*. The assassin who has come to kill the heroine refers to the fog outside and tells her it has been sent by God to help him escape. Then comes the comment:

Well, if it was God, He was a tragic artist too and knew the poetical effectiveness of dramatic irony! Everything this man reckoned on or had arranged for his deed and his safety, had been or would be helpful to his own executioner!²

1. *The Future Poetry* (1953 ed.), p. 26.

2. *Collected Plays and Stories*, CWSA, Vols. 3-4, p. 961.

This is a very clear explanation of the concept of dramatic irony. In fact I do not know if any creative writer has so consciously and clearly written about this figure in fiction so early in this century. This story had been written early in the last century — a time of realism in fiction and the authors fought shy of drawing the readers' attention to artifice as Fielding did two centuries ago.

The next figure on our list is sarcasm. Actually speaking, this too, like dramatic irony, is hardly a figure of speech, but many books on rhetoric list it as such. It is a pointed and bitter saying, intended to hurt the hearer. Usually it is Satan's rousing speech to the fallen angels from which examples of sarcasm are taken. There is no duplicity here as in irony. The speaker means what he says, but he says it without any softening grace. Scorn, contempt and ridicule are expressed openly:

Or have ye chosen this place
After the toil of battle to repose
Your wearied virtue, for the ease ye find
To slumber here, as in the vales of heaven!
Or in this abject posture have ye sworn
To adore the Conqueror?³

Our author is hardly, if ever, bitter. Not for him the vituperation of a Swift or a Pope. But, in his extremely urbane, sophisticated way, he can be quite sarcastic when he chooses. This is what he says about versifiers who have been glorified into poets:

. . . it has enabled even the Macaulays and Kiplings to mount their queer poetic thrones, I will not object . . .⁴

But it is quite clear what is meant. Scorn, ridicule and contempt — all are expressed here, specially in that wonderful phrase “queer poetic thrones”. Indeed this entire paragraph on pp. 26-27 is full of figures of indirectness and nearly all the sentences are sarcastic. But in order to find irony and sarcasm on a grand scale, extended over pages and pages, one will have to turn to *Kārākāhinī*.⁵

Our next figure is innuendo which is usually explained as just a hint, an insinuation. What is remarkable about it is that these hints or insinuations are usually derogatory ones:

For instance in “I never consult doctors, for I hope to die without them” it is insinuated that doctors kill their patients.

3. *Paradise Lost*, I, 318-323, in Bush, D. (ed) *Milton Poetical Works*, OUP, 1979 rpt., p. 220.

4. *The Future Poetry* (1953 ed.), p. 26.

5. See Addendum.

The example given earlier for irony is enough:

General consent seems indeed to have sanctioned the name of poetry for any kind of effective language set in a vigorous or catching metrical form . . .

There is a double innuendo here. General consent, it is implied, is woefully mistaken in giving poetic value to what is but mere versification, and this is true however expert that versification might be. Secondly, "any kind of effective language set in a vigorous or catching metrical form" cannot be regarded as poetry. Indeed, this entire paragraph is so rich in these figures that most of the examples given above have been taken from it.

Periphrasis is better known as circumlocution. It is a verbose, roundabout way of saying something that's basically simple. Here is a good example, Sidgwick is imagining how Swinburne might have written Wordsworth's "The Child is father of the Man".

The manner of man by the boy begotten
Is son to the child that his sire begets
And sire to the child of his father's son.⁶

Our author is a highly economical writer and is not given to verbosity. His elaborations are for the sake of clarity as here:

Nevertheless metre, by which we mean a fixed and balanced system of the measures of sound, *mātrā*, is not only the traditional, but also surely the right physical basis for the poetic movement.⁷

The length of the sentence is required to clarify what is meant by metre.

(To be continued)

RATRI RAY

6. K. D. Sethna, *Talks on Poetry*, p. 111.

7. *The Future Poetry* (1953 ed.), p. 24.

Addendum:
Translation of a passage from
Sri Aurobindo's *Karakahini* (Tales of Prison Life)

... Such was the place where we were lodged. As for fittings our generous authorities had left nothing to be desired so far as our hospitable reception was concerned. One plate and bowl used to adorn the courtyard. Properly washed and cleaned, my self-sufficing plate and bowl shone like silver, it was the solace of my life. In its impeccable, glowing radiance in the 'heavenly kingdom', in that symbol of immaculate British imperialism, I used to enjoy the pure bliss of loyalty to the Crown. Unfortunately, the plate too shared in the bliss, and if one pressed one's fingers a little hard on its surface it would start flying in a circle, like the whirling dervishes of Arabia. And then one had to use one hand for eating while the other held the plate in position. Else, while whirling, it would attempt to slip away with the incomparable grub provided by the prison authorities. But more dear and useful than the plate was the bowl. Among inert objects it was like the British civilian. Just as the civilian *ipso facto* is fit and able to undertake any administrative duty, be it as judge, magistrate, police, revenue officer, chairman of municipality, professor, preacher, whatever you ask him to do he can become at your merest bidding — just as for him to be an investigator, complainant, police magistrate, even at times to be the counsel for defence, all these roles hold a friendly concourse in the same hospitable body, my dear bowl was equally multi-purpose. The bowl was free from all caste restrictions, beyond discrimination: in the prison cell it helped in the act of ablution; later with the same bowl I gargled, bathed; a little later when I had to take my food, the lentil soup or vegetable soup was poured into the same container; I drank water out of it and washed my mouth. Such an all-purpose priceless object can be had only in a British prison. Serving all my worldly needs the bowl became an aid in my spiritual discipline too. Where else could I find such an aid and preceptor to get rid of the sense of disgust? After the first spell of solitary imprisonment was over, when we were allowed to stay together, civilian's rights were bifurcated, and the authorities arranged for another receptacle for the privy. But for one month I acquired an unsought lesson in controlling my sense of disgust. The entire procedure for defecation seems to have been oriented towards the art of self-control. Solitary imprisonment, it has been said, must be counted as a special form of punishment and its guiding principle the avoidance of human company and the open sky. To arrange this ablution in the open or outside would mean a violation of that principle; hence two baskets, with tar coating, would be kept in the room itself. The sweeper (*methar*) would clean it up in the mornings and afternoons. In case of intense agitation and heart-warming speeches from our side cleaning would be done at other times

too. But if one went to the privy at odd hours, as penance one had to put up with the noxious and fetid smell. In the second chapter of our solitary confinement there were some reforms in this respect, but British reforms keep the old principles intact while making minor changes in administration. Needless to say, because of all this arrangement in a small room, one had throughout to undergo considerable inconvenience, especially at meal times and during the night. Attached bathrooms are, I know, oftentimes a part of western culture, but to have, in a small cell, a bedroom, dining room and w.c. rolled into one — this is what is called too much of a good thing! We Indians are full of regrettable customs, it is painful for us to be so highly civilised.

Among household utilities there were also a small bucket, a tin water-container and two prison blankets. The small bucket would be kept in the courtyard, where I used to have my bath. In the beginning I did not suffer from water scarcity, though that happened later on. At first the convict in the neighbouring cowshed would supply water as and when I wanted it, hence during the bathing recess amidst the austerities of prison life I enjoyed every day a few moments of the householder's luxury and love of pleasure. The other convicts were not so fortunate, the same tub or pail did for the w.c., cleaning of utensils and bath. As undertrial prisoners this extraordinary luxury was allowed to them, the convicts had to take their bath in a bowlful or two of water. According to the British the love of God and physical well-being are almost equal and rare virtues, whether the prison regulations were made in order to prove the point of such a proverb or to prevent the unwilling austerity of the convicts spoilt by excessive bathing facilities, it was not easy to decide. This liberality of the authorities was made light of by the convicts "crow bathing". Men are by nature discontented. The arrangements for drinking water were even better than the bathing facilities. It was then hot summer, in my little room the wind was almost forbidden to enter. But the fierce and blazing sunlight of May had free access to it. The entire room would burn like an oven. While being locked thus the only way to lessen one's irresistible thirst was the tepid water in the small tin container. I would drink that water often, but this would not quench the thirst, rather there would be heavy sweating and soon after the thirst would be renewed. But one or two had earthen pots placed in their courtyard, for which, remembering the austerities of a past incarnation, they would count themselves lucky. This compelled even the strongest believers in personal effort to admit the role of fate; some had cold water, others remained thirsty for ever, it was as the stars decreed. But in their distribution of tin-cans or water-pots, the authorities acted with complete impartiality. Whether I was pleased or not with such erratic arrangements, the generous jail doctor found my water trouble unbearable. He made efforts to get an earthen pot for my use, but since the distribution was not in his hands he did not succeed for long; at last at his bidding the head-sweeper managed to discover an earthen pot from somewhere. Before that in course of my long battle with thirst I had achieved a thirst-free state.

In this blazing room two prison blankets served for my bed. There was no pillow, so I would spread one of these as mattress and fold the other as a pillow, and sleep like that. When the heat became unbearable I would roll on the ground and enjoy it. Then did I know the joy of the cool touch of Mother Earth. But the floor's contact in the prison cell was not always pleasing, it prevented the coming of sleep and so I had to take recourse to the blanket. The days on which it rained were particularly delightful. But there was this difficulty that during rain and thunder, thanks to the violent dance (*tandava nritya*) of the strong wind, full of dust, leaf and grass, a small-scale flood would take place inside my little room. After that there was no alternative but to rush to a corner with a wet blanket. Even after this game of nature was over, till the earth dried one had to seek refuge in reflection leaving aside all hope of sleep. The only dry areas were near the w.c., but one did not feel like placing the blankets near that area. But in spite of such difficulties on windy days a lot of air also blew in and since that took away the furnace-like heat of the room I welcomed the storm and the shower.

The description of the Alipore government hotel which I have given here, and will give still more later, is not for the purpose of advertising my own hardship; it is only to show what peculiar arrangements are made for undertrial prisoners in the civilised British Raj, and what prolonged agony for the innocent. The causes of hardship that I have described were no doubt there, but since my faith in divine mercy was strong I had to suffer only for the first few days; thereafter — by what means I shall mention later — the mind had risen above these sufferings and grown incapable of feeling any hardship. That is why when I recollect my prison life, instead of anger or sorrow I feel like laughing. When first of all I had to go into my cage dressed in the odd prison uniform, and noticed the arrangements for our stay, this was what I felt. And I laughed within myself. Having studied the history of the English people and their recent doings I had already found out their strange and mysterious character. So I was not at all astonished or unhappy at their behaviour towards me. Normally this kind of behaviour towards us would be considered extremely illiberal and blameworthy. We all came from gentlemanly stock; many were scions of landlords; some were, in terms of their family, education, quality and character, the equals of the highest classes in England. The charge on which we had been arrested, that too was not ordinary murder, theft or dacoity; it was an attempt at insurrection to liberate the country from foreign yoke or conspiracy tending towards armed conflict. The main cause of our detention was suspicion on the part of the police, though even there in many instances the proof of guilt was wholly wanting. In such cases to be herded together like ordinary thieves and dacoits — and not even as thieves and dacoits, to keep them like animals in a cage, to give them food unfit for animals, to make them endure water scarcity, thirst and hunger, sun, rain and cold, all these do not enhance the glory of the British race and its imperial officers. This is, however, a national defect of their character. The English are

possessed of the qualities of the Kshatriya, but in dealing with enemies or opponents they are cent per cent businesslike. But, at the time, I was not annoyed at this. On the contrary, I had felt a little happy that no discrimination had been made between the common uneducated masses and myself; moreover, the arrangement added fuel to the flame of my adoration of the Mother (*matribhakti*). I took it as a marvellous chance and favourable condition for learning yoga and rising above dualities. I was of the extremists, in whose view democracy and equality between the rich and the poor formed a chief ingredient of nationalism. I remembered that thinking it our duty to turn the theory into practice, we had travelled together, on our way to Surat, in the same third class. In the camp the leaders, instead of making separate arrangements, would sleep in the same room along with the others. Rich, poor, brahmins, businessmen, shudra, Bengali, Maratha, Punjabi, Gujarati, we all stayed, slept, ate together with a wonderful feeling of brotherhood. We slept on the ground, ate the normal fare, made of rice-pulse-curd, in every way it was superlatively *swadeshi*. The “foreign-returned” from Bombay and Calcutta and the brahmin-born Madrasi with his tilak (head-mark) had become one body. During my stay in the Alipore jail I ate, lived and went through the same hardship and enjoyed the same ‘privileges’ with the other convicts, my fellow nationals, peasants, iron-mongers, potters, the *doms* and the *bagdis*, and I could learn of the ways of the Lord who dwells in everybody, this socialism and unity, this sense of nation-wide brotherhood had put its stamp on my life’s mission (*jivan brata*). The day when, before the sacred altar of the World-Mother in the form of the Motherland, all the orders of the country will stand with proud heads as brothers and as of the same mind, thanks to the loving kindness of my fellow convicts and prisoners as well as the impartiality of the British administrators, during the imprisonment I could feel the coming of that happy day and many a time it brought such a delight and thrill. The other day I noticed that the *Indian Social Reformer*, from Poona, had ironically commented on one of my simple, easy-to-understand statements by remarking: “We find an excess of Godwardness in the prison!” Alas for the pride and littleness of men, seeking after renown, men of little learning, proud of their little virtues! The manifestation of God, should it not be in prisons, in huts, ashrams, in the hearts of the poor, instead of in the temples of luxury of the rich or the bed of repose of the pleasure-seeking selfish worldly folk? God does not look for learning, honour, leadership, popular acclaim, outward ease and sophistication. To the poor He reveals Himself in the form of the Compassionate Mother. He who sees the Lord in all men, in all nations, in his own land, in the miserable, the poor, the fallen and the sinner and offers his life in the service of the Lord, the Lord comes to such hearts. So it is that in a fallen nation ready to rise, in the solitary prison of the servants of the nation the nearness of God grows.

After the jailor had seen to the blankets and the plates and bowls and left, I began to watch, sitting on the blanket, the scene before me. This solitary confinement

seemed to me much better than the lock-up at Lal Bazar. There the silence of the commodious hall seemed to deepen the silence. Here the walls of the room seemed to come closer, eager to embrace one, like the all-pervading Brahman. There one cannot even look at the sky through the high windows of the second-storey room, it becomes hard to imagine that there are in this world trees and plants, men, animals, birds and houses. Here, since the door to the courtyard remains open, by sitting near the bars one could see the open space and the movement of the prisoners. Alongside the courtyard wall stood a tree, its green foliage a sight for sore eyes. The sentry that used to parade before the 'six decree' rooms, his face and footsteps often appeared dear to me like the welcome steps of a friend. The prisoners in the neighbouring cowshed would take out, in front of the room, the cows for grazing. Both cow and cowherd were daily and delightful sights. The solitary confinement at Alipore was a unique lesson in love. Before coming here even among people my affections had been confined to a rather narrow circle, and the closed emotions would rarely include birds and animals. I remember reading a poem by Rabibabu in which he describes, beautifully, a village boy's deep love for a buffalo. I did not at all understand it when I read it first. I had felt a note of exaggeration and artificiality in that description. Had I read that poem now, I would have seen it with other eyes. At Alipore I could feel how deep can be the love of man for all created things, how thrilled a man can be on seeing a cow, a bird, even an ant.

The first day in prison passed off peacefully. It was all so new as to be almost gay. Comparing it with the Lal Bazar lock-up I felt happy with my present circumstances, and since I had faith in God the loneliness did not weigh heavily on me. Even the strange spectacle of prison diet failed to disturb my attitude — coarse rice, even that spiced with husk, pebbles, insects, hair, dirt and such other stuff; tasteless lentil soup heavily watered; vegetables and greens mixed with grass and leaves. I never knew before that food could be so tasteless and without any nutritive value. Looking at its melancholy black visage I was appalled; and after two mouthfuls with a respectful salaam I took leave of it. All prisoners receive the same diet, and once a course gets going it goes on for ever. Then it was the Reign of Herbs. Days, fortnights and months passed by, but the same herbs (*shāk*), lentil and rice went on unchanged. What to speak of changing the menu, the preparation was not changed a jot or little; it was the same immutable, Eternal from beginning to end, a stable unique thing-in-itself. Within two evenings it was calculated to impress upon the prisoner the fragility of this world of maya. But even here I was luckier than the rest, this was because of the doctor's kindness. He had arranged a supply of milk from the hospital, thanks to which I had been spared on certain days from the vision of *shāk*.

That night I went to bed early, but it was no part of the prison regulations to be allowed to enjoy undisturbed sleep, since this might encourage a love of luxury among the prisoners. Hence there is a rule that every time sentries are changed, the

prisoner has to be noisily disturbed and till he responds to their cries there is no respite. Among those who were engaged in this kind of patrolling the ‘six decree’ cells there were a few who would be no doubt remiss in their duty in this respect — among the police there was as a rule more of kindness and sympathy than strict sense of responsibility — this was especially so with the Hindustani policemen. Some of course remained obstinate. Waking us up at odd hours they would solicitously inquire about our well-being: “How do you do, Sir?” This untimely humour was not always pleasant or welcome, but I could see that they were but carrying out orders. For a few days in spite of the annoyance I put up with this show. In the end to preserve my sleep I had to scold them. Afterwards I noticed that this custom of seeking news about my well-being stopped of itself.

Next morning at four-fifteen the prison bell rang, this was the first bell to wake up the prisoners. There is a bell again after sometime, when the prisoners have to come out in file; after washing they have to swallow the prison gruel (*lufsi*) before starting the day’s work. Knowing that it was impossible to sleep with the bells ringing everynow and then, I also got up. The bars were removed at five, and after washing I sat inside the room once again. A little later *lufsi* was served at my doorstep; that day I did not take it but had only a vision of what it looked like. It was after a few days that I had the first taste of the ‘great dish’. *Lufsi*, boiled rice, along with water, is the prisoner’s little breakfast. A trinity, it takes three forms. On the first day it was *lufsi* in its Wisdom aspect, unmixed, original element, pure, white Shiva. On the second, it was the Hiranyagarbha aspect, boiled along with lentils, called *khichuri*, a yellowish medley. On the third day *lufsi* appeared in its aspect of Virat, a little mixed with jaggery, grey, slightly more fit for human consumption. I had thought the Wisdom and the Hiranyagarbha aspects to be beyond the capacity of average humanity and therefore made no efforts in that direction, but once in a while I had forced some of the Virat stuff within my system and marvelled, in delightful muse, about the many-splendoured virtues of British rule and the high level of western humanitarianism. It should be added that *lufsi* was the only nutritious diet for the Bengali prisoners, the rest were without any food value. But what of that? It had a taste, and one could eat this only out of sheer hunger; even then, one had to force and argue with oneself to be able to consume that stuff.

That day I took my bath at half-past eleven. For the first four or five days I had to keep wearing the same clothes in which I had come from home. At the time of bathing the old prisoner-warder from the cowshed, who had been appointed to look after me, managed to procure a piece of coarse cloth, a yard and half long, and till my only clothes did not dry I had to keep wearing this. I did not have to wash my clothes or dishes; a prisoner working in the cowshed would do that for me. Lunch was at eleven. To avoid the neighbourhood of the ‘basket’, and during the summer heat, I would often eat in the courtyard. The sentries did not object to this. The evening meal would be between five and five-thirty. From then on the door was not

permitted to be opened. At seven rang the evening bell. The chief supervisor gathered the prison-warders together and loudly called out the names of the inmates, after which they would return to their respective posts. The tired prisoner then takes the refuge of sleep and in that has his only pleasure. It is the time when the weak of heart weeps over his misfortune or in anticipation of the hardships of prison life. And the lover of God feels the nearness of his deity, and has the joy of his prayer or meditation in the silent night. Then to these three thousand creatures who came from God, victims of a miserable social system, that huge instrument of torture, the Alipore jail, is lost in a vast Silence.

SRI AUROBINDO

[Translated by Sisir Kumar Ghose from the Original Bengali]

(Tales of Prison Life, fourth edition 1977)

Live within; be not shaken by outward happenings.

Sri Aurobindo

(Essays Divine and Human, CWSA, Vol. 12, p. 447)

AMID THE LEAVES THE INMATE VOICES CALLED

(Continued from the issue of April 2015)

16. The Play is the Thing

I am watching Laurence Olivier play the hero in *Hamlet* in the darkened room of Poorna Theatre in Waltair. It is in the early fifties of the last century. Along with Olivier the Shakespearian lines receive an immediacy of utterance from my neighbour. It is my father who has just returned after a visit to England. He knows the play by memory. Now, the unforgettable scene is upon us. Indeed, all scenes are unforgettable in this play! Those sharp, winding steps going upwards to the ramparts, the dark sky with louring clouds. First Hamlet's head. As William Walton's music creates the eerie effect through sounds, Olivier becomes visible and now he is looking down at the wave-tossed sea below, a very clear image with the cloudy background.

To be, or not to be? That is the question —
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And, by opposing, end them? To die, to sleep . . .

I did not understand the significance of the passage at that time but I sense the anguish when Hamlet takes out the dagger, his lips unmoving but a background voice clearly giving the speech. Phrases like “the insolence of office” cut through when the lips begin to move as the dagger goes towards the Prince's neck and withdraws and then he looks down the ramparts at the sea. Suddenly the dagger slips through his fingers and is lost below in the waves. Some more of the soliloquy as Hamlet walks on the ramparts and then goes down the steps. It is time for the next scene.

A time would come five years later when it would be quite a struggle to learn and weave essays around the soliloquies and other Shakespearian scenes for my examinations. But this scene of the handsome Prince undergoing mental torture has haunted me all these years though I would be seeing Olivier in many “greats” — *Othello*, *Rebecca*, *The Prince and the Showgirl*. Such is the pervasive power of Shakespeare's plays of maturity where Hamlet remains the first among equals. His historical plays have given us the immortal Falstaff and we laugh with him in Henry IV Part I and most of Part II but grow silent in the classroom when the Professor

takes up the scene of the Prince, now King Henry rejecting the old friend. There is a lump in our throat, our eyes get riveted on the text in hand as we hear the words of ingratitude and the power of royalty:

I know thee not, old man: fall to thy prayers;
 How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!
 I have long dream'd of such a kind of man,
 So surfeit-swell'd, so old and so profane;
 But, being awaked, I do despise my dream.
 Make less thy body hence, and more thy grace;
 Leave gormandising; know the grave doth gape
 For thee thrice wider than for other men.
 Reply not to me with a fool-born jest.

Can a person change so completely? He who had laughed and encouraged Falstaff, now acts a stranger since power has come to his hands. Falstaff, whom A. C. Bradley describes as “a character almost purely humorous” is heartlessly banished. The old man will not survive this rejection and exile, and so it comes to be. Those were grim days when the Professor taught the passages in the Honours Class. How the Hostess reports Falstaff’s last moments, how he died like a Christian child, babbling about flowers and fields and passed away crying out, “God, God, God!” Then the Professor linked the scene with Christ on the Cross crying out: “Eli! Eli! Lama sabachtani” (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?) and wondered aloud whether it was addressed to God or Falstaff’s erstwhile friend Prince Hal who had now become King Henry V.

So, we looked forward to the Shakespeare classes as there was so much of story-telling and the criss-crossing of passions. These lessons never really leave us, for the Bard of Avon becomes a permanent resident in our heart thanks to his phrases which have become part of English usage. As a writer it has been of immense use in giving that stylish tang to my mundane writing, especially political journalism:

“A Daniel come to judgement!”
 “A plague on both your houses!”
 “Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war . . .”
 “And thereby hangs a tale.”

One may thank *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar* and *As You Like It* for these phrases in helping us mentally return to our college days. But apparently we are speaking in Shakespeare’s voice when we speak or write “bag and baggage”, “be all and end all”, “fair play”, “fancy free” and scream quite often, “the game is up!” Certainly he was the lord of language and no wonder Sri

Aurobindo found in Shakespeare's style "an unfailing divinity of power in his touch". Indeed, according to him there may not arrive another Shakespeare. The Bard of Avon was the Hiranyagarbha power, "the luminous mind of dreams", a Viswamitra who created a heaven of his own for we have a Shakespearian world, unique by itself. The dramatic poet had a few faults, but what if? Thus Sri Aurobindo:

He has deviations into stretches of half prosaic verse and vagaries of tortured and bad poetic expression, sometimes atrociously bad; but they are yet always very evidently not failures of power, but the wilful errors of a great poet, more careful of dramatic truth and carried on by his force of expression than bound to verbal perfection. We feel obliged to accept his defects, which in another poet our critical sense would be swift to condemn or reject, because they are part of his force, just as we accept the vigorous errors of a great personality. His limitations are very largely the condition of his powers. Certainly, he is no universal revealer, as his idolators would have him be, — for even in the life-soul of man there are a multitude of things beyond him; but to have given a form so wonderful, so varied, so immortally alive, in so great a surge of the intensest poetical expression, to a life-vision of this kind and this power, is a unique achievement of poetic genius. The future may find for us a higher and profounder, even a more deeply and finely vital aim for the dramatic form than any Shakespeare ever conceived; but until that has been done with an equal power, grasp and fullness of vision and an equal intensity of revealing speech, he keeps his sovereign station.¹

All this is very, very true. Especially so with his great tragedies. You never know who would linger in your memory during an entire lifetime. It may not be the tragic Hamlet but the comic Polonius:

Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
 For loan oft loses both itself and friend.
 And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
 This above all: to thine own self be true . . .

This is scripture for the students in their late teens sitting huddled in an Indian classroom! Macbeth is a great tragic hero, but it is Lady Macbeth in the sleep-waking scene who keeps our heart heavy with a peculiar combination of pity and horror:

1. *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, pp. 80-81.

Out, damned spot! out, I say! One, two: why then, 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky! Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?

I have read volumes on this subject but it was that forty-five minutes of a class lecture which has remained with me to this day. As the Professor acted out the scene unconsciously, trying to wash the hand while telling the impressionable class how it is vain to think that we are not accountable for our actions if there is no witness, for there is always a witness within. For Lady Macbeth the witness within had woken up and there can be no escape from herself from now onwards.

Such was the magic spell cast on us with each one of the tragedies. We cannot ignore even *Coriolanus*, one of his last tragedies, indeed the last tragedy he would write. Some critics have found it more of a 'problem' play than a tragedy. Though not ranked among Shakespeare's 'greats', yet the play is most contemporaneous of all for the Indian citizen who can neither bite nor gulp down the nation's democracy. War is bad enough but democratic clashes can be worse. Here humanism withdraws from the stage slowly and surely. How easily the mob is led then and now!

Sri Aurobindo had certainly showed the way for Indian professors of English if they wanted a lesson in 'connectivity', teaching English literature, particularly Shakespeare in an Indian classroom, the Professor should learn "to connect". Had not Sri Aurobindo used such linkage when he refers, for instance, to Hiranyagarbha and Viswamitra when dealing with Shakespeare? In Shakespeare's play *Volumnia* successfully requests her son Coriolanus not to destroy their fatherland, Rome. The mother-son confrontation is full of foreboding and above it hangs a sense of doom for Coriolanus knows very well the basically ingrate nature of time-servers who make up the majority of senators.

And yet when a mother makes a request, how can he refuse her, even if it portends his own ruin? He is resigned now and says "Let it come," this ruin of all his hopes.

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar compares the *Volumnia-Coriolanus* scene with the Kunti-Karna meeting in the Mahabharata which is identical in the evocation of the hero's mood. Kunti wants Karna to join the Pandavas but he will not; he had to remain faithful to Duryodhana who had been his benefactor:

. . . whether Karna or Arjuna falls in the battle, there will still be five of the brothers left. Kunti's interference, although it is in the larger interests of her clan, proves the undoing of Karna himself. First and last, whether unwittingly or unavoidably, Kunti proves to be her first-born's fatality.²

2. *Shakespeare: His World and his Art* (1986 edn.), pp. 546-547.

Again, ancient Rome was not unlike the party-changing frauds in contemporary democracies. In a trice the saviour of Rome is banished! But Coriolanus is not welcomed by his earlier friend Volscians also who considers him a traitor for having forgiven Rome. Coriolanus is assassinated. Too late comes the remorse of his friend Aufidius:

My rage is gone;
 And I am struck with sorrow. Take him up.
 Help, three o' the chiefest soldiers; I'll be one.
 Beat thou the drum, that it speak mournfully:
 Trail your steel pikes. Though in this city he
 Hath widow'd and unchilded many a one,
 Which to this hour bewail the injury,
 Yet he shall have a noble memory. Assist.

We are fortunate that our tradition has always frowned on showing tragedies on the stage. The wise ancient knew of the secret of vibrations in the atmosphere and would not allow such vibrations to spoil the health of the growing minds of a society. The only tragedy in classical Sanskrit is *Urubhanga* (The Smashing of the Thigh) which recounts the last duel between Bhima and Duryodhana where the latter's thigh is smashed. But the tragic news is 'conveyed', not shown. Hence it is a relief that Shakespeare studies are rounded up with his *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. In fact, the last phase in Shakespeare is referred to as "divine comedy" by Srinivasa Iyengar:

The order of Grace, which operates by itself, or in response to the cry of the anguished human soul, is the order that brings heavens down to mingle in our earth-ways. In these last plays the order of Grace imposes at last its beneficent will on the order of mere human ingenuity and contrivance. Thus physical action shades off into the symbolic, the dramatic action into the spiritual which includes and transcends it.³

So we have the four divine comedies: *Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. Rich in story-element thanks to the several twists and turns keeping us on tenterhooks, there are times when we decide that here is going to be another tragedy like *King Lear*. But dead people turn up alive in a natural manner. They had remained undetected in their disguise, that is all! One has to suspend one's disbelief at the manner in which Pericles and Marina realise they are father and daughter. Such suspension of disbelief may not be faulted and Sri

3. *Ibid.*, p. 565.

Harsha goes one step farther in his Sanskrit play, *Nagananda*. While the stage is full of dead persons, Gauri appears and wakes up everyone to life and all is well that ends well. For the Indian mind turned away from making a spectacle of corpses on the stage, which was considered holy, the 'Ranga'.

One can recognise the difference between the western and Indian cultures even in this single point. *Gorboduc* closes with innumerable deaths beginning with the king of the land:

Did ever age bring forth such Tyrant's hearts?
 The Brother hath bereft the Brother's life;
 The mother she hath died her cruel hands
 In blood of her own son, and now at last
 The people lo forgetting trouble and love,
 Contemning quite both Law and loyal heart
 Even they have slain their sovereign Lord and Queen.

This was the pre-Shakespearian play which had taught the Bard of Avon to chisel his *Titus Andronicus* and *King Lear*.

A like situation occurs in the closing scene of *Nagananda*. Here it is not lust for power that causes this universal sorrow but the eagerness of the Vidhyadhara King Jimutavahana to sacrifice himself to protect the serpents (Nagas) threatened by Garuda. The theme is the Buddhist virtue of compassion even towards one's enemy. And the drama moves gracefully with its undercurrent of terror and sadness till we have to watch helplessly all the noble people lying dead. It is then that the Hindu Goddess appears and raises all back to life. There is lamentation no more.

Both *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* do have violent passages and sorrow that lies like a pall on many characters, but they end happily. There are no deaths and past wrongs do get erased leaving behind a host of memorable characters. As I wander in my library, hidden voices call out, for they lisp immortal passages from Shakespeare. The contours of jealousy in a suspicious husband, so accurately portrayed by the master psychiatrist when Leontes soliloquises in *The Winter's Tale*:

Too hot, too hot!
 To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods.
 I have tremor cordis on me: my heart dances;
 But not for joy; not joy. This entertainment
 May a free face put on, derive a liberty
 From heartiness, from bounty, fertile bosom,
 And well become the agent; 't may, I grant;
 But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers,
 As now they are, and making practised smiles,

As in a looking-glass, and then to sigh, as 'twere
 The mort o' the deer; O, that is entertainment
 My bosom likes not, nor my brows! Mamillius,
 Art thou my boy?

One can even trace the humour of Sri Aurobindo to the enduring clowns who pepper the dramas of Shakespeare. In *The Winter's Tale* we have Autolycus. How can a Shakespeare-lover ever forget this charming rogue? Sri Aurobindo says that for dramatic poetry to be effective, the dramatist should have an interpretative vision. Autolycus is from Greek mythology. He is the son of the Olympian god Hermes and Shakespeare did well to pluck him out and transplant him in his play. For, the Greek character was a thief, a trickster and quite a jolly fellow strumming away his lyre. That is what he is now in Shakespeare's Bohemia, a lovable rascal, a born actor who no doubt became the darling of the Elizabethan audiences, as that was the age when actors were verily the rulers of the citizen's heart. The jolly liar he is, it is amazing how fast his imagination works to spell out new problems for himself. How we laughed no end when the Professor explained the scene where Autolycus assures the clown that he has been robbed by Autolycus and gives a perfect description of himself:

Vices, I would say, sir. I know this man well: he
 hath been since an ape-bearer; then a
 process-server, a bailiff; then he compassed a
 motion of the Prodigal Son, and married a tinker's
 wife within a mile where my land and living lies;
 and, having flown over many knavish professions, he
 settled only in rogue: some call him Autolycus.

In the background of the somber tale of a husband's jealousy and the travails of a chaste wife, Autolycus keeps the mercury at the right room temperature. With him coming in so many guises in quick succession, the audience sparkles with laughter. Here is Autolycus the peddler:

Gloves as sweet as damask roses;
 Masks for faces and for noses;
 Bugle bracelet, necklace amber,
 Perfume for a lady's chamber;
 Golden quoifs and stomachers,
 For my lads to give their dears:
 Pins and poking-sticks of steel,
 What maids lack from head to heel:

Come buy of me, come; come buy, come buy;
Buy lads, or else your lasses cry: Come buy.

Shakespeare bowed out of the world's stage with *The Tempest*. A divine comedy in every way, we move through inferno and purgatorio and reach the ever-brilliant region of paradise both in the play as well as in the mind of the protagonist, Prospero. There are brilliant character-studies of the young and the ageing, the humans and the para-human creatures. The conversation between Prospero and Miranda that opens the play has no parallel in dramatic literature. Yet it is all a natural exchange of information, past and present. Shakespeare makes the past so real with his language that we actually *see* it all happening, here and now: the exile, the horrendous sea voyage, the goodness of Gonzalo, Miranda sleeping and Ariel coming on the stage. Beloved sprite! and the hateful Caliban as well. Decades have passed by and I have struggled with the English language and gained much to wander in its rainbow brilliance, but Caliban?

You taught me language; and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!

Do we not see millions of Calibans in the world today who have learnt all the felicities of the internet only to indulge in extremism and heartless massacres? Caliban is a symbol, a terror-icon. Violence in speech, plots and the rest. Then comes Ariel's feast and as quickly it vanishes. But no matter. The shadows have lifted and blessings are the order of the day for the newly betrothed Miranda and Ferdinand.

Earth's increase, foison plenty,
Barns and garners never empty,
Vines and clustering bunches growing,
Plants with goodly burthen bowing;
Spring come to you at the farthest
In the very end of harvest!
Scarcity and want shall shun you;
Ceres' blessing so is on you.

And the quality of mercy gets another brilliant Shakespearian hue when we come to the very end of the play with Prospero forgiving his enemies:

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
Do I take part: the rarer action is

In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,
 The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
 Not a frown further.

With *The Tempest* we have a real problem. Almost each and every passage cries out to be quoted, to be declaimed. How accurate is Sri Aurobindo when describing Shakespeare's dramatic poetry! The author of these classics had brought a "new intensity . . . an utterance of the creative life-power . . . unexampled power . . ."⁴ English poetry had been making a wondrous journey since those early days of Anglo-Saxon riddles and was now able to grapple with the questions of Existence with power and sublimity. It was now ready to take up philosophy and metaphysics in its poetry.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

4. *The Future Poetry*, CWSA, Vol. 26, p. 88.

Yes, of course there is an intuition of greatness by which the great poet or artist is distinguished from those who are less great and these again from those who are not great at all. But you are asking too much when you expect this intuition to work with a mechanical instantaneousness and universality so that all shall have the same opinion and give the same values. The greatness of Shakespeare, of Dante, of others of the same rank is unquestioned and unquestionable and the recognition of it has always been there in their own time and afterwards. Virgil and Horace stood out in their own day in the first rank among the poets and that verdict has never been reversed since. The area of a poet's fame may vary; it may have been seen first by a few, then by many, then by all. At first there may be adverse critics and assailants, but these negative voices die away. Questionings may rise from time to time — e.g. as to whether Lucretius was not a greater poet than Virgil — but these are usually from individuals and the general verdict abides always.

Sri Aurobindo

(Letters on Poetry and Art, CWSA, Vol. 27, p. 665)



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