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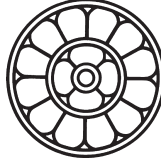
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXIX

No. 12

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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URVASIE

(Continued from the issue of November 2016)

CANTO III

So was a goddess won to mortal arms;
And for twelve months he held her on the peaks,
In solitary vastnesses of hills
And regions snow-besieged. There in dim gorge
And tenebrous ravine and on wide snows
Clothed with deserted space, o'er precipices
With the far eagles wheeling under them,
Or where large glaciers watch, or under cliffs
O'er-murmured by the streaming waterfalls,
And later in the pleasant lower hills,
He of her beauty world-desired took joy:
And all earth's silent sublime spaces passed
Into his blood and grew a part of thought.
Twelve months in the green forests populous,
Life in sunlight and by delightful streams
He increased rapture. The green tremulous groves,
And solitary rivers white with birds,
And watered hollow's gleam, and sunny boughs
Gorgeous with peacocks or illumining
Bright bosom of doves, in forests' musing day
Or the great night with roar of many beasts, —
All these were Eden round the glorious pair.
And in their third flower-haunted spring of love
A child was born from golden Urvasie.
But when the goddess from maternal pangs
Woke to the child's sweet face and strange tumult
Of new delight and felt the little hands
Erring about her breasts, passionate she cried:
"How long shall we in woods, Pururavus,
Waste the glad days of cheerful human life?
What pleasure is in soulless woods and waves?
But I would go into the homes of men,
Hear the great sound of cities, watch the eager

Faces tending to hall and mart, and talk
 With the bright girls of earth, and kiss the eyes
 Of little children, feel smooth floors of stone
 Under my feet and the restraint of walls,
 And eat earth's food from vessels made and drink
 Earth's water cool from jars, and know all joy
 And labour of that blithe and busy world."'
 She said, and he with a slight happy smile
 Consented. So to sacred Ganges they
 Came and the virgin's city Ilian.
 But when they neared the mighty destined walls,
 His virgin-mother from her temple pure
 Saw him, and a wild blare of conchs arose.
 Rejoicing to the lion-gates they streamed,
 The people of Pururavus, a glad
 Throng indistinguishable, traders and priests,
 Merchants of many gains and craftsmen fine
 Oblivious of their daily toils; the carver
 Flinging his tool away and hammerless
 The giant smith laughing through his vast beard.
 And little children ran, all over flowers,
 And girls like dawn with a delightful noise
 Of anklets, matrons and old men divine,
 And half a godhead with great glances came
 The large-eyed poets of the Vedic chant;
 Before them, all that multitude divided
 Honouring them. In gleaming armour came,
 And bearing dreadful bows, with sound of swords,
 High lords of sacrifice and aged chiefs
 War-weary and great heroes with mighty tread.
 All these to a high noise of trumpets came.
 They with a wide sound going up to heaven
 Welcomed their king, and a soft shower of blooms
 Fell on him as from warlike fields returned.
 Much all they marvelled at his heavenly bride
 And worshipped her, half-awed. And young girls came,
 Daughters of warriors, to great houses wed,
 Sweet faces of delightful laughter, came
 And took into their glad embrace and kissed,
 Enamoured of her smiling mouth, and praised
 Aloud her beauty. With flowers then they bound

Her soft immortal wrists, and through the gates,
 Labouring in vain to bend great bows, waving
 Far-glancing steel, and up the bridal streets
 Captive the girlish phalanx, bright with swords,
 After the old heroic fashion led.
 They amid trumpets and the vast acclaim
 Of a glad people brought the child of Gods
 To her terrestrial home; through the strong doors
 They lifted, and upon an earthly floor,
 Loosening, let from the gleaming limbs slide down
 Her heavenly vesture; next they brought and flung
 About her sweet insufferable grace
 Mortal habiliments, a clinging robe.
 Over her hair the wifely veil was drawn.
 Thus was the love of all the world confined
 To one man's home. And O too fortunate
 Mortal, who could with those august joys
 Mingle our little happy human pains,
 Subduing a fair goddess from her skies
 To gentle ordinary things, sweet service
 And household tasks making her beautiful,
 And trivial daily words, and kisses kind,
 And all the meaning dear of wife and home!
 Human with earth dwelt golden Urvasie,
 And bore to King Pururavus a race
 Of glorious children, each a shining god.
 She loved that great and simple life of old,
 Its marble outlines, strong joys and clear air
 Around the soul, loved and made roseate.
 The sacred city felt a finer life
 Within it; burning inspirations breathed
 From hallowed poets; and architects to grace
 And fancy their immense conceptions toned;
 Numberless heroes emulously drove forth
 And in strong joyous battle rolling back
 The dark barbarian borders, flashed through fields,
 Brilliant, and sages in their souls saw God.
 And from the city of Pururavus
 High influences went; Indus and Ganges
 And all the golden intermediate lands
 Grew with them and a perfect impulse felt.

Seven years the earth rejoiced in Urvasie.

But in their fortunate heavens the high Gods
 Dwelt infelicitous, losing the old
 Rapture inexplicable and thrill beneath
 Their ancient calm. Therefore not long enduring,
 They in colossal council marble, said
 To that bright sister whom she had loved best,
 “Ménaca!” crying “how long shall one man
 Divide from heaven its most perfect bliss?
 Go down and bring her back, our bright one back,
 And we shall love again our luminous halls.”
 She heard and went, with her ethereal robe
 Murmuring about her, to the gates divine,
 And looked into the world, and saw the far
 Titanic Ilian city like a stone
 Sunlit upon the small and distant earth.
 Down from heaven’s peaks the daughter of the sea
 Went flashing and upon a breathless eve
 Came to the city of Pururavus,
 Air blazing far behind her till she paused.
 She over the palace of Pururavus
 Stood in shadow. Within the lights yet were;
 Still sat the princes and young poets sang
 On harps heroical of Urvasie
 And strong Pururavus, of Urvasie
 The light and lovely spirit golden-limbed,
 Son of a virgin strong Pururavus.
 “O earth made heaven to Pururavus!
 O heaven left earth without sweet Urvasie!
 “Rejoice possessing, O Pururavus!
 Be glad who art possessed, O Urvasie!
 “Behold the parents of the sacrifice!
 When they have met, then they together rush
 And in their arms the beautiful fire is born.
 “Behold the children of the earth and sky!
 When they met, then they loved, O then they clasped,
 And from their clasp a lovely presence grew.
 “A holy virgin’s son we hear of thee
 Without a father born, Pururavus,
 Without a mother lovely Urvasie.

"Hast thou not brought the sacrifice from heaven,
 The unquenched, unkindled fire, Pururavus?
 Hast thou not brought delightful Urvasie?
 "The fires of sacrifice mount ever up:
 To their lost heavens they naturally aspire.
 Their tops are weighted with a human prayer.
 "The soul of love mounts also towards the sky;
 Thence came the spark but hardly shall return;
 Its wings are weighted with too fierce a fire.
 "Rejoice in the warm earth, O lovely pair,
 The green strong earth that gave Pururavus.
 "Rejoice in the blithe earth, O lovely pair,
 The happy earth all flushed with Urvasie.
 "As lightning takes the heart with pleasant dread,
 So love is of the strong Pururavus.
 "As breathes sweet fragrance from the flower oppressed,
 So love from thy bruised bosom, Urvasie."

So sang they and the heart rejoiced. Then rose
 The princes and went down the long white street,
 Each to his home. Soon every sound had faded;
 Heaven and a few bright stars possessed the world.
 But in a silent place dim with the west
 On that last night of the sweet passionate earth,
 The goddess with the mortal hero lay.
 For over them victorious Love still showered
 His arrows marble-dinting, not flower-tipped
 As our brief fading fires, — naked and large
 As heaven the monumental loves of old.
 On their rich bed they lay, and the two rams
 That once the subtle bright Gundhuras gave
 To Urvasie, were near; they were ever
 With her and cherished; hardly even she loved
 The tender faces of her children more
 Than these choice from flocks heavenly: only these
 Remained to her of unforgotten skies.
 So lay they under those fierce shafts of Love,
 And in the arms of strong Pururavus
 Once more were those beloved limbs embraced,
 Once more, if never once again on earth.
 Before he slept, the lord of Urvasie
 Clasped her to him and wooed from her tired lips

One kiss, nor in its passion felt farewell.
 But the night darkened over the vague town,
 And clouds came gradual up, and through the clouds
 In thunderless great flashes stealing came
 The subtle-souled Gundhurvas from the peaks
 Of distant Paradise. Thunder rolled out,
 And through the walls, in a fierce rush of light,
 Entered the thieves of heaven and stole the rams,
 And fled with the same lightning. Shuddering
 The exile of the skies awoke and knew
 Her loss, and with a lamentable cry
 Turned to her lord. "Arise, Pururavus!"
 She wept, "they take from me my snow-white joys."
 And starting from his sleep Pururavus,
 In that waking when memory is far
 And nature of a man unquestioned rules,
 Heard of oppression and a space forgot
 Fate and his weak tenure of mighty bliss,
 Restored to the great nature of a king.
 Wrathful he leaped up and on one swift stride
 Reached to his bow. Before 'twas grasped he shuddered,
 His soul all smitten with a rushing fear.
 Alarmed he turned towards her. Suddenly wide
 The whole room stood in splendour manifest,
 All lightning, and heroically vast,
 In gesture kingly like a statue stayed,
 Rose glorious, all a grace of naked limbs,
 The hero beautiful, Pururavus,
 In that fierce light. Intenser than by day
 He for one brilliant moment clear beheld
 All the familiar place, the fretted huge
 Images on the columns, the high-reared
 Walls massively erect and silent floor,
 And on the floor the gracious fallen dress
 That never should embrace her perfect form,
 Lying a glimmer, and each noble curve
 Of the strong couch, and delicately distinct
 The golden body and the flower-like face:
 Beside her with a lovely smile that other,
 One small hand pressing back the shining curls
 Blown with her speed over her. Then all faded.

Thunder crashed through the heavens jubilant.
 For a long while he stood with beating heart
 Half-conscious of its loss, and as if waiting
 Another flash, into the dimness gazed
 For those loved outlines that were far away.
 Then with a quiet smile he went and placed
 Where she had lain such a short while ago
 Both hands, expecting her sweet breasts, but found
 Her place all empty to him. Silently
 He lay down whispering to his own heart:
 "She has arisen and her shining dress
 Put round her and gone into the cool alcove
 To fetch sweet water for the heavenly rams,
 And she will stay awhile perhaps to look
 And muse upon the night, and then come back,
 And give them drink, and silently lie down
 Beside me. I shall see her when it dawns."
 And so he slept. But the grey dawn came in
 And raised his lashes. He stretched out his arms
 To find her. Then he knew he was alone.

Even so he would not dwell with his despair.
 "She is but gone," he said, "for a little gone
 Into the infinite silences afar
 To see her golden sisters and revisit
 The streams she knew and those unearthly skies.
 But she will soon come back, — even if her heart
 Would let her linger, mine would draw her back; —
 Come soon and talk to me of all she left,
 And clasp her children, and resume sweet goings
 And happy daily tasks and rooms she loved."
 So, steadfast, he continued kingly toils
 Among a people greatly-destined, giving
 In sacred sessions and assemblies calm
 Counsels far-seeing, magnanimous decrees
 Bronze against Time, and from the judgment seat
 Unblamed sentence or reconciliation large.
 And perfect trinity of holy fires
 He kindled for desirable rain, and went
 To concourse of strong men or pleasant crowds,
 Or triumphed in great games armipotent.

Yet behind all his moments there was void.
 And as when one puts from him desperately
 The thought of an inevitable fate,
 Blinding himself with present pleasures, often
 At a slight sound, a knocking at the door,
 A chance word terrible, or even uncalled
 His heart grows sick with sudden fear, and ghastly
 The face of that dread future through the window
 Looks at him; mute he sits then shuddering:
 So to Pururavus in session holy,
 Or warlike concourse, or alone, speaking,
 Or sitting, often a swift dreadful fear
 Made his life naked like a lightning flash;
 Then his whole being shook and his strong frame,
 As with a fever, and his eyes gazed blind;
 Soon with great breaths he repossessed his soul.
 Long he endured thus, but when shocks of fear
 And brilliant passage of remorseless suns
 And wakeful nights wrestling with memory
 Invisibly had worn his heart, he then
 Going as one desperate, void of thought or aim,
 Into that silent place dim with the west,
 Saw there her dress empty of her, and bed
 Forlorn, and the cold floor where she had lain
 At noon and made life sweet to him with her voice.
 Sometimes as in an upland reservoir
 Built by the hands of early Aryan kings,
 Its banks in secret fretted long go down,
 Suddenly down with resonant collapse,
 Then with a formidable sound the flood
 Descends, heard over all the echoing hills,
 And marble cities are o'erwhelmed; so sank
 The courage of the strong Pururavus,
 By memory and anguish overcome
 And thoughts of bliss intolerable. Tears
 Came from him; the unvanquished hero lay
 With outstretched arms and wept. Henceforth his life
 Was with that room. If he appeared in high
 Session, warlike concourse or pleasant crowd,
 Men looked on him as on the silent dead.
 Nor did he linger, but from little stay

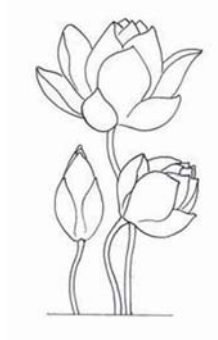
Would silently return and in hushed rooms
 Watch with the little relics left of her,
 Things he had hardly borne to see before,
 Now clasped them often, often kissed, sometimes
 Spoke to them as to sweet and living friends,
 And often over his sleeping children hung.
 Nor did he count the days, nor weep again,
 But looked into the dawn with tearless eyes.
 And all the people mourned for their great king,
 Silently watching him, and many murmured:
 "This is not he, the King Pururavus,
 Hero august, who his impetuous soul
 Ruled like a calm and skilful charioteer,
 And was the virgin Ila's son, our king.
 Would that the enemy's war-cry now might rush
 Against our gates and all the air be sound.
 Surely he would arise and lift his bow,
 And his swift chariot hurling through the gates
 Advance upon them like a sea, and triumph,
 And be himself among the rushing wheels."
 So they would murmur grieving. But the king
 When the bright months brought round a lustier earth,
 Felt over his numbed soul some touch of flowers,
 And rose a little from his grief, and lifted
 His eyes against the stars. Then he said low:
 "I was not wont so quickly to despair.
 O hast thou left me and art lost in light,
 Cruel, between the shining hemispheres?
 Yet even there I will pursue my joy.
 Though all the great immortals jealously
 Encompass round with shields thy golden limbs,
 I may clash through them yet, or my strong patience
 Will pluck my love down from her distant stars.
 Still am I Ila's son, Pururavus,
 That passionless pure strength though lost, though fallen
 From the armed splendid soul which once I was."
 So saying he to the hall of session strode,
 Mightily like a king, a marble place
 With wide Titanic arches imminent,
 And from the brooding pillars seized a shell
 And blew upon it. Like a storm the sound

Through Pratisthana's streets was blown. Forth came
 From lintel proud and happy threshold low
 The people pouring out. Majestic chiefs
 And strong war-leaders and old famous men
 And mighty poets first; behind them streamed
 The Ilian people like driving rain, and filled
 With faces the immeasurable hall.
 And over them the beautiful great king
 Rose bright; anticipations wonderful
 Of immortality flashed through his eyes
 And round his brow's august circumference.
 "My people whom I made, I go from you;
 And what shall I say to you, Ilian people,
 Who know my glory and know my grief? Now I
 Endure no more the desolate wide rooms
 And gardens empty of her. I will depart
 And find her under imperishable trees
 Or secret beside streams. But since I go
 And leave my work behind and a young nation
 With destiny like an uncertain dawn
 Over it — Ayus her son, I give you. He
 By beauty and strength incomparable shall rule.
 Lo, I have planted earth with deeds and made
 The widest heavens my monument, have brought
 From Paradise the sempiternal fire
 And warred in heaven among the warring Gods.
 O people, you have shared my famous actions
 Done in a few great years of earthly life,
 The battles I fought, edifications vast,
 And perfect institutes that I have framed.
 High things we have done together, O my people.
 But now I go to claim back from the Gods
 Her they have taken from me, my dear reward."
 He spoke and all the nation listened, dumb.
 Then was brought forth the bud of Urvasie,
 With Vedic verse intoned and Ganges pure
 Was crowned a king, and empire on his curls
 Established. But Pururavus went forth,
 Through ranks of silent people and gleaming arms,
 With the last cloud of sunset up the fields
 And darkening meadows. And from Ila's rock,

And from the temple of Ila virginal,
A rushing splendour wonderfully arose
And shone all round the great departing king.
He in that light turned and saw under him
The mighty city, luminous and vast,
Colossally up-piled towards the heavens,
Temple and street and palace, and the sea
Of sorrowing faces and sad grieving eyes;
A moment saw, and disappeared from light
Into forest. Then a loud wail arose
From Pratisthana, as if barbarous hordes
Were in the streets and all its temples huge
Rising towards heaven in disastrous fire,
But he unlistening into darkness went.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Collected Poems, CWSA, Vol. 2, pp. 87-98)



EXPERIENCES AND REALISATIONS IN THE INTEGRAL YOGA

(Continued from the issue of November 2016)

PART FOUR THE FUNDAMENTAL REALISATIONS OF THE INTEGRAL YOGA

SECTION TWO THE PSYCHIC OPENING, EMERGENCE AND TRANSFORMATION

Chapter Three The Emergence or Coming Forward of the Psychic

The Meaning of “Coming to the Front”

What is meant by [*the psychic's*] coming to the front is simply this. The psychic ordinarily is deep within. Very few people are aware of their souls — when they speak of their soul, they usually mean the vital + mental being or else the (false) soul of desire. The psychic remains behind and acts only through the mind, vital and physical wherever it can. For this reason the psychic being except where it is very much developed has only a small and partial, concealed and mixed or diluted influence on the life of most men. By coming forward is meant that it comes from behind the veil, its presence is felt clearly in the waking daily consciousness, its influence fills, dominates, transforms the mind and vital and their movements, even the physical. One is aware of one's soul, feels the psychic to be one's true being, the mind and the rest begin to be only instruments of the inmost within us.

The inner mental, vital, physical are also veiled, but much nearer to the surface and much of their movements or inspirations get through the veil (but not in any fullness or purity) in the lives of developed human beings, something even in the lives of ordinary people. But these too in Yoga throw down the veil after a time and come in front and their action predominates in the consciousness while the external is no longer felt as one's own self but only as a front or even a fringe of the being.

*

Awakening [*of the psychic being*] is a different thing [*from its coming to the front*], it means the conscious action of the psychic from behind. When it comes to the

front it invades the mind and vital and body and psychicises their movements. It comes best by aspiration and an unquestioning and entire turning and surrender to the Mother. But also it sometimes comes of itself when the Adhar is ready.

*

That is what we speak of as the psychic being coming in front — to psychicise the whole consciousness, i.e. make it subject to the psychic truth and full of the psychic nature. At the same time the ordinary vital being has to disappear and be changed into the true vital.

*

The soul in itself contains all possible strength, but most of it is held behind the veil and it is what comes forward in the nature that makes the difference. In some people the psychic element is strong and in others weak; in some people the mind is the strongest part and governs, in others the vital is the strongest part and leads or drives. But by sadhana the psychic being can be more and more brought forward till it is dominant and governs the rest. If it were already governing, then the struggles and difficulties of the mind and vital would not at all be serious; for each man in the light of the psychic would see and feel the truth and more and more follow it.

Signs of the Psychic's Coming Forward

It is the psychic being in you that has come forward — and when the psychic being comes forward all is happiness, the right attitude, the right vision of things. Of course in one sense it is the same I that puts forward different parts of itself. But when these different parts are all under the control of the psychic and turned by it towards the reception of the higher consciousness, then there begins the harmonisation of all the parts and their progressive recasting into moulds of the higher consciousness growing in peace, light, force, love, knowledge, Ananda which is what we call the transformation.

*

The psychic being in you is open always to the Divine Power, and when it comes in front, your spiritual capacity awakens and you are fully within the protection and can be moved by the Mother's force. The other parts are divided and can be carried away by the wrong movements of the ordinary nature. Especially if you trust your physical mind and mistake its ideas and suggestions for the true inspiration, you are

liable to fall into serious errors both in your attitude and your choice of action and may lose the results of the protection and of the Force. Aspire to live always in your psychic being and to be open to the Mother; let the psychic part in you dominate the instruments, mind, life and body. Then the habit of the true intuition and the true impulse to action will come and you will be able to live in conscious communion, to feel her presence and be moved only by her Force. This is your true way in the Yoga.

*

A central love, bhakti, surrender, giving everything, a sight within that sees always clearly what is spiritually right or wrong and automatically rejects the latter — a movement of entire consecration and dedication of all in one to the Mother [*are the signs of the psychic's coming forward*].

*

It is your psychic being which came in front, probably, or else it is the true vital being in you which was able to come in front because you took the psychic attitude. When the psychic being comes in front, then there is an automatic perception of the true and untrue, the divine and the undivine, the spiritual right and wrong of things and the false vital and mental movements and attacks are immediately exposed and fall away and can do nothing; gradually the vital and physical as well as the mind get full of this psychic light and truth and sound feeling and purity and such violent attacks as you have are impossible. When the true vital being comes forward, it is something wide and strong and calm, an unmoved and powerful warrior for the Divine and the Truth repelling all enemies, bringing in a true strength and force and opening the vital to the greater Consciousness above. It has to be seen which of the two it is you feel within you.

*

That is good. It means that the psychic has come up again. When the psychic is in the front, the sadhana becomes natural and easy and it is only a question of time and natural development. When the mind or the vital or the physical consciousness is on the top, then the sadhana is a tapasya and a struggle.

*

Excuse me, — if it [*the soul*] goes on with its karma, then it does not get liberation. If it wants only farther experience, it can just stay there in the ordinary nature. The

aim of Yoga is to transcend karma. Karma means subjection to lower Nature; through Yoga the soul goes towards freedom.

You are describing the action of the ordinary existence, not the Yoga. Yoga is a seeking (not a mental searching), it is not experimenting in contraries and contradictions. It is the mind that does that and the mind that analyses. The soul does not search, analyse, experiment — it seeks, feels, experiences.

The only grain of truth is that the Yoga is very usually a series of ups and downs till you get to a certain height. But there is a quite different reason for that — not the vagaries of the soul. On the contrary when the psychic being gets in front and becomes master, there comes in a fundamentally smooth action and although there are difficulties and undulations of movement, these are no longer of an abrupt or dramatic character.

*

It is very good; all you write is a strong sign of the psychic emergence of which I spoke in yesterday's letter. There is at once the deep plunge into the psychic and the emergence of the psychic influence in mind and heart. The depth of the plunge is the reason why action has become so slow, because the consciousness is too much inside to act swiftly on outside things. This is a stage which one passes through in the process of the inner change. At the same time the ideas in the mind and the perceptions and the mental and vital attitude towards things and happenings and people are becoming more and more of a psychic character. Love and devotion to the Divine is the central feeling of the psychic nature and that is growing in you towards the Mother, pervading your being. A psychic love towards all is also emerging; this love is a thing inward and does not seek to express itself outwardly like the vital love which men usually have. The psychic and spiritual attitude is also not dependent on the good and bad in beings, but is self-existent regarding them as souls who carry the Divine in them however thickly concealed and are children of the Mother.

*

Once the condition has come in which the thoughts that cross are not believed, accepted or allowed to govern the conduct, it must be understood that the vital mind is no longer dominant — for the nature of the vital mind is always to cloud the true mind's perception and drive it towards action. Neither the vital mind nor the physical mind are things that have to be got rid of, but they must be quietened, purified, controlled and transformed. That will take place fully when the thinking mind becomes fully conscious and when the psychic comes forward and leads and governs both it and the vital and physical being. Your thinking mind is becoming more and

more conscious; that is shown by what you write, for the perceptions there expressed are quite clear-seeing and correct and show an increasingly right understanding. Moreover what is making you conscious is the increasing pressure of the psychic behind to come forward. For what you felt as trying to come out from behind was the psychic itself. The feeling of flowers and fragrance and a coolness and peace are always sure signs that the psychic is becoming active. It has been developing in you for some time past, only it was covered over by rushes of the old vital mind which did not want to lose its hold or its place. Now that the vital mind is quiet, it is again the psychic that is pressing to come forward and establish its influence.

The thoughts that came afterwards about the defects of your action towards others, repentance and the reasons why you could not establish proper relations with others were the result of this psychic emergence. For when the psychic comes forward or when it strongly influences mind or vital, then one begins to see clearly and rightly about one's own nature and action and about things and about others and to have the right feelings. It was under this pressure of the psychic also that while the mind got these right thoughts and perceptions, the vital felt repentance for what had been done and wished to ask forgiveness. But while this readiness to ask forgiveness was in itself a right feeling, to do so physically would not have been quite the wisest or best action. So the psychic itself at once told you what was the true thing to do, to ask forgiveness instead from the Mother. What was necessary having been done in the mind and vital, the psychic then cleared the whole consciousness and brought back its own quiet and peace. I explain all that to you so that you may begin to understand how these things work within and what is meant by the psychic and its action and influence.

The vision you had of the other luminous and peaceful and beautiful world was a sort of symbolic image of the true physical consciousness and the world in which it lives, the physical consciousness as it is when it is directly under the control of the psychic, and the character of the world which it tends to create for itself.

The Psychic and the Relation with the Divine

The psychic knows that the Divine is and affirms its knowledge against all appearances.

*

The direct relation with the Divine can only grow from within — it is there in the soul and it has to come out by sadhana — that is indeed the reason for doing sadhana. The natural mind of man follows its own ideas, the vital clings to its own desires, the physical follows its own habits — these divide from the Divine. It is only when the

psychic being grows and comes forward and governs the mind and vital and physical and changes them that this veil of personal ideas, desires and habits can fall — then the direct relation and nearness grows in the being till the whole consciousness is united with the Divine. When you go deep into the psychic, then you begin to feel the Mother near — when the mind or vital is under the influence of the psychic this sense grows in them also. That is the way in which it must come.

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The realisation of the psychic being, its awakening and the bringing of it in front depend mainly on the extent to which one can develop a personal relation with the Divine, a relation of bhakti, love, reliance, self-giving, rejection of the insistences of the separating and self-asserting mental, vital and physical ego.

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It may be either way [*that the psychic comes to the front — before the realisation of the Divine or after it*]. There is a touch and the realisation comes and the psychic takes its proper place as the result; or the psychic may come to the front and prepare the nature for the realisation.

Means of Bringing Forward the Psychic

Aspiration constant and sincere and the will to turn to the Divine alone are the best means of bringing forward the psychic being.

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There is no approved method of bringing forward the psychic being. It depends on the aspiration, the growth of faith and devotion, the diminution of the hold of the mental and vital ego and their movements — at a certain point in this development the screen between the psychic and the rest of the nature thins and begins to break, the psychic becomes more and more visible and active and finally takes over charge. Sometimes it may come suddenly, but there is no rule for that.

*

There is no process for it [*getting the psychic in front*]. It comes like the other things — you have to aspire for it and it can only happen when you are sufficiently advanced.

*

It [*the psychic*] comes forward of itself either through constant love and aspiration or when the mind and vital have been made ready by the descent from above and the working of the Force.

*

It [*the dynamic descent from above into the heart*] can help the psychic to come forward, but it does not always do so automatically — it at least creates better conditions for the psychic.

*

To bring the psychic forward, selfishness and demand (which is the base of the vital feelings) must be got rid of — or at least never accepted.

*

Nothing done in the past or present can prevent the psychic from coming forward if there is the true will to get rid of these things and live in the psychic and spiritual consciousness.

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If there is the will to surrender in the central being, then the psychic can come forward.

*

There is absolutely no reason why you should return when you have come with the intention of staying here for a sufficient time and it is better to keep to your intention.

It is not necessary to make an effort to bring your psychic being to the front; all that is necessary is a steady and quiet aspiration; if that is there always, all that is necessary to prepare for the result will be done by degrees and the psychic being will come fully to the front when all is ready and it is time. It happens usually that much in the mental, vital and physical has to be prepared before it can happen. This preparation cannot fail to be hastened by your stay here.

Bhakti and love are part of the psychic movement, a large part of it; in aspiring for the psychic change, you are aspiring for bhakti and love. But it is not useful to restrict your aspiration by a single movement like that of the Vaishnava sadhana; for this Yoga is more ample and contains, but is not confined to, what is essential in the Vaishnava sadhana. Whether you visit the physical Brindavan or not does not matter; what is necessary is to find the inner union through love and bhakti.

As for weeping, there is nothing against the tears that come from the inner aspiration; it is only when it is vital, outward, too much on the surface that it becomes a movement of disturbance and emotional disorder. Intensity of prayer is not at all to be rejected; it is one of the most powerful means of the sadhana.

As for the obstacle to meditation or experience, it would usually be when some part of the being is dealt with which has still to be prepared and to open. Such periods always occur in sadhana and one has to meet these with a patient and persistent aspiration and a quiet vigilance of self-introspection that will bring about the necessary opening. It should not awaken depression or lead to any relaxation of will and the effort of sadhana. Open yourself more and more, that is all that is needed.

Obstacles to the Psychic's Emergence

You have been keeping the psychic in the background during a thousand lives and indulging the vital. That is why the psychic is not strong.

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The mind and the vital have always been dominant and developed themselves and are accustomed to act for themselves. How do you expect an influence [*of the psychic*] coming forward for the first time to be stronger than they are?

*

Of course the ego and the vital with its claims and desires is always the main obstacle to the emergence of the psychic. For they make one live, act, do sadhana even for one's own sake and psychicism means to live, act and do sadhana for the sake of the Divine.

*

The psychic being emerges slowly in most men, even after taking up sadhana. There is so much in the mind and vital that has to change and readjust itself before the psychic can be entirely free. One has to wait till the necessary process has gone far enough before it can burst its agelong veil and come in front to control the nature. It is true that nothing can give so much inner happiness and joy — though peace can come by the mental and vital liberation or through the growth of a strong samata in the being.

*

It is the action of the psychic being, not the being itself, that gets mixed with the mental, vital and physical distortions because it has to use them to express what little of the true psychic feeling gets through the veil. It is by the heart's aspiration to the Divine that the psychic being gets free from these disabilities.

*

Even when the psychic is in front, there may be and are likely to be mental and vital difficulties — only then, there is also the right psychic power and perception behind to deal with them.

*

It [*the flow of love and joy from the heart centre*] can be misused on a large scale only if there is a strong and vehement vital ego not accustomed to correction or else a vital full of the *kāma-vāsanā*. On a small scale it can be misused by the small selfishnesses, vanities, ambitions, demands of the lower vital supporting themselves upon it. If you are on guard against these things then there is no danger of misuse. If the psychic puts forth psychic discernment along with the love, then there is no danger, for the light of psychic discernment at once refuses all mixture or misuse.

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That is of course the difficulty, even when one sees what is to be done and wishes to do it. One forgets at the moment when the control is needed. The habit of remembering and applying one's knowledge at the right moment comes only by a great patience and perseverance which refuses to be discouraged by frequent failure. Only if the psychic being is in front, then it reminds the mind and the thing can be more quickly done. It was your physical ill-health combined with the difficulty of the physical consciousness (which is always a thing of habits and repeats and clings to the old habits even when the mind wants to get rid of them) that prevented the emergence of the psychic from completing itself. With the disappearance of ill-health the difficulty may be more successfully tackled and achieved. As for the long period of seven years without the spiritual success there is nothing unusual in that — the old Yogins used to say that one must be ready for 12 years of preparation before the old nature will be sufficiently modified to allow of the spiritual opening. That is of course not inevitable; it can be done more briefly; but still it takes usually a long time — it has done so with most in the Asram. But in your case the first opening did come, it is only temporarily and not altogether closed, awaiting a second opening which should free the nature for the external as well as the inner change.

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It [*the psychic*] may and does retire from the front or gets clouded over, but once it has been in front it is never relegated back behind the veil altogether and it can always return to the front with comparative ease.

*

The conversion which keeps the consciousness turned towards the light and makes the right attitude spontaneous and natural and abiding and rejection also spontaneous is the psychic conversion. That is to say, man usually lives in his vital and the body is its instrument and the mind its counsellor and minister (except for the few mental men who live mostly for the things of the mind, but even they are in subjection to the vital in their ordinary movements). The spiritual conversion begins when the soul begins to insist on a deeper life and is complete when the psychic becomes the basis or the leader of the consciousness and mind and vital and body are led by it and obey it. Of course if that once happens fully, doubt, depression and despair cannot come any longer, although there may be and are difficulties still. If it is not fully, but still fundamentally accomplished, even then these things either do not come or are brief passing clouds on the surface — for there is a rock of support and certitude at the base, which even if partially covered cannot disappear altogether.

Mostly however the *constant* recurrence of depression and despair or of doubt and revolt is due to a mental or vital formation which takes hold of the vital mind and makes it run round always in the same circle at the slightest provoking cause or even without cause. It is like an illness to which the body consents from habit and from belief in the illness even though it suffers from it, and once started the illness runs its habitual course unless it is cut short by some strong counteracting force. If once the body can withdraw its consent, the illness immediately or quickly ceases — that was the secret of the Coué system. So too if the vital mind withdraws its consent, refuses to be dominated by the habitual suggestions and the habitual movements, these recurrences of depression and despair can be made soon to cease. But it is not easy for this mind, once it has got into the habit of consent, even a quite passive and suffering and reluctant consent, to cancel the habit and get rid of the black circle. It can be done easily only when the mind refuses any longer to believe in the suggestions or accept the ideas or feelings that start the circle.

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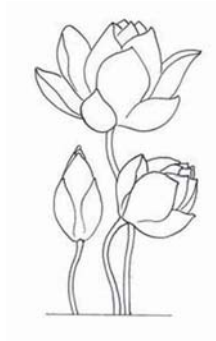
The facts or arguments you put forward to support your diffidence or depression cannot stand in the light of the Yoga experience of others — if they were enough to justify discouragement, how many would have had to turn back from the way who are now far on towards the goal? I cannot now deal with them in detail, but they do not, any of them, justify your inference [*of unfitness for Yoga*].

Also, your psychic being does not deserve the censure you have bestowed upon it. What prevents it from coming out in its full power is the crust of past habits, formations, active vibrations of the mind-stuff and vital stuff which come from a mind and life which have been more creative and outgoing and expansive than indrawn and introspective. In many who are like this — active men and intellectuals — the first stage of Yoga is long and difficult with slow development and sparse experiences, most of the work being done in the subliminal behind the veil — until things are ready.

When the time comes for the definite opening and removal of the purdah between the inner and the outer man, I think I can promise you that you will find your power of Yoga and Yogic experience at least as unexpectedly complete as you, and others, have found your power for poetry — though necessarily its working out will take time, because it is not a detail but the whole life and the whole nature in which there must be the divine victory.

SRI AUROBINDO

(Letters on Yoga — III, CWSA, Vol. 30, pp. 354-66)



THE COMING OF THE AVATAR AND DHARMA

. . . Avatarhood is a fact of divine life and consciousness which may realise itself in an outward action, but must persist, when that action is over and has done its work, in a spiritual influence; or may realise itself in a spiritual influence and teaching, but must then have its permanent effect, even when the new religion or discipline is exhausted, in the thought, temperament and outward life of mankind.

We must then, in order to understand the Gita's description of the work of the Avatar, take the idea of the Dharma in its fullest, deepest and largest conception, as the inner and the outer law by which the divine Will and Wisdom work out the spiritual evolution of mankind and its circumstances and results in the life of the race. Dharma in the Indian conception is not merely the good, the right, morality and justice, ethics; it is the whole government of all the relations of man with other beings, with Nature, with God, considered from the point of view of a divine principle working itself out in forms and laws of action, forms of the inner and the outer life, orderings of relations of every kind in the world. Dharma¹ is both that which we hold to and that which holds together our inner and outer activities. In its primary sense it means a fundamental law of our nature which secretly conditions all our activities, and in this sense each being, type, species, individual, group has its own dharma. Secondly, there is the divine nature which has to develop and manifest in us, and in this sense dharma is the law of the inner workings by which that grows in our being. Thirdly, there is the law by which we govern our outgoing thought and action and our relations with each other so as to help best both our own growth and that of the human race towards the divine ideal.

Dharma is generally spoken of as something eternal and unchanging, and so it is in the fundamental principle, in the ideal, but in its forms it is continually changing and evolving, because man does not already possess the ideal or live in it, but aspires more or less perfectly towards it, is growing towards its knowledge and practice. And in this growth dharma is all that helps us to grow into the divine purity, largeness, light, freedom, power, strength, joy, love, good, unity, beauty, and against it stands its shadow and denial, all that resists its growth and has not undergone its law, all that has not yielded up and does not will to yield up its secret of divine values, but presents a front of perversion and contradiction, of impurity, narrowness, bondage, darkness, weakness, vileness, discord and suffering and division, and the hideous and the crude, all that man has to leave behind in his progress. This is the *adharma*, not-dharma, which strives with and seeks to overcome the dharma, to draw backward and downward, the reactionary force which makes

1. The word means "holding" from the root *dhr*, to hold.

for evil, ignorance and darkness. Between the two there is perpetual battle and struggle, oscillation of victory and defeat in which sometimes the upward and sometimes the downward forces prevail. This has been typified in the Vedic image of the struggle between the divine and the Titanic powers, the sons of the Light and the undivided Infinity and the children of the Darkness and Division, in Zoroastrianism by Ahuramazda and Ahriman, and in later religions in the contest between God and his angels and Satan or Iblis and his demons for the possession of human life and the human soul.

It is these things that condition and determine the work of the Avatar. In the Buddhistic formula the disciple takes refuge from all that opposes his liberation in three powers, the *dharma*, the *saṅgha*, the Buddha. So in Christianity we have the law of Christian living, the Church and the Christ. These three are always the necessary elements of the work of the Avatar. He gives a dharma, a law of self-discipline by which to grow out of the lower into the higher life and which necessarily includes a rule of action and of relations with our fellowmen and other beings, endeavour in the eightfold path or the law of faith, love and purity or any other such revelation of the nature of the divine in life. Then because every tendency in man has its collective as well as its individual aspect, because those who follow one way are naturally drawn together into spiritual companionship and unity, he establishes the *saṅgha*, the fellowship and union of those whom his personality and his teaching unite. In Vaishnavism there is the same trio, *bhāgavata*, *bhakta*, *bhagavān*, — the *bhāgavata*, which is the law of the Vaishnava dispensation of adoration and love, the *bhakta* representing the fellowship of those in whom that law is manifest, *bhagavān*, the divine Lover and Beloved in whose being and nature the divine law of love is founded and fulfils itself. The Avatar represents this third element, the divine personality, nature and being who is the soul of the dharma and the *saṅgha*, informs them with himself, keeps them living and draws men towards the felicity and the liberation.

In the teaching of the Gita, which is more catholic and complex than other specialised teachings and disciplines, these things assume a larger meaning. For the unity here is the all-embracing Vedantic unity by which the soul sees all in itself and itself in all and makes itself one with all beings. The dharma is therefore the taking up of all human relations into a higher divine meaning; starting from the established ethical, social and religious rule which binds together the whole community in which the God-seeker lives, it lifts it up by informing it with the Brahmic consciousness; the law it gives is the law of oneness, of equality, of liberated, desireless, God-governed action, of God-knowledge and self-knowledge enlightening and drawing to itself all the nature and all the action, drawing it towards divine being and divine consciousness, and of God-love as the supreme power and crown of the knowledge and the action. The idea of companionship and mutual aid in God-love and God-seeking which is at the basis of the idea of the *saṅgha* or divine fellowship, is

brought in when the Gita speaks of the seeking of God through love and adoration, but the real *saṅgha* of this teaching is all humanity. The whole world is moving towards this dharma, each man according to his capacity, — “it is my path that men follow in every way,”— and the God-seeker, making himself one with all, making their joy and sorrow and all their life his own, the liberated made already one self with all beings, lives in the life of humanity, lives for the one Self in humanity, for God in all beings, acts for *lokasaṅgraha*, for the maintaining of all in their dharma and the Dharma, for the maintenance of their growth in all its stages and in all its paths towards the Divine. For the Avatar here, though he is manifest in the name and form of Krishna, lays no exclusive stress on this one form of his human birth, but on that which it represents, the Divine, the Purushottama, of whom all Avatars are the human births, of whom all forms and names of the Godhead worshipped by men are the figures. The way declared by Krishna here is indeed announced as the way by which man can reach the real knowledge and the real liberation, but it is one that is inclusive of all paths and not exclusive. For the Divine takes up into his universality all Avatars and all teachings and all dharmas.

The Gita lays stress upon the struggle of which the world is the theatre, in its two aspects, the inner struggle and the outer battle. In the inner struggle the enemies are within, in the individual, and the slaying of desire, ignorance, egoism is the victory. But there is an outer struggle between the powers of the Dharma and the Adharma in the human collectivity. The former is supported by the divine, the godlike nature in man, and by those who represent it or strive to realise it in human life, the latter by the Titanic or demoniac, the Asuric and Rakshasic nature whose head is a violent egoism, and by those who represent and strive to satisfy it. This is the war of the Gods and Titans, the symbol of which the old Indian literature is full, the struggle of the Mahabharata of which Krishna is the central figure being often represented in that image; the Pandavas who fight for the establishment of the kingdom of the Dharma, are the sons of the Gods, their powers in human form, their adversaries are incarnations of the Titanic powers, they are Asuras. This outer struggle too the Avatar comes to aid, directly or indirectly, to destroy the reign of the Asuras, the evil-doers, and in them depress the power they represent and to restore the oppressed ideals of the Dharma. He comes to bring nearer the kingdom of heaven on earth in the collectivity as well as to build the kingdom of heaven within in the individual human soul.

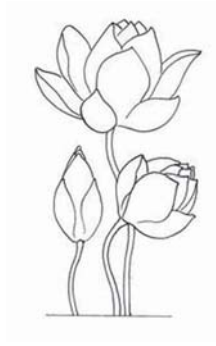
The inner fruit of the Avatar's coming is gained by those who learn from it the true nature of the divine birth and the divine works and who, growing full of him in their consciousness and taking refuge in him with their whole being, *manmayā mām upāsritāḥ*, purified by the realising force of their knowledge and delivered from the lower nature, attain to the divine being and divine nature, *madbhāvam*. The Avatar comes to reveal the divine nature in man above this lower nature and to show what are the divine works, free, unegoistic, disinterested, impersonal, universal,

full of the divine light, the divine power and the divine love. He comes as the divine personality which shall fill the consciousness of the human being and replace the limited egoistic personality, so that it shall be liberated out of ego into infinity and universality, out of birth into immortality. He comes as the divine power and love which calls men to itself, so that they may take refuge in that and no longer in the insufficiency of their human wills and the strife of their human fear, wrath and passion, and liberated from all this unquiet and suffering may live in the calm and bliss of the Divine.² Nor does it matter essentially in what form and name or putting forward what aspect of the Divine he comes; for in all ways, varying with their nature, men are following the path set to them by the Divine which will in the end lead them to him and the aspect of him which suits their nature is that which they can best follow when he comes to lead them; in whatever way men accept, love and take joy in God, in that way God accepts, loves and takes joy in man. *Ye yathā mām prapadyante tām̐s tathaiva bhajāmyaham.*

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays on the Gīta*, CWSA, Vol. 19, pp. 171-76)

2. *janma karma ca me divyam evaṁ yo vetti tattvataḥ,
tyaktvā dehaṁ punarjanma naiti mām eti so' rjuna.
vītarāgabhayakrodhā manmayā mām upāśritāḥ,
bahavo jñānatapasā pūtā madbhāvam āgatāḥ*



INDIAN POLITY

(Continued from the issue of October 2016)

4

A right knowledge of the facts and a right understanding of the character and principle of the Indian socio-political system disposes at once of the contention of occidental critics that the Indian mind, even if remarkable in metaphysics, religion, art and literature was inapt for the organisation of life, inferior in the works of the practical intelligence and, especially, that it was sterile in political experiment and its record empty of sound political construction, thinking and action. On the contrary, Indian civilisation evolved an admirable political system, built solidly and with an enduring soundness, combined with a remarkable skill the monarchical, democratic and other principles and tendencies to which the mind of man has leaned in its efforts of civic construction and escaped at the same time the excess of the mechanising turn which is the defect of the modern European State. I shall consider afterwards the objections that can be made to it from the evolutionary standpoint of the West and its idea of progress.

But there is another side of politics on which it may be said that the Indian political mind has registered nothing but failure. The organisation it developed may have been admirable for stability and effective administration and the securing of communal order and liberties and the well-being of the people under ancient conditions, but even if its many peoples were each of them separately self-governed, well governed and prosperous and the country at large assured in the steady functioning of a highly developed civilisation and culture, yet that organisation failed to serve for the national and political unification of India and failed in the end to secure it against foreign invasion, the disruption of its institutions and an age-long servitude. The political system of a society has to be judged, no doubt first and foremost by the stability, prosperity, internal freedom and order it ensures to the people, but also it must be judged by the security it erects against other States, its unity and power of defence and aggression against external rivals and enemies. It is not perhaps altogether to the credit of humanity that it should be so and a nation or people that is inferior in this kind of political strength, as were the ancient Greeks and mediaeval Italians, may be spiritually and culturally far superior to its conquerors and may well have contributed more to a true human progress than successful military States, aggressive communities, predatory empires. But the life of man is still predominatingly vital and moved therefore by the tendencies of expansion, possession, aggression, mutual struggle for absorption and dominant survival which

are the first law of life, and a collective mind and consciousness that gives a constant proof of incapacity for aggression and defence and does not organise the centralised and efficient unity necessary to its own safety, is clearly one that in the political field falls far short of the first order. India has never been nationally and politically one. India was for close on a thousand years swept by barbaric invasions and for almost another thousand years in servitude to successive foreign masters. It is clear therefore that judgment of political incapacity must be passed against the Indian people.

Here again the first necessity is to get rid of exaggerations, to form a clear idea of the actual facts and their significance and understand the tendencies and principles involved in the problem that admittedly throughout the long history of India escaped a right solution. And first if the greatness of a people and a civilisation is to be reckoned by its military aggressiveness, its scale of foreign conquest, its success in warfare against other nations and the triumph of its organised acquisitive and predatory instincts, its irresistible push towards annexation and exploitation, it must be confessed that India ranks perhaps the lowest in the list of the world's great peoples. At no time does India seem to have been moved towards an aggressive military and political expansion beyond her own borders; no epic of world dominion, no great tale of far-borne invasion or expanding colonial empire has ever been written in the tale of Indian achievement. The sole great endeavour of expansion, of conquest, of invasion she attempted was the expansion of her culture, the invasion and conquest of the Eastern world by the Buddhistic idea and the penetration of her spirituality, art and thought-forces. And this was an invasion of peace and not of war, for to spread a spiritual civilisation by force and physical conquest, the vaunt or the excuse of modern imperialism, would have been uncongenial to the ancient cast of her mind and temperament and the idea underlying her Dharma. A series of colonising expeditions carried indeed Indian blood and Indian culture to the islands of the archipelago, but the ships that set out from both the eastern and western coast were not fleets of invaders missioned to annex those outlying countries to an Indian empire but of exiles or adventurers carrying with them to yet uncultured peoples Indian religion, architecture, art, poetry, thought, life, manners. The idea of empire and even of world-empire was not absent from the Indian mind, but its world was the Indian world and the object the founding of the imperial unity of its peoples.

This idea, the sense of this necessity, a constant urge towards its realisation is evident throughout the whole course of Indian history from earlier Vedic times through the heroic period represented by the traditions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata and the effort of the imperial Mauryas and Guptas up to the Mogul unification and the last ambition of the Peshwas, until there came the final failure and the levelling of all the conflicting forces under a foreign yoke, a uniform subjection in place of the free unity of a free people. The question then is whether the tardiness, the difficulty, the fluctuating movements of the process and the collapse

of the long effort were due to a fundamental incapacity in the civilisation or in the political consciousness and ability of the people or to other forces. A great deal has been said and written about the inability of Indians to unite, the want of a common patriotism — now only being created, it is said, by the influence of Western culture — and the divisions imposed by religion and caste. Admitting even in their full degree the force of these strictures, — all of them are not altogether true or rightly stated or vitally applicable to the matter, — they are only symptoms and we have still to seek for the deeper causes.

The reply made for the defence is usually that India is practically a continent almost as large as Europe containing a great number of peoples and the difficulties of the problem have been as great or at least almost as considerable. And if then it is no proof of the insufficiency of Western civilisation or of the political incapacity of the European peoples that the idea of European unity should still remain an ineffective phantasm on the ideal plane and to this day impossible to realise in practice, it is not just to apply a different system of values to the much more clear ideal of unity or at least of unification, the persistent attempt at its realisation and the frequent near approach to success that marked the history of the Indian peoples. There is some force in the contention, but it is not in the form entirely apposite, for the analogy is far from perfect and the conditions were not quite of the same order. The peoples of Europe are nations very sharply divided from each other in their collective personality, and their spiritual unity in the Christian religion or even their cultural unity in a common European civilisation, never so real and complete as the ancient spiritual and cultural unity of India, was also not the very centre of their life, not its basis or firm ground of existence, not its supporting earth but only its general air or circumambient atmosphere. Their base of existence lay in the political and economic life which was strongly separate in each country, and it was the very strength of the political consciousness in the Western mind that kept Europe a mass of divided and constantly warring nations. It is only the increasing community of political movements and the now total economic interdependence of the whole of Europe that has at last created not any unity, but a nascent and still ineffective League of Nations struggling vainly to apply the mentality born of an age-long separatism to the common interests of the European peoples. But in India at a very early time the spiritual and cultural unity was made complete and became the very stuff of the life of all this great surge of humanity between the Himalayas and the two seas. The peoples of ancient India were never so much distinct nations sharply divided from each other by a separate political and economic life as sub-peoples of a great spiritual and cultural nation itself firmly separated, physically, from other countries by the seas and the mountains and from other nations by its strong sense of difference, its peculiar common religion and culture. The creation of a political unity, however vast the area and however many the practical difficulties, ought therefore to have been effected more easily than could possibly be the unity of

Europe. The cause of the failure must be sought deeper down and we shall find that it lay in a dissidence between the manner in which the problem was or ought to have been envisaged and the actual turn given to the endeavour and in the latter a contradiction of the peculiar mentality of the people.

The whole basis of the Indian mind is its spiritual and inward turn, its propensity to seek the things of the spirit and the inner being first and foremost and to look at all else as secondary, dependent, to be handled and determined in the light of the higher knowledge and as an expression, a preliminary, field or aid or at least a dependent to the deeper spiritual aim, — a tendency therefore to create whatever it had to create first on the inner plane and afterwards in its other aspects. This mentality and this consequent tendency to create from within outwards being given, it was inevitable that the unity India first created for herself should be the spiritual and cultural oneness. It could not be, to begin with, a political unification effected by an external rule centralised, imposed or constructed, as was done in Rome or ancient Persia, by a conquering kingdom or the genius of a military and organising people. It cannot, I think, justly be said that this was a mistake or a proof of the unpractical turn of the Indian mind and that the single political body should have been created first and afterwards the spiritual unity could have securely grown up in the vast body of an Indian national empire. The problem that presented itself at the beginning was that of a huge area containing more than a hundred kingdoms, clans, peoples, tribes, races, in this respect another Greece, but a Greece on an enormous scale, almost as large as modern Europe. As in Greece a cultural Hellenic unity was necessary to create a fundamental feeling of oneness, here too and much more imperatively a conscious spiritual and cultural unity of all these peoples was the first, the indispensable condition without which no enduring unity could be possible. The instinct of the Indian mind and of its great Rishis and founders of its culture was sound in this matter. And even if we suppose that an outward imperial unity like that of the Roman world could have been founded among the peoples of early India by military and political means, we must not forget that the Roman unity did not endure, that even the unity of ancient Italy founded by the Roman conquest and organisation did not endure, and it is not likely that a similar attempt in the vast reaches of India without the previous spiritual and cultural basis would have been of an enduring character. It cannot be said either, even if the emphasis on spiritual and cultural unity be pronounced to have been too engrossing or excessive and the insistence on political and external unity too feeble, that the effect of this precedence has been merely disastrous and without any advantage. It is due to this original peculiarity, to this indelible spiritual stamp, to this underlying oneness amidst all diversities that if India is not yet a single organised political nation, she still survives and is still India.

After all the spiritual and cultural is the only enduring unity and it is by a persistent mind and spirit much more than by an enduring physical body and outward

organisation that the soul of a people survives. This is a truth the positive Western mind may be unwilling to understand or concede, and yet its proofs are written across the whole story of the ages. The ancient nations, contemporaries of India, and many younger born than she are dead and only their monuments left behind them. Greece and Egypt exist only on the map and in name, for it is not the soul of Hellas or the deeper nation-soul that built Memphis which we now find at Athens or at Cairo. Rome imposed a political and a purely outward cultural unity on the Mediterranean peoples, but their living spiritual and cultural oneness she could not create, and therefore the east broke away from the west, Africa kept no impress of the Roman interlude, and even the western nations still called Latin could offer no living resistance to barbarian invaders and had to be reborn by the infusion of a foreign vitality to become modern Italy, Spain and France. But India still lives and keeps the continuity of her inner mind and soul and spirit with the India of the ages. Invasion and foreign rule, the Greek, the Parthian and the Hun, the robust vigour of Islam, the levelling steam-roller heaviness of the British occupation and the British system, the enormous pressure of the Occident have not been able to drive or crush the ancient soul out of the body her Vedic Rishis made for her. At every step, under every calamity and attack and domination, she has been able to resist and survive either with an active or a passive resistance. And this she was able to do in her great days by her spiritual solidarity and power of assimilation and reaction, expelling all that would not be absorbed, absorbing all that could not be expelled, and even after the beginning of the decline she was still able to survive by the same force, abated but not slayable, retreating and maintaining for a time her ancient political system in the south, throwing up under the pressure of Islam Rajput and Sikh and Mahratta to defend her ancient self and its idea, persisting passively where she could not resist actively, condemning to decay each empire that could not answer her riddle or make terms with her, awaiting always the day of her revival. And even now it is a similar phenomenon that we see in process before our eyes. And what shall we say then of the surpassing vitality of the civilisation that could accomplish this miracle and of the wisdom of those who built its foundation not on things external but on the spirit and the inner mind and made a spiritual and cultural oneness the root and stock of her existence and not solely its fragile flower, the eternal basis and not the perishable superstructure?

But spiritual unity is a large and flexible thing and does not insist like the political and external on centralisation and uniformity; rather it lives diffused in the system and permits readily a great diversity and freedom of life. Here we touch on the secret of the difficulty in the problem of unifying ancient India. It could not be done by the ordinary means of a centralised uniform imperial State crushing out all that made for free divergence, local autonomies, established communal liberties, and each time that an attempt was made in this direction, it has failed after however long a term of apparent success, and we might even say that the guardians of India's

destiny wisely compelled it to fail that her inner spirit might not perish and her soul barter for an engine of temporary security the deep sources of its life. The ancient mind of India had the intuition of its need; its idea of empire was a uniting rule that respected every existing regional and communal liberty, that unnecessarily crushed out no living autonomy, that effected a synthesis of her life and not a mechanical oneness. Afterwards the conditions under which such a solution might securely have evolved and found its true means and form and basis, disappeared and there was instead an attempt to establish a single administrative empire. That endeavour, dictated by the pressure of an immediate and external necessity, failed to achieve a complete success in spite of its greatness and splendour. It could not do so because it followed a trend that was not eventually compatible with the true turn of the Indian spirit. It has been seen that the underlying principle of the Indian politico-social system was a synthesis of communal autonomies, the autonomy of the village, of the town and capital city, of the caste, guild, family, *kula*, religious community, regional unit. The state or kingdom or confederated republic was a means of holding together and synthesising in a free and living organic system these autonomies. The imperial problem was to synthesise again these states, peoples, nations, effecting their unity but respecting their autonomy, into a larger free and living organism. A system had to be found that would maintain peace and oneness among its members, secure safety against external attack and totalise the free play and evolution, in its unity and diversity, in the uncoerced and active life of all its constituent communal and regional units, of the soul and body of Indian civilisation and culture, the functioning on a grand and total scale of the Dharma.

This was the sense in which the earlier mind of India understood the problem. The administrative empire of later times accepted it only partially, but its trend was, very slowly and almost subconsciously, what the centralising tendency must always be, if not actively to destroy, still to wear down and weaken the vigour of the subordinated autonomies. The consequence was that whenever the central authority was weak, the persistent principle of regional autonomy essential to the life of India reasserted itself to the detriment of the artificial unity established and not, as it should have done, for the harmonious intensification and freer but still united functioning of the total life. The imperial monarchy tended also to wear down the vigour of the free assemblies, and the result was that the communal units instead of being elements of a united strength became isolated and dividing factors. The village community preserved something of its vigour, but had no living connection with the supreme authority and, losing the larger national sense, was willing to accept any indigenous or foreign rule that respected its own self-sufficient narrow life. The religious communities came to be imbued with the same spirit. The castes, multiplying themselves without any true necessity or true relation to the spiritual or the economic need of the country, became mere sacrosanct conventional divisions, a power for isolation and not, as they originally were, factors of a harmonious functioning of

the total life-synthesis. It is not true that the caste divisions were in ancient India an obstacle to the united life of the people or that they were even in later times an active power for political strife and disunion, — except indeed at the end, in the final decline, and especially during the later history of the Mahratta confederation; but they did become a passive force of social division and of a stagnant compartmentalism obstructive to the reconstitution of a free and actively united life.

The evils that attended the system did not all manifest themselves with any power before the Mahomedan invasions, but they must have been already there in their beginning and they increased rapidly under the conditions created by the Pathan and the Mogul empires. These later imperial systems however brilliant and powerful, suffered still more than their predecessors from the evils of centralisation owing to their autocratic character and were constantly breaking down from the same tendency of the regional life of India to assert itself against an artificial unitarian regime, while, because they had no true, living and free relation with the life of the people, they proved unable to create the common patriotism which would have effectively secured them against the foreign invader. And in the end there has come a mechanical Western rule that has crushed out all the still existing communal or regional autonomies and substituted the dead unity of a machine. But again in the reaction against it we see the same ancient tendencies reviving, the tendency towards a reconstitution of the regional life of the Indian peoples, the demand for a provincial autonomy founded on true subdivisions of race and language, a harking back of the Indian mind to the ideal of the lost village community as a living unit necessary to the natural life of the national body and, not yet reborn but dimly beginning to dawn on the more advanced minds, a truer idea of the communal basis proper to Indian life and the renovation and reconstruction of Indian society and politics on a spiritual foundation.

The failure to achieve Indian unity of which the invasions and the final subjection to the foreigner were the consequence, arose therefore at once from the magnitude and from the peculiarity of the task, because the easy method of a centralised empire could not truly succeed in India, while yet it seemed the only device possible and was attempted again and again with a partial success that seemed for the time and a long time to justify it, but always with an eventual failure. I have suggested that the early mind of India better understood the essential character of the problem. The Vedic Rishis and their successors made it their chief work to found a spiritual basis of Indian life and to effect the spiritual and cultural unity of the many races and peoples of the peninsula. But they were not blind to the necessity of a political unification. Observing the constant tendency of the clan life of the Aryan peoples to consolidate under confederacies and hegemonies of varying proportions, *vairājya*, *sāmrājya*, they saw that to follow this line to its full conclusion was the right way and evolved therefore the ideal of the Chakravarti, a uniting imperial rule, uniting without destroying the autonomy of India's many kingdoms and peoples, from sea

to sea. This ideal they supported, like everything else in Indian life, with a spiritual and religious sanction, set up as its outward symbol the Aswamedha and Rajasuya sacrifices, and made it the dharma of a powerful King, his royal and religious duty, to attempt the fulfilment of the ideal. He was not allowed by the Dharma to destroy the liberties of the peoples who came under his sway nor to dethrone or annihilate their royal houses or replace their archons by his officials and governors. His function was to establish a suzerain power possessed of sufficient military strength to preserve internal peace and to combine at need the full forces of the country. And to this elementary function came to be added the ideal of the fulfilment and maintenance under a strong uniting hand of the Indian dharma, the right functioning of the spiritual, religious, ethical and social culture of India.

The full flowering of the ideal is seen in the great epics. The Mahabharata is the record of a legendary or, it may be, a historic attempt to establish such an empire, a *dharmarājya* or kingdom of the Dharma. There the ideal is pictured as so imperative and widely acknowledged that even the turbulent Shishupala is represented as motivating his submission and attendance at the Rajasuya sacrifice on the ground that Yudhisthira was carrying out an action demanded by the Dharma. And in the Ramayana we have an idealised picture of such a Dharmarajya, a settled universal empire. Here too it is not an autocratic despotism but a universal monarchy supported by a free assembly of the city and provinces and of all the classes that is held up as the ideal, an enlargement of the monarchical state synthetising the communal autonomies of the Indian system and maintaining the law and constitution of the Dharma. The ideal of conquest held up is not a destructive and predatory invasion annihilating the organic freedom and the political and social institutions and exploiting the economic resources of the conquered peoples, but a sacrificial progression bringing with it a trial of military strength of which the result was easily accepted because defeat entailed neither humiliation nor servitude and suffering but merely a strengthening adhesion to a suzerain power concerned only with establishing the visible unity of the nation and the Dharma. The ideal of the ancient Rishis is clear and their purpose: it is evident that they saw the military and political utility and necessity of a unification of the divided and warring peoples of the land, but they saw also that it ought not to be secured at the expense of the free life of the regional peoples or of the communal liberties and not therefore by a centralised monarchy or a rigidly unitarian imperial State. A hegemony or confederacy under an imperial head would be the nearest Western analogy to the conception they sought to impose on the minds of the people.

There is no historical evidence that this ideal was ever successfully carried into execution, although the epic tradition speaks of several such empires preceding the Dharmarajya of Yudhisthira. At the time of Buddha and later when Chandragupta and Chanakya were building the first historic Indian empire, the country was still covered with free kingdoms and republics and there was no united empire to meet

the great raid of Alexander. It is evident that if any hegemony had previously existed, it had failed to discover a means or system of enduring permanence. This might however have evolved if time had been given, but a serious change had meanwhile taken place which made it urgently necessary to find an immediate solution. The historic weakness of the Indian peninsula has always been until modern times its vulnerability through the north-western passes. This weakness did not exist so long as ancient India extended northward far beyond the Indus and the powerful kingdoms of Gandhara and Vahlka presented a firm bulwark against foreign invasion. But they had now gone down before the organised Persian empire and from this time forward the trans-Indus countries, ceasing to be part of India, ceased also to be its protection and became instead the secure base for every successive invader. The inroad of Alexander brought home the magnitude of the danger to the political mind of India and from this time we see poets, writers, political thinkers constantly upholding the imperial ideal or thinking out the means of its realisation. The immediate practical result was the rise of the empire founded with remarkable swiftness by the statesmanship of Chanakya and constantly maintained or restored through eight or nine centuries, in spite of periods of weakness and incipient disintegration, successively by the Maurya, Sunga, Kanva, Andhra and Gupta dynasties. The history of this empire, its remarkable organisation, administration, public works, opulence, magnificent culture and the vigour, the brilliance, the splendid fruitfulness of the life of the peninsula under its shelter emerges only from scattered insufficient records, but even so it ranks among the greatest constructed and maintained by the genius of the earth's great peoples. India has no reason, from this point of view, to be anything but proud of her ancient achievement in empire-building or to submit to the hasty verdict that denies to her antique civilisation a strong practical genius or high political virtue.

At the same time this empire suffered by the inevitable haste, violence and artificiality of its first construction to meet a pressing need, because that prevented it from being the deliberate, natural and steady evolution in the old solid Indian manner of the truth of her deepest ideal. The attempt to establish a centralised imperial monarchy brought with it not a free synthesis but a breaking down of regional autonomies. Although according to the Indian principle their institutes and customs were respected and at first even their political institutions not wholly annulled, at any rate in many cases, but brought within the imperial system, these could not really flourish under the shadow of the imperial centralisation. The free peoples of the ancient Indian world began to disappear, their broken materials serving afterwards to create the now existing Indian races. And I think it can be concluded on the whole that although for a long time the great popular assemblies continued to remain in vigour, their function in the end tended to become more mechanical and their vitality to decline and suffer. The urban republics too tended to become more and more mere municipalities of the organised kingdom or empire. The habits of mind

created by the imperial centralisation and the weakening or disappearance of the more dignified free popular institutions of the past created a sort of spiritual gap, on one side of which were the administered content with any government that gave them security and did not interfere too much with their religion, life and customs and on the other the imperial administration beneficent and splendid, no doubt, but no longer that living head of a free and living people contemplated by the earlier and the true political mind of India. These results became prominent and were final only with the decline, but they were there in seed and rendered almost inevitable by the adoption of a mechanical method of unification. The advantages gained were those of a stronger and more coherent military action and a more regularised and uniform administration, but these could not compensate in the end for the impairment of the free organic diversified life which was the true expression of the mind and temperament of the people.

A worse result was a certain fall from the high ideal of the Dharma. In the struggle of kingdom with kingdom for supremacy a habit of Machiavellian statecraft replaced the nobler ethical ideals of the past, aggressive ambition was left without any sufficient spiritual or moral check and there was a coarsening of the national mind in the ethics of politics and government already evidenced in the draconic penal legislation of the Maurya times and in Asoka's sanguinary conquest of Orissa. The deterioration, held in abeyance by a religious spirit and high intelligence, did not come to a head till more than a thousand years afterwards and we only see it in its full force in the worst period of the decline when unrestrained mutual aggression, the unbridled egoism of princes and leaders, a total lack of political principle and capacity for effective union, the want of a common patriotism and the traditional indifference of the common people to a change of rulers gave the whole of the vast peninsula into the grasp of a handful of merchants from across the seas. But however tardy the worst results in their coming and however redeemed and held in check at first by the political greatness of the empire and a splendid intellectual and artistic culture and by frequent spiritual revivals, India had already lost by the time of the later Guptas the chance of a natural and perfect flowering of her true mind and inmost spirit in the political life of her peoples.

Meanwhile the empire served well enough, although not perfectly, the end for which it was created, the saving of Indian soil and Indian civilisation from that immense flood of barbarian unrest which threatened all the ancient stabilised cultures and finally proved too strong for the highly developed Graeco-Roman civilisation and the vast and powerful Roman empire. That unrest throwing great masses of Teutons, Slavs, Huns and Scythians to west and east and south battered at the gates of India for many centuries, effected certain inroads, but, when it sank, left the great edifice of Indian civilisation standing and still firm, great and secure. The irruptions took place whenever the empire grew weak and this seems to have happened whenever the country was left for some time secure. The empire was weakened by

the suspension of the need which created it, for then the regional spirit reawoke in separatist movements disintegrating its unity or breaking down its large extension over all the North. A fresh peril brought about the renewal of its strength under a new dynasty, but the phenomenon continued to repeat itself until, the peril ceasing for a considerable time, the empire called into existence to meet it passed away not to revive. It left behind it a certain number of great kingdoms in the east, south and centre and a more confused mass of peoples in the northwest, the weak point at which the Mussulmans broke in and in a brief period rebuilt in the north, but in another, a Central Asiatic type, the ancient empire.

These earlier foreign invasions and their effects have to be seen in their true proportions, which are often disturbed by the exaggerated theories of oriental scholars. The invasion of Alexander was an eastward impulsion of Hellenism that had a work to do in western and central Asia, but no future in India. Immediately ejected by Chandragupta, it left no traces. The entrance of the Graeco-Bactrians which took place during the weakness of the later Mauryas and was annulled by the reviving strength of the empire, was that of a Hellenised people already profoundly influenced by Indian culture. The later Parthian, Hun and Scythian invasions were of a more serious character and for a time seemed dangerous to the integrity of India. In the end however they affected powerfully only the Punjab, although they threw their waves farther south along the western coast and dynasties of a foreign extraction may have been established for a time far down towards the south. To what degree the racial character of these parts was affected, is far from certain. Oriental scholars and ethnologists have imagined that the Punjab was Scythianised, that the Rajputs are of the same stock and that even farther south the race was changed by the intrusion. These speculations are founded upon scanty or no evidence and are contradicted by other theories, and it is highly doubtful whether the barbarian invaders could have come in such numbers as to produce so considerable a consequence. It is farther rendered improbable by the fact that in one or two or three generations the invaders were entirely Indianised, assumed completely the Indian religion, manners, customs, culture and melted into the mass of the Indian peoples. No such phenomenon took place as in the countries of the Roman empire, of barbarian tribes imposing on a superior civilisation their laws, political system, barbaric customs, alien rule. This is the common significant fact of these irruptions and it must have been due to one or all of three factors. The invaders may have been armies rather than peoples: the occupation was not a continuous external rule which had time to stiffen in its foreign character, for each was followed by a revival of the strength of the Indian empire and its return upon the conquered provinces: and finally the powerfully vital and absorbing character of Indian culture was too strong to allow of any mental resistance to assimilation in the intruders. At any rate if these irruptions were of a very considerable character, Indian civilisation must be considered to have proved itself much more sound, more vital and more solid than the younger

Graeco-Roman which went down before the Teuton and the Arab or survived only underneath and in a debased form heavily barbarised, broken and unrecognisable. And the Indian empire too must be pronounced to have proved after all more efficacious than was the Roman with all its vaunt of solidity and greatness, for it succeeded, even if pierced in the west, in preserving the security of the great mass of the peninsula.

It is a later downfall, the Mussulman conquest failing in the hands of the Arabs but successfully reattempted after a long interval, and all that followed it which serves to justify the doubt thrown on the capacity of the Indian peoples. But first let us put aside certain misconceptions which cloud the real issue. This conquest took place at a time when the vitality of ancient Indian life and culture after two thousand years of activity and creation was already exhausted for a time or very near exhaustion and needed a breathing space to rejuvenate itself by transference from the Sanskrit to the popular tongues and the newly forming regional peoples. The conquest was effected rapidly enough in the north, although not entirely complete there for several centuries, but the south long preserved its freedom as of old against the earlier indigenous empire and there was not so long a distance of time between the extinction of the kingdom of Vijayanagara and the rise of the Mahrattas. The Rajputs maintained their independence until the time of Akbar and his successors and it was in the end partly with the aid of Rajput princes acting as their generals and ministers that the Moguls completed their sway over the east and the south. And this was again possible because — a fact too often forgotten — the Mussulman domination ceased very rapidly to be a foreign rule. The vast mass of the Mussulmans in the country were and are Indians by race, only a very small admixture of Pathan, Turkish and Mogul blood took place, and even the foreign kings and nobles became almost immediately wholly Indian in mind, life and interest. If the race had really like certain European countries remained for many centuries passive, acquiescent and impotent under an alien sway, that would indeed have been a proof of a great inherent weakness; but the British is the first really continuous foreign rule that has dominated India. The ancient civilisation underwent indeed an eclipse and decline under the weight of a Central Asiatic religion and culture with which it failed to coalesce, but it survived its pressure, put its impact on it in many directions and remained to our own day alive even in decadence and capable of recovery, thus giving a proof of strength and soundness rare in the history of human cultures. And in the political field it never ceased to throw up great rulers, statesmen, soldiers, administrators. Its political genius was not in the decadence sufficient, not coherent enough or swift in vision and action, to withstand the Pathan, Mogul and European, but it was strong to survive and await every opportunity of revival, made a bid for empire under Rana Sanga, created the great kingdom of Vijayanagara, held its own for centuries against Islam in the hills of Rajputana, and in its worst days still built and maintained against the whole power of the ablest of the Moguls the kingdom of Shivaji, formed the Mahratta

confederacy and the Sikh Khalsa, undermined the great Mogul structure and again made a last attempt at empire. On the brink of the final and almost fatal collapse in the midst of unspeakable darkness, disunion and confusion it could still produce Ranjit Singh and Nana Fadnavis and Madhoji Scindia and oppose the inevitable march of England's destiny. These facts do not diminish the weight of the charge that can be made of an incapacity to see and solve the central problem and answer the one persistent question of Fate, but considered as the phenomena of a decadence they make a sufficiently remarkable record not easily paralleled under similar circumstances and certainly put a different complexion on the total question than the crude statement that India has been always subject and politically incapable.

The real problem introduced by the Mussulman conquest was not that of subjection to a foreign rule and the ability to recover freedom, but the struggle between two civilisations, one ancient and indigenous, the other mediaeval and brought in from outside. That which rendered the problem insoluble was the attachment of each to a powerful religion, the one militant and aggressive, the other spiritually tolerant indeed and flexible, but obstinately faithful in its discipline to its own principle and standing on the defence behind a barrier of social forms. There were two conceivable solutions, the rise of a greater spiritual principle and formation which could reconcile the two or a political patriotism surmounting the religious struggle and uniting the two communities. The first was impossible in that age. Akbar attempted it on the Mussulman side, but his religion was an intellectual and political rather than a spiritual creation and had never any chance of assent from the strongly religious mind of the two communities. Nanak attempted it from the Hindu side, but his religion, universal in principle, became a sect in practice. Akbar attempted also to create a common political patriotism, but this endeavour too was foredoomed to failure. An autocratic empire built on the Central Asian principle could not create the desired spirit by calling in the administrative ability of the two communities in the person of great men and princes and nobles to a common service in the creation of a united imperial India: the living assent of the people was needed and that remained passive for want of awakening political ideals and institutions. The Mogul empire was a great and magnificent construction and an immense amount of political genius and talent was employed in its creation and maintenance. It was as splendid, powerful and beneficent and, it may be added, in spite of Aurangzeb's fanatical zeal, infinitely more liberal and tolerant in religion than any mediaeval or contemporary European kingdom or empire and India under its rule stood high in military and political strength, economic opulence and the brilliance of its art and culture. But it failed like the empires before it, more disastrously even, and in the same way, crumbling not by external attack but by internal disintegration. A military and administrative centralised empire could not effect India's living political unity. And although a new life seemed about to rise in the regional peoples, the chance was cut short by the intrusion of the European nations and their seizure of the opportunity

created by the failure of the Peshwas and the desperate confusion of the succeeding anarchy and decadence.

Two remarkable creations embodied in the period of disintegration the last effort of the Indian political mind to form the foundations of a new life under the old conditions, but neither proved to be of a kind that could solve the problem. The Mahratta revival inspired by Ramdas's conception of the Maharashtra Dharma and cast into shape by Shivaji was an attempt to restore what could still be understood or remembered of the ancient form and spirit, but it failed, as all attempts to revive the past must fail, in spite of the spiritual impetus and the democratic forces that assisted its inception. The Peshwas for all their genius lacked the vision of the founder and could only establish a military and political confederacy. And their endeavour to found an empire could not succeed because it was inspired by a regional patriotism that failed to enlarge itself beyond its own limits and awaken to the living ideal of a united India. The Sikh Khalsa on the other hand was an astonishingly original and novel creation and its face was turned not to the past but the future. Apart and singular in its theocratic head and democratic soul and structure, its profound spiritual beginning, its first attempt to combine the deepest elements of Islam and Vedanta, it was a premature drive towards an entrance into the third or spiritual stage of human society, but it could not create between the spirit and the external life the transmitting medium of a rich creative thought and culture. And thus hampered and deficient it began and ended within narrow local limits, achieved intensity but no power of expansion. The conditions were not then in existence that could have made possible a successful endeavour.

Afterwards came the night and a temporary end of all political initiative and creation. The lifeless attempt of the last generation to imitate and reproduce with a servile fidelity the ideals and forms of the West has been no true indication of the political mind and genius of the Indian people. But again amid all the mist of confusion there is still the possibility of a new twilight, not of an evening but a morning Yuga-sandhya. India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples. And that which must seek now to awake is not an anglicised oriental people, docile pupil of the West and doomed to repeat the cycle of the Occident's success and failure, but still the ancient immemorable Shakti recovering her deepest self, lifting her head higher towards the supreme source of light and strength and turning to discover the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma.

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‘NOTHING IS IN THE UNIVERSE BUT THY LIFE, THY LIGHT, THY LOVE’

May 22, 1914

When we have discerned successively what is real from what is unreal in all the states of being and all the worlds of life, when we have arrived at the perfect and integral certitude of the sole Reality, we must turn our gaze from the heights of this supreme consciousness towards the individual aggregate which serves as the immediate instrument for Thy manifestation upon earth, and see in it nothing but Thee, our sole real existence. Thus each atom of this aggregate will be awakened to receive Thy sublime influence; the ignorance and the darkness will disappear not only from the central consciousness of the being but also from its most external mode of expression. It is only by the fulfilment, by the perfection of this labour of transfiguration that there can be manifested the plenitude of Thy Presence, Thy Light and Thy Love.

Lord, Thou makest me understand this truth ever more clearly; lead me step by step on that path. My whole being down to its smallest atom aspires for the perfect knowledge of Thy presence and a complete union with it. Let every obstacle disappear, let Thy divine knowledge replace in every part the darkness of the ignorance. Even as Thou hast illumined the central consciousness, the will in the being, enlighten too this outermost substance. And let the whole individuality, from its first origin and essence to its last projection and most material body, be unified in a perfect realisation and a complete manifestation of Thy sole Reality.

Nothing is in the universe but Thy Life, Thy Light, Thy Love.

Let everything become resplendent and transfigured by the knowledge of Thy Truth.

Thy divine love floods my being; Thy supreme light is shining in every cell; all exults because it knows Thee and because it is one with Thee.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, pp. 151-52)

“HOW?” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Is this poem a failure? Does it express in a merely fanciful instead of a truly imaginative form how the consciousness, in-drawn by its feeling of the Mother's presence within, is graced with the inspiration of abiding poetry?

How shall I praise You, Charmer,
For the spell You cast on me,
The glow and breath and harmony
You bring beneath embowering skies
Of inly-lustred paradise
Each time You draw me, Charmer,
Through darkness of shut eyes?

The blossoms there are music
On stems of silences
And from the tune-effulgences
A-tremble in that world apart
Whose petals bear no sering¹ smart
You give one flower of music
To treasure in my heart!

Again through shut-eyed darkness
I reach the world of death,
But there's a flame upon my breath
Inhaling ever more a fume
Of joy untouched by withering gloom
And from my heart of darkness
Out-burns a music-bloom!

I know not how this beauty
Of soul takes earthly form;
But never shall a blinding storm
Destroy the mystery-blossomed rays
Of song that makes with dreaming gaze
Each tone a mirrored beauty
Of Your enhaloed face!

[*Amal's question:*]

1. Is the alternative form “sear” preferable?

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

1. I should say so.

It is not a failure — it is good, though not quite so good as some others you have recently written.

3 February 1934

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

Only one thing is important, it is to find the Divine.

For each one and for the whole world anything becomes useful if it helps to find the Divine.

The Mother

(*Words of the Mother – II, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 3*)

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

(Continued from the issue of November 2016)

Chapter: LVII

AT THE HEIGHT OF INFLUENCE

Aurobindo Ghose was now out of prison, and Nivedita had her school decorated as for the most auspicious festival days to celebrate his release. She found him completely transformed. . . . He possessed an irresistible power, derived from a spiritual revelation that had come to him in prison. During the entire ordeal he had seen before him nothing but the Lord Krishna: Krishna the adored and the adorable, the essence of Brahman, the Absolute in the sphere of relativity: Lord Krishna had become at the same time prisoner, jailor and judge . . .

Now, released from prison Aurobindo found his party discouraged and downcast. With a mere handful of supporters — Nivedita among them — he launched an appeal and tried to rekindle the patriotic spark in weakening society. His mission was now of a Yogin sociologist. . .

He was already known as ‘Seer’ Sri Aurobindo, although still involved in political life, and as yet not manifested to his future disciples on the spiritual path. For Nivedita he was the expression of life itself, the life of a new seed grown on the ancient soil of India, the logical and passionate development of all her Guru’s teachings . . .

Aurobindo was throwing out the first ideas of the Integral Yoga he was to teach, depicting man in his cosmic reality. . . . He was, as Nivedita understood him, the successor to the spiritual Masters of the past, offering the source of his inspiration for all . . .

Lizelle Reymond: *The Dedicated*¹

The last big political event in which Sri Aurobindo played a unique role was the Bengal Provincial Conference of the National Congress held at Chinsura, Hooghly, on the 5th and 6th of September 1909. Just as the Moderates had chosen Surat as the venue for the National Conference of 1907 because the town was dominated by them, (but history has recorded the turbulent turn it took,) so too, they now chose Chinsura — the sleepy small town that it was at that time, free from any marked sign of Nationalist presence.

Reminiscences of several participants in the conference and observers of the

developments preceding it show how the Moderates did their best to bar the Nationalists from becoming delegates to the conference and how they even conspired to ensure Sri Aurobindo's non-participation in it. We choose to reproduce a few words from the reminiscences of a young scholar, Jyotish Chandra Ghose (1883-1971), an active participant in the conference who later rose to prominence as an educationist and freedom fighter, President of the Forward Block of Bengal and Member of the Assembly more than once:

The Reception Committee that was formed consisted of Moderates so that the rules that they formed and the Draft Resolutions that they passed at the sitting of their executive body were extremely retrograde in character and repugnant to the sentiments of the Nationalists. Alone and single-handed, Sri Aurobindo was called upon to break the clique of the Moderate caucus who had combined to prevent even Sri Aurobindo being returned as a delegate and were using unfair means to chuck out men of pronounced nationalistic views from the list of the delegates and return their own men instead from all districts. Undaunted, Sri Aurobindo began his vigorous campaign to defeat the Moderates hollow . . .²

The Moderate conspiracy entirely failed as Sri Aurobindo took a bold and disarmingly candid stand and called upon all forward-looking people to make themselves eligible to attend the conference. We also see from a sumptuous quantity of evidence that if the conference became "the largest ever"³, it was because of Sri Aurobindo's efforts through the *Karmayogin* to make it a meaningful affair and his influence over the youth. He arranged to form teams of students as volunteers, under capable captainship of trusted youths, defying the Reception Committee's notice which forbade it, in keeping with the infamous Risley Circular that denied students any right to participate in political events. Sri Aurobindo published his own draft of resolutions in his weekly for the would-be delegates to have time enough to reflect on them.

Proposal for the Indian Councils Act of 1909, popularly known as the Morley-Minto Reforms, was the great news of the day. A sample of the resolution in this connection prepared by the Reception Committee, when juxtaposed with the draft proposed by the Nationalists, should serve the purpose for posterity to assess the basic difference between the two outlooks. The one vital fact we must bear in mind is that the stimulation and perpetuation of communal discord for which the brains behind the colonial rule would leave no stone unturned, was now receiving yet another boost through the proposed election of members to the legislative fronts on a communal basis. The Reception Committee gave it only a secondary importance in a subsequent paragraph of its draft whereas it was a matter of prime concern for the Nationalists.

The proposed Moderate Resolution on this issue read:

That while expressing its gratefulness to the Government for the concessions made in the recent Reform Scheme, this Conference records its firm conviction that no reform will ensure the happiness and contentment of the people unless it gives them a direct control over the finances of the country.⁴

The proposed Nationalist Resolution read:

That this Conference emphatically condemns the principle of separate electorates on sectarian lines and of special privileges of one community which it is intended to introduce into the Reform Scheme and is farther of the opinion that no reform will be acceptable to the country which does not concede to the people a direct and substantial control over finance and legislation.⁵

To the great dismay of the Moderates, Sri Aurobindo reached Chinsura, accompanied by a trainload of delegates, on the 4th of September, in the evening. In a long telegram consisting of a few hundred words dated the 20th of September 1909, sent by Sir Charles Allen, the officiating Chief Secretary of Bengal, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, we read:

The Conference was opened at Chinsura on the 5th September and was attended by about 1,500 people from both Bengals, mostly young men. Arabindo Ghose attended as the elected delegate for Uttarpara and Diamond Harbour and for the students of Hooghly and Chinsura and the senior students of Calcutta. Babu Surendra Nath Banerji was also present at the Conference . . . Arabindo Ghose receiving the warmer welcome. The latter was escorted to Chinsura by a body-guard of about a hundred youths, and he entered the *pandal* garlanded and escorted by his guard. . . . Adequate police arrangements were made to maintain order and the proceeding passed off without any breach of the peace. All reports agree that Arabinda Ghosh had a strong numerical majority in the gathering inside the *pandal*; but he kept his forces in order and refrained from pressing his amendments to the resolutions for the sake of securing a united Congress.⁶

What is interesting is that in an earlier and shorter telegram dated the 10th of September, the Chief Secretary wrote that Sri Aurobindo received the “warmest reception”!⁷

Of all the reports of the conference available to us, the most unexpectedly informative as well as interesting one is by a gentleman planted as a delegate by the top echelon of the Government. His identity was a jealously guarded secret — not revealed even to the senior British members of bureaucracy, not to speak of the Indian ones. He must have been quite an important person in the Moderate camp, so much so that he was allowed to be present even in the “secret conclave” convened

by the crowning leader of the Moderates, Babu (later Sir) Surendra Nath. The code name this mysterious gentleman used is “L”. His strictly confidential report is reproduced here in full for its unique value in our objectively assessing Sri Aurobindo’s position in the political situation in that decade — on the eve of his quitting the scene:

“L” [*code letter of the writer*] Calcutta, 8-9-09.

Bengal Provincial Conference,

Hooghly

The Bengal Provincial Conference that met on the 5th and 6th instant has been fruitful of greater and far-reaching results than any of its predecessors. The inner workings of this organisation are to be told first, then the outward manifestations, which are, however, exhaustively described in the columns of the daily newspapers.

Babu Arabindo Ghosh, as I told you in one of my previous reports, was organising an opposition to the moderate party. He succeeded in making his opposition party so compact and so well organised that the moderate leaders got frightened at the probable prospect of their being defeated and placed in the minority at the deliberations of the Conference. On Friday the 3rd September last a secret meeting of the moderate leaders was held at the *Bengali* Office in the room of the editor, Babu Surendra Nath Banerji. There were present at this secret conclave, Babus Bhupendra Nath Bose, Prithvis Chandra Rai, Satya Nanda Bose, Pramathanath Banerji, Ramanand Chaterji, Pandit Gispati Kabyatirtha, Moulvi Dedar Bux and a few others.

Babu Surendranath Banerji was the presiding genius and the deliberations were carried on with closed doors. I was allowed admittance and I managed to stay on till the last. It was decided that if Arabindo gets the majority at the Subjects Committee, all the moderates under the leadership of Surendranath would leave the Conference premises and wash their hands clean of the affair. Both Babus Bhupendranath and Surendranath were against such drastic measures. They wanted to temporise and enter into a concordat with Arabindo and his party. They were given by those present a free hand in the matter. Then came the question of the boycott. Babu Surendranath Banerji distinctly said that it was the only effective weapon that we have against the Government. He said: — “Put any other name if you please, but the boycott, pure and simple, should be pushed on so long as the Partition endures; and, if necessary, it should be kept on for any length of time.” At this Babu Bhupendranath suggested that the word Swadeshi would very well serve our purpose; it would denote industrial developments and connote boycott *per se*. This was agreed

to and the meeting dissolved after arranging to send as many moderate delegates as possible to Chinsura.

Babu Arabindo is a greater organiser, because, as I told you in one of my previous reports, that the English educated community of the two Bengals are at heart extremists — yea, anarchists potentially and substantively, and those who have a stake in the country and have something to lose, if they go counter to the wishes of Government, do very cleverly hide their extremism under a thin veneer of moderate ideas. This fact is known to all the people in Bengal and this helped Arabindo in getting up his party so quickly.

The fact is Babu Surendranath is quickly going down in the estimation of his countrymen. He is like the five headed God Janus always looking to the victorious side. Besides, truth has a greater hold on the imagination of the common people than the polished lies of a silver-tongued orator. Arabindo speaks out the truth and Surendranath hides it and calls it diplomacy — paying the devil (Government) its dues. However both met at Hooghly and Arabindo gave his mind out that the Surat affair would be re-enacted if the moderates get the upper hand. At the meeting of the Subjects Committee held at Chinsura on Sunday the 5th September night it became very apparent to the moderates that the extremists, though not in actual majority, were pushing up rapidly and some of the extremist speakers were adepts at obstruction.

All through the fateful night of Sunday the moderates talked and quarrelled and there were defections from the party. At last Kumar Rajendranath Mukherji came to the relief of the moderates. He became the go-between of the parties and managed to bring Arabindo and Surendranath together. Babu Surendranath confessed that he was an extremist at heart and “all persons who know what is what, are all extremists”. But extremism is not a paying concern now. He exhorted Arabindo to come over to his party or subscribe to the creed and demand Swaraj within Colonial limits. He said these Shibboleths are being used only to hide their common purpose and that the game of the bomb and revolver is now a played out game. “Let the moderates and the extremists work under the standard of the so-called Constitutionalism and let each party work in its own way quietly and in a covert way and we will steer clear of all shoals and sand banks.”

After this Kumar Rajendranath said that unless and until the extremist party gets into a make-believe concordat with the moderates, persons like him would not be able to substantially help the extremist cause. Babus Bhupendranath Bose and Ambica Charan Mazumdar also supported the plea of the Kumar and promised substantial help to the extremist party.

Babu Arabindo Ghosh saw through the whole game and gave his assent to the false commingling of the two parties. On the morrow, Monday morning, another meeting of the Subjects Committee was held, Babu Surendranath

Banerji delivered an impassioned speech. People smiled at his histrionics and young and old, Babus Baikunta Nath Sen and Benode Behari Mitter, all assented to the fusion of the parties and the business smoothly passed off without any let or hindrance. Babu Baikunta Nath went so far as to allow Arabindo to explain his theory of boycott and passive resistance, at the general meeting of the conference.

As a matter of fact, as I reiterated in many of my previous reports, in Bengal there are no moderates; we are all extremists, but moderates by necessity. If the truth is to be told, Babu Surendranath is a political mountebank, a Bengali Kossuth rolled up in the varoqueries [*sic*] of a Talleyrand. He always bids for popularity and sails before the wind. He believes that if Arabindo Ghosh be allowed to remain too long out of the jail enclosures, he (Arabindo) would take the shine out of him (Surendranath).

Besides he has correctly gauged public opinion in Bengal and sees it drifting on to Arabindo's side. Hence the concordat, hence the mingling of the two parties. I forgot to tell you, when in England Surendranath saw Babu Bipin Chandra Pal times without number, dined with him, lived with him and knew all Bipin's secrets. And on coming back from England he was closeted with Arabindo for hours together on three occasions.

As for Arabindo he has won all along the line. He will now be able quietly to gather as much money as he wants, will be able to control the deliberations of the Congress and Conferences and be safe beyond the clutches of the law. I was explaining to Kabiraj Upendranath Sen who interrupted me by saying "What can Surendra do? He must bow down to the inevitable." Before the Calcutta Congress over which Dadabhai Naoroji presided, there were no extremists and no moderates. And after the Hooghly Conference, so far as Bengal is concerned there will be no more extremists and moderates, and perhaps a new force will get up to disturb the public peace.

I am glad that at last the Police have been able to put their hands on the actual plague spots in Calcutta. Ahiritola, Bechu Chatterjee Street, Nimtola Ghat, Baugbazar, Shyambazar and Harrison Road East are the places where the anarchists congregate most. I happened to meet some of the boys arrested for the Faridpur dacoity, when they were being carried through Coolootola Street. Two of them I recognised as belonging to the Sanatan party or the worshippers of Kali, vowed to commit dacoities and under the leadership of Babu Krishna Kumar Mitter's son. Saroda Charan Sen is again in Calcutta, and looks very busy. Perhaps he is after some new mischief.

Kumar Rajendranath Mukherji has been nominated President of the extremist party in place of Babu Subodh Chandra Mullick. He paid Rs. 800 towards the Hooghly Conference expenses. He has promised to double his monthly donations to the extremist fund now that the moderates and extremists

belong to the same party. The Raja of Narajole has already paid Rs. 1,200 to Arabindo Ghosh, perhaps sometime yesterday.⁸

Rapid correspondence followed between those at the helm of the ruling hierarchy about Hooghly Conference — and particularly in regard to the growing influence of Sri Aurobindo, in the course of which F. C. Daly wrote to F. W. Duke, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal (extracts):

It is certainly true that at the Hooghly Provincial Conference the vast majority of those in the Pandal were in favour of Arabindo Ghosh, but this majority was largely made up of young men from Eastern Bengal. If we are to take the voice of the young men as expressing the opinion of the people generally, there can be little doubt that Surendra Nath Banerjea is not in it with Arabindo Ghosh. This is not, I think, the case with the older men, though Arabindo, most certainly, has strong adherents of all ages.

I had heard that Rajendra Nath Mukerji tried to settle the difference between Arabindo and Surendra Nath. I have never heard that Surendra Nath stated before the Subject committee that he was an Extremist at heart, though, personally, it does not at all surprise me to hear that he did say so. . . . They (the Extremists) eventually agreed to the Moderate resolution being passed on condition that Arabindo was allowed to speak, and to state that their agreement to the Moderates' resolution was not to be constructed into an abandonment of their own individual ideas of absolute self-government . . .

As I said before, there is no question as to Arabindo being now the more powerful man of the two, among the hot-headed young men, but I do not think that he has yet succeeded in winning the absolute confidence and admiration of the older generation . . .

“L”, whoever he may be, however, seems to be in a position to obtain and furnish very useful information, and if he could tell us anything absolutely definite regarding the connection of Kristo Kumar Mitter's (*sic*) son with the dacoity band, or of the doings of Saroda Charan Sen, who is well-known to us and against whom we would be glad to hear of something definite, he would be doing us a good turn.

That Kumar Rajendra Nath Mukerji is one of the financial supporters of the Extremist party, we know perfectly well, and there is not the slightest doubt of it. I have not, however, heard of Narajole paying any large sum to Arabindo Ghose, and I should like to know exactly how the money was paid, and any further particulars the informant may be in possession of.⁹

Let us now hear Sri Aurobindo's own account (in third person) of the Hooghly episode:

He led the party again at the session of the Provincial Conference at Hooghly. There it became evident for the first time that Nationalism was gaining the ascendant, for it commanded a majority among the delegates and in the Subjects Committee Sri Aurobindo was able to defeat the Moderates' resolution welcoming the Reforms and pass his own resolution stigmatising them as utterly inadequate and unreal and rejecting them. But the Moderate leaders threatened to secede if this was maintained and to avoid a scission he consented to allow the Moderate resolution to pass, but spoke at the public session explaining his decision and asking the Nationalists to acquiesce in it in spite of their victory so as to keep some unity in the political forces of Bengal. The Nationalist delegates, at first triumphant and clamorous, accepted the decision and left the hall quietly at Sri Aurobindo's order so that they might not have to vote either for or against the Moderate resolution. This caused much amazement and discomfiture in the minds of the Moderate leaders who complained that the people had refused to listen to their old and tried leaders and clamoured against them, but at the bidding of a young man new to politics they had obeyed in disciplined silence as if a single body.¹⁰

Exchange of several ideas later, on the 2nd of October 1909, Lord Minto, the Governor General of British India, sanctioned for the circulation among those concerned, the following document signed by H. A. Start and H. H. Risley:

There is every indication that if the boycott movement survives at all, it will be in the extreme form advocated by Arabindo Ghosh. Just as Mr. Parnell drove out Mr. Butt, so will Arabindo supersede Surendra Nath Banerji. In both cases the Extremists' programme is the more logical and more attractive of enthusiasm. With His Excellency's permission this may be circulated.¹¹

[Isaac Butt (1813-1879) was the most influential Irish leader in the 19th century till the rise of Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) who gave a revolutionary turn to the Irish Home Rule movement. Sri Aurobindo hailed Parnell in his series of articles known as "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance" serialised in the *Bande Mataram*. The series published in the April 1907 issues of the paper is likely to have been read by the authors of the document circulated.]

No wonder that a terrified administration would now explore every possibility to either deport or imprison Sri Aurobindo.

(To be continued)

MANOJ DAS

Notes and References

1. Lizelle Reymond: *The Dedicated: A Biography of Nivedita*.
2. Jyotish Chandra Ghose: *Life-Work of Sri Aurobindo*; Atmashakti Library, College Square, Kolkata, 1929.
3. *The Bengalee* (Editorial); 8 September 1907.
4. The Government of Bengal Confidential File (No. 13 of 1909).
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid* (Tel. No. 1764 – P.D.).
7. The Government of Bengal Confidential File (No. 13 of 1909).
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Sri Aurobindo: On Himself*; SABCL, Vol. 26.
11. The Government of Bengal Confidential File.

... even the man who is capable of governing his life by ideas, who recognises, that is to say, that it ought to express clearly conceived truths and principles of his being or of all being and tries to find out or to know from others what these are, is not often capable of the highest, the free and disinterested use of his rational mind. As others are subject to the tyranny of their interests, prejudices, instincts or passions, so he is subjected to the tyranny of ideas. Indeed, he turns these ideas into interests, obscures them with his prejudices and passions and is unable to think freely about them, unable to distinguish their limits or the relation to them of other, different and opposite ideas and the equal right of these also to existence. Thus, as we constantly see, individuals, masses of men, whole generations are carried away by certain ethical, religious, aesthetic, political ideas or a set of ideas, espouse them with passion, pursue them as interests, seek to make them a system and lasting rule of life and are swept away in the drive of their action and do not really use the free and disinterested reason for the right knowledge of existence and for its right and sane government.

Sri Aurobindo

(*The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 107-08)

A TEACHER'S TOLERANCE AND HEALING TOUCH TO TROUBLED TEENS

(Continued from the issue of November 2016)

Erin's approach

One of Erin's major motivating tools was taking the students on educational field trips thus breaking the monotony of an indoor classroom with outdoor experiences. Children always like open spaces, fresh air and are fascinated by new sights and sounds. Erin took them to places linked to what they read, watched or were taught in the class. It helped the students get a deeper understanding of what they had learnt in class. Their first educational trip was a visit to the Museum of Tolerance which exhibited the Holocaust of the Second World War. The students were overawed by the suffering that the Jews had to bear at the Nazi concentration camps. The visit struck a sympathetic chord with the rebellious students. It also proved to be a huge bonding experience for them. A newspaper article later wrote about this trip with the headline "Troubled Teens find hope amid Holocaust".

Erin introduced new books where she felt the students could identify with the main character. A student after reading a few pages of a certain book thought "Hey, this is my type of book!" This spurred the student to read the entire book. Another student walked into Erin's class and picked up a novel just to browse through only to find the book so intense that she could not put it down. Erin was successful in arousing the curiosity of the students and slowly developed their reading habit and concentration and widened the scope of their studies.

In another instance, Erin was relating the medieval legend of King Arthur and Camelot. As the students were not interested in the story she announced that she would hold a test on the legend and all those who passed it would earn a field trip to a Medieval Times restaurant. The class perked up and soon all students wanted to know everything about the legend; they found the lesson mesmerising and began to re-live the medieval era besides learning literature. To Erin's great surprise all the students passed the test and earned the right to this outing. At the restaurant dinner the students re-lived the medieval atmosphere: they were entertained by knights engaged in hand-to-hand combat. "There is no better way to teach than to provide some firsthand experience and a little fun"¹ recalls a student.

§

1. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, p. 59.

A teacher once asked the Mother:

Is it good to give prizes to the children or reward them in order to make them work or to create some sort of interest?

The Mother replied:

It is obviously better for the children to study in order to develop their consciousness and learn a little of all they do not know; but to give prizes to those who have been particularly studious, disciplined and attentive, is not bad.²

§

After the students had picked up the reading habit, Erin introduced them to Shakespeare; she pointed out people from real life who could be rough images to the characters in the plays.

Several stories read in class were enacted as plays in the classroom thus engaging their creativity and developing a camaraderie amongst the students; they even took their studies more seriously.

Erin once took the class to a private screening of the film, *Higher Learning*, which dealt with overcoming prejudice and hypocrisy. It was a story about a Japanese immigrant family's attempt to integrate and live the American Dream. But after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour all Japanese and Americans of Japanese origin were rounded up and sent to internment camps. An Asian student from Cambodia could relate to this story for he and his family too had to go through the shock and humiliation of being interned in a camp during the war in Cambodia.

After the movie there was a panel of people from different backgrounds, each of whom had faced discrimination either because of their race, class, religion or gender yet each of them went on to become very successful. Sharing and identifying with each others' pain and adversity releases the hurt and makes us more tolerant, thus making us stronger yet more sensitive to the struggle of others.

A student relates:

Everything from today related to something we have read or watched in class. It's amazing how Ms. Gruwell went out of her way to contact all these people to come to speak to us. By meeting these people, it made the books we've been reading more meaningful. It also made me realise that anything is possible!³

2. *Growing up with the Mother*, Tara Jauhar, p. 61.

3. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, p. 43.

Education and tolerance became the buzz word in the class. A difficult student with a passion and talent for basketball was dropped from the school basketball team due to her aggressive attitude. Distressed, she channelised her energies into writing. The recognition she received for her essay changed her. She quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson: "To improve is to change, to be perfect is to change often."⁴

John Tu, a benefactor, had donated a number of computers to the class so that the stories could be typed directly on the computer, retaining the anonymity of the writer. This helped in editing the stories and also typing in new ones.

One of Erin's great achievements was to get two key motivational speakers to the class. Miep Gies was the lady who risked her life in sheltering Anne Frank. In the spring of 1996 Miep came to the USA from Amsterdam to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Anne Frank's diary. Erin managed to invite Miep to speak with the students at school. To help prepare the students for the visit Erin asked Gerda Siefer, a Holocaust survivor, to share her experiences with the students. Gerda hid in a windowless cellar, where she was barely able to stand, during the Second World War. After Gerda's talk the students could vividly imagine how Anne felt in the attic. Miep got a grand welcome from the students. She described how she hid the Frank family and subsequently found Anne's diary. She also told them on how the Gestapo found Anne. Miep was on a knife's edge — hiding Jews was punishable by death — yet she took a further risk by attempting to bribe the officers in the hope that the Frank family would be released. The class expressed their admiration to Miep but she responded by saying that it was the "right thing to do". When a student declared that Miep was their hero she interjected, to the great joy of the students, "No, you're the real heroes."

A student wrote: "Now after meeting Miep, I can honestly say that my heroes are not just made-up characters — my hero is real."⁵

On her return, Miep wrote to Erin and the students:

She (Erin) told me with great enthusiasm about the courageous way in which you secure your personal future. I am deeply impressed by the fact that although many of you endured a lot of hardships, you nevertheless don't give up, but struggle towards a brighter future. You are wonderful individuals and will contribute a lot to your society and also to a better world for all.⁶

The following summer vacation Erin went to Amsterdam to meet Miep. Erin found her not only courageous but also very generous. What struck Erin profoundly was Miep's humility. Miep's philosophy was that "every individual, even a very

4. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

ordinary housewife or secretary, can make a difference.” This is a philosophy that Erin tried to ingrain in her students.

After their meeting with Miep, the students were keen to meet Zlata. Erin asked each of them to draft an invitation letter to Zlata. The letters were so fascinating that Erin had them bound into a book. At first Erin was unable to locate Zlata; she was told that she lived either in France or Ireland, so she sent the bound letters to both these countries, hoping they would somehow reach the young celebrated author. The letters finally reached Zlata who replied that she would be delighted to meet the class. Finally Erin got a sponsorship for Zlata to visit the USA. Zlata spent four days with the students and several activities were organised. She hit it off with the class. The class was enthralled to meet her since she was a role model of the same age. A student wrote: “The local newspapers have actually done stories about us bringing Zlata here and how we’ve made monumental changes in our lives.”⁷

§

The Mother has said that the teacher should have a proportionately higher capacity when teaching below par students:

. . . But as one goes down the scale and the capacity of the student becomes lower, the teacher must have higher and higher capacities: discipline, self-control, consecration, psychological understanding, infectious enthusiasm, to awaken in the student the part which is asleep: the will to know, the need for progress, self-control, etc.⁸

§

The students’ love and loyalty

Erin motivated and encouraged her students in all sorts of ways. A girl student was skipping classes and wasting her time with wayward friends during school time in the first semester. In the second semester she enthusiastically writes:

I have learned so much in my freshman year, and one important lesson I’ve learned is that people do change, because I did.

. . . So one day when Ms. Gruwell pointed out my 0.5 GPA, but said that I had potential, I felt guilty. Then before I left class, Ms. Gruwell told me something that would change my life forever. She told me she believed in me. I have never heard those words from anyone . . . especially a teacher.⁹

7. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

8. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 12, 2nd ed., pp. 172-73.

9. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, pp. 45-6.

Another student who was missing classes in order to assist her terminally ill mother found a supportive Erin. She wrote:

What she showed me today is that a truly self-reliant person takes action, leaving nothing to chance and everything to themselves. . . . A truly self-reliant person finds his weak link and strengthens it. I want to be a self-reliant person, now and forever.¹⁰

A student rejoining school after a rather traumatic summer holiday wrote:

Ms. Gruwell, my crazy English teacher from last year, is really the only person that made me think of hope for my future.¹¹

Another student on being hospitalised for sinus surgery, reminisced:

I'm really going to miss Ms. G and her class. Last year when I was in the hospital she bought like a two-foot card and everyone in her class signed it. She even came to hospital to visit me.¹²

A dyslexic student relates:

I've learned a lot from her. She doesn't call me lazy or stupid. I have learned that reading can be fun. It is still difficult at times, but I don't get that knot in my stomach when I read out loud.

Ms. Gruwell has also encouraged me in my one true love — sports. She told me that a lot of dyslexic people do really well in sports to compensate for people laughing at them in the classroom. Now I know if I work hard in school and in sports, I can succeed in both.¹³

Later, when computers were introduced in the class, the dyslexic student could with the help of the spell-check instantaneously correct his spelling errors thus empowering him as never before.

Not surprisingly Erin's inventive and interesting teaching style percolated to other classrooms.

The only white student of the class wrote about the metamorphosis of the so-called "Ghetto Class":

10. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

She's the best teacher I've ever had. She truly cares about us and never judges us based on appearances.

. . . my friends who had made me feel stupid, all are now interested in my class . . . they don't know how great this class really is and how many friends I have made because of it. We have had many guest speakers and travel to museums and social functions.

I told my friends that there was going to be room for a couple of more students in Ms. Gruwell's class. I found out they had all signed a waiting list to get into her class the very next day!¹⁴

A recently transferred student wrote:

She plays reading and vocabulary games to help us learn, and she listens to our questions. She actually cares. She talks to us on a level I can understand.¹⁵

Erin won over her students and brought the best out of them because she had a psychological knack to understand them.

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The Mother stated:

. . . he [the teacher] must have a power of psychological discernment in dealing with the students, he must understand his students and what they are capable of doing.¹⁶

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Further, Erin's sensitive handling of her students epitomises Mother's saying:

1. Never make fun of anyone if you do not want others to make fun of you.
2. Always act in a respectable way if you want others to respect you.
3. Love everybody if you want everybody to love you.¹⁷

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14. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

16. *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2nd ed., Vol. 12, p. 377.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

Erin also encouraged her students to express themselves in public so that they could gain in self-confidence. She chose one of her reticent poverty-stricken students to speak on homelessness at an important seminar. To hold the understanding audience in rapt attention whilst publicly expressing her struggles had a liberating effect on the student; it emotionally healed her.

Erin could also be strict if the situation was getting out of hand.

Erin had to warn a difficult student following which the improvement in the student's behaviour was so marked that Erin selected her to be a speaker at an important gathering. This did wonders for the student's self-esteem. Erin bore none any grudge.

Erin took great pains to prepare for her classes. Further she gave her personal time to the students for their learning and education and they in turn responded by bonding with her. The students became intimate and transparent with Erin and often they would have stimulating frank discussions with her.

Evidently Erin's love and energy rubbed off on the students and in return their trust, enthusiasm and progress gave Erin immense joy.

However there was one fall-out of Erin's dedication and sacrifice for her students; her husband divorced her because of her long hours at school. This saddened Erin and she later remarked: "No woman wants to feel a failure in her marriage."¹⁸ There was also criticism for Erin's hectic schedule from certain quarters. Some teachers who admired Erin nonetheless confessed that they could not have devoted almost all their time for their students as they had family responsibilities besides wanting to pursue their hobbies and setting aside leisure time.

The class becomes like a supportive family

Erin's open and progressive attitude to her underprivileged students (also referred to as the Freedom Writers) worked wonders and her classroom was illustriously dubbed as Room 203. Erin wanted to treat her class like her own family so Room 203 wasn't only a classroom but a home and a safe haven to the students.

Erin used positive reinforcement to motivate and change her students. Any accomplishment achieved by any student was immediately announced in class by Erin so that others too could share the good news.

Erin was deeply loved by the students and in the bargain this united the class. In addition to being a teacher it was obvious that Erin was also a mentor to her class. She tried to be equal and fair to all students without any preferences. Gradually she was being transfigured into a mother-figure by her students. A student gratefully acknowledges:

18. Website: dailymail.co.uk.

Even though my mother left me when I was young, I have had many people try to fill the role of a mother. Many have not accomplished the position very well, but Ms. Gruwell has succeeded. I appreciate her and the Freedom Writers for what they have done and given me. They have helped me become a stronger person.¹⁹

After teaching the class for almost two years, school policy would not allow Erin to continue teach the same class. As an exception, Erin was allowed to teach the class for four consecutive years till they graduated from High School. The unanimous feeling of the class was that these four years was the greatest experience a teenager could possibly have.

Several students considered Erin's class to be a "surrogate family". Erin herself admitted that she became a "mom" to 150 students.

Looking into the future

The students from the projects or ghettos, largely from uneducated families, had now transformed themselves into role models.

Erin had clearly surpassed her role as teacher since she was using her resourcefulness, time and energy in activities which were far above what a school teacher was expected to do.

Erin's students finally graduated from school in the spring of 1998. Astonishingly all 150 students completed High School. It was, "the proudest day of my life. I felt like a mother with 150 children and I thought that my heart was going to explode with pride,"²⁰ beamed Erin, on the verge of tears. Four years earlier the possibility of a diploma for many of these 'sure-to-drop-out-kids' with below par reading skills and no interest in studies whatsoever was very remote. Many of the students were the first in their families to complete High School. Graduating from High School evoked mixed feelings amongst the students. On one hand they were happy to graduate, looking forward to new experiences at college but there was a tinge of sadness because Room 203 would no longer be their home and the Freedom Writers family will be separating. A student writes:

Looking back, I can't believe that those same unteachable kids who refused to speak to each other are today's Freedom Writers . . . the same Freedom Writers who became a family. I wonder how we're going to follow up on this one. How can you top off four years of the greatest experiences a teenager could have?²¹

19. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, p. 191.

20. Website: www.dailymail.co.uk.

21. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, p. 270.

The Freedom Writers began college in the autumn of 1998. They joined universities spread all over the United States. Erin had a big hand in this. She convinced her students to pursue higher studies, oriented them to colleges by advice and field trips to universities to enable them to choose the appropriate subjects and college, helped them fill in the college admission forms and the financial aid forms, even secured scholarships for deserving students through her non-profit organisation and help from businessmen.

Life after High School

After five years at Wilson High School, Erin joined California State University as a “Distinguished Teacher in Residence” where she shared her experiences with college students aspiring to be teachers. Erin also spoke about her learning experience at the university:

At the university, I discovered that some of the pedagogical strategies I had arrived at instinctively while teaching at Wilson High were supported by research in the field of education. I learned that educational psychologists strongly support a student-centred learning model based on “internal motivation”. Students who are internally motivated feel a sense of choice in the classroom, experience themselves as competent, and are more likely to achieve academic success. Teachers who support “internal motivation” listen to their students, engage interest, encourage questions, and allow their students flexibility in problem solving. Inspired by this academic validation of my student-centred methods, I drew on my classroom experiences with the Freedom Writers and began to teach future educators how to motivate their students from the inside out.²²

Meanwhile the Freedom Writers pursued their higher studies at various colleges. They were the pride of their kin since most were the first in their families to join college.

Erin then managed something that would change their lives — a book deal with one of the most prestigious publishing companies in the world. In the fall of 1999 the classroom essays consisting of the experiences and observations of the students, along with Erin's notes, were compiled and published as a book, *The Freedom Writers Diary — How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them*. It was No. 1 on the New York Times bestseller list and on its 10th anniversary had printed more than a million copies and continues to be translated in several languages. The newspapers gave rave reviews

22. Website: www.freedomwritersfoundation.org.

and some of the headlines read: “She Opened Their Eyes and They Opened Up Their Lives”; “Education: Erin Gruwell used the Holocaust to teach students about tolerance”.²³

The book created waves in the US; it was later made into a major Hollywood motion picture. Soon after the Freedom Writers were invited to address audiences ranging from impoverished students to elite universities to Congressmen. A student who had been an illegal immigrant, while addressing the Congressmen, courageously admitted to these lawmakers:

I'm standing in front of you because I was lucky enough to land in a classroom that had no limits. Ms. G [Erin] never looked at me and saw an undocumented immigrant; she saw *me*. And the Freedom Writers didn't care where I was from. They cared about me because despite our differences, we became a family.²⁴

From the royalties of the book, Erin founded “The Freedom Writers Foundation”, whose mission was to bring down the drop-out rates in high schools.

After graduating from the universities the Freedom Writers realised that they were pioneers for others to follow. They were now teachers in their homes or amongst friends and some had even taken up teaching as a profession. As they wanted to give back to their school they created the Freedom Writers Scholarship at their alma mater, Wilson High, to help underprivileged students to become the first ones in their family to graduate from High School and consequently graduate from university. The majority of relationships that were formed at Wilson High School in Room 203 still continue many years later.

Zlata Filipovic, labelled the “Anne Frank of Sarajevo” and author of the book *Zlata's Diary* writes about Erin:

I will always very highly respect and admire the Freedom Writers' mentor, their friend and teacher, Erin Gruwell, who is also my friend. She never wants to be congratulated or held responsible for the great things that came out of Room 203 at Wilson High School, but she must be. She was (and still is) much more than a teacher to the Freedom Writers. She was a parent to those who did not have, or could not communicate with, their own; she was an older friend who was fun to be around; but she was also very loyal, someone who cared and fought for each one of her “kids”. She shared her education, tenacity and love with them and made a huge difference in her students' lives. They could have remained the “underachievers” they'd been labelled before they arrived

23. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, p. 222.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 287.

in her classroom. But in just several years, she made a tremendous difference and created a safe place for them to grow and blossom into amazing people. She made authors and I dare say historical figures out of them. Many teachers consider their after-school time to be precious, but Erin gave herself over to her work. She was dedicated to helping her students learn, opening their eyes to injustice and guiding them to the weapons (in this case a pen, knowledge, a measure of faith, and an unyielding determination) with which to fight intolerance. Finally, she taught them how to assume their rightful place in the world. I know the students will remember the rest of their lives, as well they should. I wish that teachers everywhere were like her — because the world would be a much better place.²⁵

Ten years after the Freedom Writers had completed school, Erin reminisced:

Over the years, I have been proud to watch my “kids” become adults, first struggling to find a sense of self in high school, then navigating their way through college, and ultimately choosing careers that reflect their passion. It hasn't always been easy, but the bond they created as Freedom Writers seems to ground them whenever there is chaos or uncertainty and provides the impetus they need to persevere over adversity.

Although I'm no longer their teacher in the traditional sense, I am still their cheerleader, their mentor, and their close confidante. I learn from them every day, and in this way I have also become their student. Over the last decade, we have been there to pick each other up whenever we've stumbled, and to revel in each other's successes. I have encouraged the Freedom Writers to pursue college degrees, gain their independence, and find their footing in the working world. All the while, they have been there to support me: comforting me through a difficult divorce, through moving from Newport Beach to Long Beach, and through the devastating loss of my father.²⁶

Erin had an idyllic and happy childhood in pleasant environs. When she started teaching she was shocked to hear the poignant stories of her pupils living in the projects. This reality check, where she was taken into another side of the world, made Erin grow and brought out the best of her.

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25. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 278.

The Mother speaks of facing life in totality:

If we consider that the child should learn and know only what can keep him pure of every low, crude, violent and degrading movement, we would have to eliminate at a stroke all contact with the rest of humanity, beginning with all these stories of war and murder, of conflict and deception which go under the name of history; we would have to eliminate all present contact with family, relatives and friends; we would have to exercise control over all the vital impulses of their being.

This was the idea behind the enclosed monastic life of convents, or the ascetic life in caves and forests.

This remedy proved to be quite ineffectual and failed to pull mankind out of the mire.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the remedy is quite different.

We must face life as a whole, with all the ugliness, falsehood and cruelty it still contains, but we must take care to discover in ourselves the source of all goodness, all beauty, all light and all truth, in order to bring this source consciously into contact with the world so as to transform it.

This is infinitely more difficult than running away or shutting our eyes so as not to see, but it is the only truly effective way — the way of those who are truly strong and pure and capable of manifesting the Truth.²⁷

§

Erin's intrinsic goodness, beauty and fairness coupled with her herculean endeavours and sacrifices, beyond the call of duty, helped change her neglected troubled students into good young individuals and bright personalities.

Erin respects every individual and believes that everyone has a story to share. She notes: "After all of our experiences over the last ten years, the greatest lesson the Freedom Writers and I have learned is to validate that everyone has a story . . . and that story needs to be shared."²⁸

Surely, Erin has a story to share.

(Concluded)

GAUTAM MALAKER

27. *Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 12, 2nd ed., pp. 242-43.

28. The Freedom Writers with Erin Gruwell, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, p. 283.

ANGELS: TRANSFORMING DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Overflowing from her bright magnificent plane
On the rigid coil and sprawl of mortal Space,
Here too the gracious great-winged Angel poured
Her splendour and her swiftness and her bliss,
Hoping to fill a fair new world with joy.

Savitri (p. 130)

The Return of the Light

Long before the Christian religion made December 25th the day of Christ's birth, this day was the festival of the return of the sun, the Day of Light. It is this very ancient symbol of the rebirth of the Light that we wish to celebrate here.

CWM (Vol. 17, p. 360)

The Festival of the Return of the Light originates in European Paganism and is also called the winter solstice. In the Northern Hemisphere the longest night of the year is December 21st, following which the Light of the Sun returns and the days begin to lengthen, heralding the arrival of Spring and the growth of new crops. The festival originates at the dawn of agriculture when people depended upon the return of the Sun for their livelihood.

This joyous light-filled festival was widely celebrated by Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Pagan religions in the early part of the Roman Empire when Christianity was founded, making it easy to see how the celebration of Christmas today integrates not only the Return of the Light of Paganism but also the Birth of Christ, which was almost certainly grafted onto the already popular Pagan Festival. In Irish Celtic Christianity elements of Paganism have been integrated with Christian beliefs so successfully that there is no antagonism between them.

In fact, December 25th, was traditionally the festival of the Roman Sun god 'Sol Invictus' (The Unconquered Sun), and has come down to us today as the Sabbath or Sun-day. This Sun-god festival was very popular with Roman soldiers and is another practical reason why Christianity may have adopted it as the day to celebrate Christ's birth.

This eclecticism of the religious Christmas celebrations integrated with Paganism have made it so popular the world over that many non-Christian cultures today have adapted and adopted it as their own.

The Sun is a powerful symbol for many things: The Light of New Understanding

and Wisdom; New Growth and Fresh Beginnings; Hope and Optimism; Prosperity and Abundance; Happiness and Laughter; Confidence and Positivity.

It is no wonder that the Mother included this festival of Light, integrating it with the Christmas celebrations at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram with its aim of transforming the Darkness to the New Light, the New Dawn of Consciousness.

Thoughts, glistening Angels, stood behind the brain
In flashing armour, folding hands of prayer,
And poured heaven's rays into the earthly form.

Savitri (p. 539)

Joyeux Noël.

Let us celebrate the Light by letting it enter into us.

CWM (Vol. 15, p. 196)

Angels as Protectors

For every soul, there is a guardian watching over it.

The Qur'an

It was a typical wet wintry grey Christmas evening in London's hectic city centre except that the rainfall had become steadily torrential, creating dangerous driving conditions.

A mother of four was driving home from work that night, anxious to prepare for the anticipated joyous family Christmas gathering. But when she reached the hazardous roundabout at Piccadilly Circus her engine suddenly failed and she came to a halt right in the middle of the roundabout. Panic-stricken and expecting the worst she was suddenly astonished to see a tall handsome man in a perfect pin-striped business suit striding towards her out of nowhere.

Without a word he lifted up her car as if it was a toy and placed it back down out of danger. Then he came to peer through the front window to make sure the woman was alright before striding back off into the distance. Flabbergasted, the woman quickly wound down the window and called after him: "Thank you! And may I know your name please?"

The tall man with beautiful blonde wavy hair turned around, smiled and answered: "My name is Gabriel." Furthermore, the woman was amazed to see that, despite the torrential downpour, the man and his suit were bone dry. Then he vanished into the ether as quickly as he had arrived.

There is a passage in the Holy Scriptures reminding people that one day they may "entertain angels unaware". The angels, such as the Angel Gabriel in this true story, may be going about their business disguised as ordinary human beings wearing,

not flowing robes and golden wings, but literally a business suit.

The Mother herself spoke of the two guardian angels who were always with her protecting her, particularly when she fell off a high precipice as a child but was carried in invisible arms and placed down safely without a single injury.

All of a sudden she was tossed into the air and fell down onto the path below. It was a drop of several metres. When she was in the air she felt she was being borne, being carried, sustained in her fall and then gently being put down upon the ground.

A Unique Little Girl (p. 14)

Madame Théon saw two of these beings (angels) always near me. . . . So I looked and sure enough I saw them.

Mother's Chronicles (Vol. 1, p. 91)

Angels as Messengers

Every blade of grass has an angel that bends over it and whispers, Grow!
Grow!

The Talmud

A glorious shining Angel of the Way
Presented to the seeking of the soul
The sweetness and the might of an idea,
Each deemed Truth's intimate fount and summit force,
The heart of the meaning of the universe,
Perfection's key, passport to Paradise.

Savitri (p. 281)

The word Angel derives from the Greek word 'angelos', or 'malak' in Arabic, which means Messenger. At Christmas we read and sing carols about God's messenger the Angel Gabriel, who told Mary she would give birth to the Divine Baby Jesus in what is celebrated in the Holy Gospel of Saint Luke as the Annunciation.

There are a whole flock of angels in the Nativity story in the two Holy Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, who fulfil different roles in ensuring the precious but hazardous Incarnation of this Divine Baby.

A heavenly throng of angels appear to the shepherds guarding their sheep at night to proclaim the birth of Jesus, and to give them instructions on where to find him. And it is the angels who protected the Holy Family during the Flight to Egypt when Herod had threatened to kill Jesus, reminiscent of Baby Krishna's Flight to Brindavan when Kamsa had threatened to kill him. (Was it not also the equivalent

of an Angel, a Deva, who mysteriously opened the prison door allowing Vasudeva to smuggle his Divine Son out and take him safely to Brindavan?)

It was the Angel Gabriel who recited the words of *The Qur'an* to the Prophet Muhammad in a long series of revelations; and the *The Qur'an* itself contains many angels, including those in the Nativity of Christ. In fact, belief in angels is one of the Six Articles of Faith in Islam.

Today, there are also many true stories about God's contemporary messenger angels warning and advising people and delivering important messages.

Seeing through Child-like Eyes

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Gospel of Saint Matthew 18: 1-4

According to the English mystical artist Cecil Collins, who painted angels frequently in his mystical landscapes, we need to return to a state of childlike innocence in order to be receptive to the Divine world and the realms of the angels.

This receptivity has been almost destroyed by the modern scientific world created by the logical, analytical, rational energy dominating the world. So the return to a more soulful and empathic Consciousness is crucial in recovering childlike receptivity and unconditioned direct perception of the Divine Realms.

Although Biblical angels were predominantly male, the angels which Cecil Collins painted were nearly always female reflecting the need for the return of the Feminine Consciousness.

Saint Joan of Arc and the Angels

The spirits who habitually appeared to her were three in number — the Archangel Michael, Saint Margaret and Saint Catherine. She claimed also to have seen the Archangel Gabriel and several hundreds of other angels, but it was with her three familiars that she was chiefly concerned. She saw them with her bodily eyes, and wept when they left her. . . . They came always accompanied by the cloud of heavenly light. She could touch them and embrace them.

Saint Joan of Arc, V. Sackville-West

Joan of Arc was one such unlettered guileless child, a simple fifteenth century shepherdess, who not only saw angels several times a day but also physically

embraced them.

Joan was born in the village of Domrémy on January 6 1412, the Day of the Epiphany or twelfth day of Christmas when the Three Wise Men gifted the Baby Jesus their Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

The spiritual interpretation of the gifts of the Three Wise Men has been given by the Mother: Gold is the wealth of the world and supramental knowledge. Frankincense means purification of the vital. Myrrh is the immortalisation of the body. (see *CWM*, Vol. 15, p. 198)

Joan was twelve years old when she was first visited by the Archangel Michael in her father's garden, accompanied by a cloud of Light. During his frequent visits he gradually revealed her Divine mission, to lead the army in a spiritual war against the English to save Orleans and to restore the Dauphin of France to his rightful throne at Rheims. He then told her that Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret would visit her to give her instruction.

These messenger angels, or voices as Joan called them, became increasingly insistent during several years of revelations preparing Joan for her military spiritual mission. Aged 16 she was compelled to leave home, disguise herself in a man's clothes for protection, and present herself to the King or Dauphin.

The Power of the Divine had transformed the simple child Joan into a fearless warrior, though she had often wept from fear when her Military Mission was revealed to her. Now she was filled with Divine Power and believed that so long as she obeyed God through his Messengers nothing upon Earth could stop her.

She had already gained a reputation in France as speaking with angels and saints and being given miraculous powers. Predictions she made from the information her Divine Messengers gave her proved accurate, and she was increasingly revered by the French army and feared by her enemies.

She was remarkably successful in her military campaigns, and when taking Orleans back from the English she cried: "Classidas, Classidas, surrender, surrender to the King of Heaven."

From there she entered Rheims since the English were too afraid to resist her. Next day the King was crowned in Rheims Cathedral, though Joan silently wept for the many brave soldiers who had sacrificed their lives.

She could have returned home having accomplished her mission, but news came of the siege at Compiègne and her soldiers begged her to stay. Filled with compassion Joan chose to sacrifice her personal safety to help save the citizens of Compiègne, though the angels warned her that she would be captured.

She was indeed seized and eventually taken to the prison at Rouen where a false trial was set up by the English, aided by Cauchon, the wicked Bishop of Beauvais, who accepted a bribe to betray Joan. Denied any advocacy at her trial she nevertheless answered boldly and wisely evading the traps to condemn her as a heretic. In prison Archangel Michael and his company of Angels comforted and

consoled Joan when her fate became inevitable.

When she was burned at the stake, on May 30, 1431 at the tender age of nineteen, many strange things happened. The name of Jesus leapt written across the flames. An English soldier declared that he saw a white dove fly out of the flames and wing its way to France. Many wept and John Tressart, secretary to the King of England, exclaimed, "We are lost; we have burned a saint." Indeed, centuries later Joan the Maid was canonised as a Saint on May 16, 1920, and is today revered throughout the globe as an example of immense courage and sacrifice. But we never remember her without also remembering the angels and saints who directed and upheld her life.

Agents of Transformation

We want to show to the world that man can be a true servant of the Divine.
Who will collaborate *in all sincerity*?

CWM (Vol. 12, p. 316)

The butterfly, winged like the angel, is the traditional symbol for Transformation: the earth-bound caterpillar emerging from its apparently lifeless chrysalis to become a beautiful air-borne butterfly. Likewise, our rigid mentality and hardness of heart, like the tough inflexible chrysalis, must undergo a process of death and rebirth into the Light of a New Consciousness, which integrates us with the whole of life in a state of wideness and oneness: from small self-based separate consciousness to inclusive heart-based consciousness, from stasis to fluidity.

Often it is a crisis of suffering which triggers a process of transformation when old patterns of conditioned behaviour no longer work (the chrysalis), and something within us must change to break free of the limitations these outgrown patterns impose upon us: we die to the small egocentric self and are reborn into the higher self as Servitors of the Divine Consciousness.

It is during crisis (opportunity in Chinese) that the angels are closest to us with their protective light, help, comfort and guidance as Messengers, Protectors, Healers and Encouragers. Their higher vibrations lift us to the realms of the Divine where our Souls are regenerated and infused with Love, Peace, Joy and Faith.

The fiery flame of their Being burns away the dross, purifying our hearts, souls and minds of their lower vibrations of doubt, fear, anxiety, anger and depression. We emerge from our time of trial like a radiant butterfly from its chrysalis, beautiful in our strength and empathy with all life, ready to serve the Divine wherever and however we are called.

Angels exist to help transform our consciousness, to open our awareness, and contemplation of their beauty purifies us.

Cecil Collins

Transmission of Beauty and Joy

Armed with the golden speech, the diamond eye,
 His is the vision and the prophecy:
 Imagist casting the formless into shape,
 Traveller and hewer of the unseen paths,
 He is the carrier of the hidden fire,
 He is the voice of the Ineffable,
 He is the invisible hunter of the light,
 The Angel of mysterious ecstasies,
 The conqueror of the kingdoms of the soul.

Savitri (p. 681)

The Mother has said that Beauty is a Power and Transmission of Beauty is one of the important roles which the Angels fulfil. The Soul of modern man living in a predominantly soulless ugly technological age has a great longing for Beauty, reflected in the current resurgence of interest in Angels and the many beautiful images of Angels appearing in every modern media.

Contemplating their beauty purifies our minds, uplifts our spirits with joy and brings us into communion with the Divine.

The angels are as perfect in form as they are in spirit.

Saint Joan of Arc

Unifying Universal Forces: Awakening us to the Eternal

God gives Himself to His whole creation; no one religion holds the monopoly of His Grace.

*

Instead of excluding each other, religions ought to complete each other.

CWM (Vol. 15, p. 27)

Angels do not belong exclusively to any one culture or religion. They are Universal Beings who were created before any of the religions appeared upon the Earth.

So they are a great Force of Unification and have increased in popularity at this time of globalisation, when many of the barriers which separate people are breaking down.

The angelic tradition, or the angelic intelligence is that which connects all the worlds and very often visits this world and enters into the world, into the battlefield of this world.

Cecil Collins

Fallen Angels

Even Light and Love by that cloaked danger's spell,
Turned from the brilliant nature of the gods
To fallen angels and misleading suns,
Became themselves a danger and a charm,
A perverse sweetness, heaven-born malefice:
Its power could deform divinest things.

Savitri (p. 203)

According to some traditions, angels were made equal and had free will. But a number of them craved power and domination and turned against God. These fallen angels became demons who try to control human beings and the earth and to frustrate the Divine's plans.

Since human beings were also created with free will there is a continual battle between the angelic and demonic forces for control of the human Soul. Each person, or demon, can choose to be influenced by the Darkness or the Light.

Angel and demon brides his chamber share,
Possessors or competitors for life's heart.

Savitri (p. 631)

According to traditional knowledge there is a Great War being waged in the invisible realms between the Angels, led by the great Warrior Archangel Michael, and the demons or fallen angels.

Some angels enter right into the war of the world and some are deeply wounded. There's a picture of mine called *The Wounded Angel* (1967), where the Angel has returned to Paradise, and is lying on the ground of Paradise, wounded, resting rather like a butterfly whose wings have been injured.

Cecil Collins

Ultimately the Victory has been won, but the demons, knowing their time is up, are doing as much damage as they are able to, for as long as they can. The real war is being fought upon the invisible planes which necessarily manifests upon Earth: "As above, so below."

The desire of power in excess caused the Angels to fall. The desire of knowledge in excess caused men to fall. But in love and charity there is no excess, neither can man or Angels come into danger by it.

Francis Bacon

Christmas Angels at the Ramakrishna Mission

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Gospel of Saint Luke 2: 9-15

Every year, on Christmas Eve, this story of how the angels announced the birth of Jesus to humble shepherds is recited at the Ramakrishna Mission as part of their traditional Christmas celebrations. And there is a special sacred reason for this.

Ramakrishna wanted to understand other religions in order to connect with the Divine in each one. Jesus Christ especially attracted him and a strong spiritual connection between Christ and the monastic order of Ramakrishna still exists today.

Ramakrishna once asked one of his monks to read the New Testament to him in Bengali. At one time he meditated upon a picture of the Madonna and Child for so long that it was transformed into a luminous living image which absorbed him into a mystical experience for three days.

He was in a grove at Dakshineswar when a serene looking person walked purposefully towards him, gazing deeply into his eyes. Ramakrishna recognised him instantly as the Christ, the embodiment of Love, whom he called ‘Isha’. When they merged Ramakrishna went into a state of transcendental consciousness or samadhi.

A few days after Ramakrishna’s death nine of his young disciples were preparing to take their vows of renunciation when their leader, Swami Vivekananda, told his brothers the story of Jesus Christ. He asked them to be like Christ, to pledge themselves to help in the redemption of the world and to deny themselves — like Jesus had done — for a greater good.

The monks, accustomed to following only the Hindu calendar, later found out that that same evening had been December 24, Christmas Eve — an auspicious occasion for their vows.

Ever since, the Christ has been greatly honoured and revered by the Rama-

krishna Mission with Christmas observed joyfully in all the Mission centres and schools and many monks quoting Christ's words to explain and illustrate spiritual truths, seeing an essential oneness between his messages and that of Hindu acharyas.

Love: The Transcendent's Angel

Love must not cease to live upon the earth;
For Love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven,
Love is the far Transcendent's angel here . . .

Savitri (p. 633)

Our landlady was an Angel. She came from Somerset and had settled in London, perhaps after she was widowed. She was long-suffering and never asked us for money even if we did not pay for months and months.

Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Sri Aurobindo (p. 118)

Angels embody the Divine qualities which we can also manifest in order to transform and heal the World and each other: Love; Support; Protection; Empathy; Peace; Courage; Beauty; Healing; Joy; Truth; Light.

Small acts of universal and inclusive kindness, support, protection, encouragement and healing transform us into Human Angels.

Mother Teresa tells a story of walking past an open drain and catching a glimpse of something moving in it. She investigated and found a dying man whom she took back to a home where he could die in love and peace: "I lived like an animal in the streets," the man told her. "Now I will die like an angel."

Mother Teresa of Calcutta (*Words to Live By*)

Across the lowly threshold with bowed heads
Angels of ecstasy and self-giving pass,
And lodged in an inner sanctuary of dream
The makers of the image of deity live. . . .
And flashes of sympathy and tenderness
Cast heaven-lights from the heart's secluded shrine.

Savitri (p. 170)

GLENYS NIVEDITA

Acknowledgements

Savitri: Sri Aurobindo

Words of the Mother: The Mother

The Holy Bible: King James version

The Qur'an

The Holy Talmud

The Vision of the Fool and Other Writings: Cecil Collins

Saint Joan of Arc: V. Sackville-West

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Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Sri Aurobindo: M. P. Pandit

Words to Live By: Mother Teresa

Mother's Chronicles: Sujata Nahar

A Unique Little Girl: Pournaprema

And since Yoga is in its essence a turning away from the ordinary material and animal life led by most men or from the more mental but still limited way of living followed by the few to a greater spiritual life, to the way divine, every part of our energies that is given to the lower existence in the spirit of that existence is a contradiction of our aim and our self-dedication. On the other hand, every energy or activity that we can convert from its allegiance to the lower and dedicate to the service of the higher is so much gained on our road, so much taken from the powers that oppose our progress. It is the difficulty of this wholesale conversion that is the source of all the stumblings in the path of Yoga. For our entire nature and its environment, all our personal and all our universal self, are full of habits and of influences that are opposed to our spiritual rebirth and work against the whole-heartedness of our endeavour.

Sri Aurobindo

(The Synthesis of Yoga — I, CWSA, Vol. 23, pp. 71-72)

THE MOTHER IN THE PLAYGROUND

(Continued from the issue of November 2016)

The Mother held classes in the Playground

The Mother wanted her children to learn French well. She always spoke to them in French and expected them to speak to her in that language. When she started coming to the Playground she started to take French classes for different age groups.

* * *

Our School was started by the Mother with a handful of children on December 2, 1943. The classes were held in the present Playground. The number of students grew rapidly. One year, when the Mother came to know that the highest class of the School did not have a teacher for conversation in French, she decided to take up this class herself. Thus, during the academic session of 1949-1950, she started holding this class in the Playground. She would reach around 5.30 p.m. and go to her room there. After a short while, she came out for her class which was held in a fairly large room situated on the eastern side of her room. This class room was furnished with desks and benches; in front was a wooden platform on which were placed the table and the chair for the teacher for the classes in the morning. The Mother held her class there thrice a week — on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 5.45 to 6.30 pm. Gauri-di, the Mother's attendant in the Playground, would arrange the room for the Mother before she came there. The teacher's table and chair would be removed to one side and a separate table and chair for the Mother would be placed there.

Initially the class was a 'Question-and-Answer' class, where the students asked questions which the Mother answered. The Mother used to read a passage from her own writings or from a French translation of Sri Aurobindo's writings, and then, invited questions from the students or even from some teachers who attended. The Mother had invited a few other people also to this class. The volume *Questions and Answers 1950-1951* of the complete works of the Mother is a compilation of the questions and answers of that period.

In 1952, this class became a translation class. The Mother started translating portions from some of Sri Aurobindo's major works. She used to translate just one paragraph at each sitting from one of Sri Aurobindo's works chosen to be printed in the *Bulletin*. Nolini-da, Amrita-da, Pavitra-da, Satprem and other disciples were also present in this class. If at times the Mother searched for an appropriate French

word to express properly the original English text, Pavitra-da, who sat with a few huge dictionaries on the platform where the Mother sat on her chair, would find out the possible words for the Mother to choose from. If she was not satisfied with the word, she would ask either Satprem or Nolini-da for an alternative. Even the young students would venture occasionally to put in their suggestion. Gradually, many others too, asked her permission to join this class, thus the number of participants became quite large.

Amita, one of the students, remembers, “After translating a few relevant passages for a few issues, the Mother decided to take up *The Ideal of Human Unity* and then *The Human Cycle*. The Mother said that these two books contained what the general thinking humanity was most in need of.”

Other texts translated into French by the Mother were a few chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga* and the last six chapters of *The Life Divine*. After publication in the *Bulletin*, all of these were later brought out in book-form.

* * *

When the School was opened in 1943, after the classes were over, the children used the courtyard for playing. The Mother used to go to this area to distribute groundnuts to the children. A few older people would also be there. To the west of the Playground is the building known as the ‘Guest House’. When, in 1949, an opening was made in the wall separating the Playground and this building, the little children, 6 to 12 years old, who were part of the Green group, played and enjoyed themselves in this building’s courtyard which came to be known as the ‘Children’s Courtyard’. By 1951 there were see-saws, a chute, a jumping pit and also a very popular tree on which the children used to play a number of exciting games and perform stunts. The jumping pit filled with sand was also used by them for moulding beautiful sand figures. In one of the rooms on the ground floor a table-tennis table was kept for them.

The Mother wanted children to learn correct French. On 17th November 1950, she started a class for them in this courtyard.

On 19th November, she brought the first lesson, a typed sheet with the picture of a bee drawn at the top. She sat in her chair in the children’s courtyard with the children all around her, and gave the first lesson on the bee. She explained about the life of the bee and the meaning of related words.

Tara Jauhar: *Learning with the Mother*, p. 28.

Initially she took four classes and had to discontinue them for the Darshan on 24th November 1950. Sri Aurobindo’s Mahasamadhi took place on December 5, 1950. The Mother did not emerge from her room for 12 days after that.

She resumed her classes only on 17th December 1950. She reduced the classes to four days a week, and finally by May 1951, to three days a week — Sundays for dictation, Tuesdays for recitation and Fridays for stories. Thrice a week, when the regular activities of the groups were over, the Mother would hold the French classes in this open area. Thus she took classes of some group or the other every day in the Playground. Later, she discontinued the dictation, and still later, the recitation classes. She continued with the Friday classes right up to 5th December 1958.

She would give the children between four to thirteen years of age a short dictation of a line or two. When the number of the children was small she would herself correct them then and there. As the number increased the group was divided into two. She would correct four notebooks of the good ones of each group. The rest were corrected by some captains or others who were present there. But the Mother went through all these notebooks too.

The younger ones had to write only one sentence which they prepared beforehand. The older ones had to write a dictation consisting of three or four lines without prior preparation. Tara maintained the record for successful recitations and dictations on a little chit pad. The record was used for giving prizes and awards to the children. Tara writes:

Besides the notebooks and stationery for the class, I kept in the almirah a lot of little toys, photographs, framed pictures, pencils, erasers and other gifts that Mother handed me from time to time. . . . She used these little gifts as prizes in the class. Each time a child would note down a dictation correctly or recite a passage without a mistake, she would mark a tick against the child's name. When 10 such ticks were marked, she would give him or her a prize. . . . most often she would also write the name of the child, write her blessings and sign the prize before she gave it.

(Ibid.)

We reproduce one of the early dictations given on 08.04.1951:

Brave children of the world, what are the bad things that you must learn to fight? What should man learn to overcome or destroy?

They are those that threaten his life and hinder his progress. All that weakens, degrades or makes him unhappy.

(Ibid., p. 38)

The Mother also frequently helped the children to improve their handwriting when it was too bad.

Mother discontinued the dictation class after 28th February 1954. Tara writes:

The Mother gave the children short passages to write or recite. Most were passages from her own writings but sometimes she also wrote from memory sayings from other saints. She knew so many beautiful quotations of famous people by heart. . . .

During the recitation classes, the children would be seated in a big semicircle around the Mother. One child at a time would come to the centre, sit in front of her and recite a selected passage. . . .

Mother also gave the children poems by French poets for the recitation classes.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 55, 70)

In the early months of 1951, during these classes, the Mother started telling stories from her own books: *Tales of all Times* and *Words of Long Ago*. From November 1951, she started taking up different stories on Fridays. These included legends from different countries of the world, her personal experiences in Japan and Algeria and also many well-known stories from France. She would explain the meaning of the difficult words and would also encourage the children to find these words in a dictionary.

During these classes the Mother took up several other topics to make it interesting for the children. She was a rare teacher.

Some time later, the Friday class of stories read out to children was shifted to the Playground. The Mother took her seat in front of the map of India (as for the Wednesday classes) and read stories to the children, mostly fairy tales, or legends of different countries. Elders and youngsters alike would sit around the students and everyone enjoyed listening to these wonderful stories read out by her.

Later on, from August 1957 to September 1958, she started reading the *Dhammapada* to the children from a French translation of the Pali text. She commented on the chapters and explained the teachings of the Buddha to them. At the end of the class, there was a short meditation. These commentaries of the Mother were first published in 1960.

Tara observes:

It is quite interesting to note the date on which the Mother started classes for the Green group and the last date of the class. She started on 17th November 1950 (17th November was her Mahasamadhi day in 1973). She took the last class on 5th December 1958 (5th December was Sri Aurobindo's Mahasamadhi day in 1950).

(*Ibid.*, p. 32)

* * *

Every Wednesday evening, after the group activities were over, the Mother held a class for the juniors — children of the 13 to 16 age group who were in the Red group in the Playground. In 1948, Pranab-da started coaching the young captains of the groups twice a week. The Mother would sit on a bench in the Playground and watch their exercises. Some time later, two young girls in their early teens, Tara and Parul would sit near her. The Mother had asked them to bring with them the copies of the book *Prières et Méditations (Prayers and Meditations of the Mother)*. They read out alternately one prayer in French and the Mother would give long explanations of the text. However, this lasted for a very short time.

This is what Parul informs us when asked about the origin of the class the Mother held for them in the Playground.

Group Red or ‘B’ group consists of girls and boys — teenagers. In the good old days we had the opportunity to go to the Mother many times during the day. We, the children of the boarding or ‘Dortoir’, had to take her permission for whatever we wanted to do or to go anywhere. She spoke to us in French and expected us to do the same. We spoke to her in French, with mistakes, which she corrected and we had to repeat to learn. As Green Group class had already started she decided to start Red Group class. Our first class with the book “*Prières et Méditations*” started on 6.6.1951.

We shall now quote from the book *Growing up with the Mother*, by Tara Jauhar (pp. 3-5), where we get a more comprehensive report about this class.

Later, in early June 1951, the Mother took up these classes again. At first there were only the six of us: Chum, Jhumur, Bubu, Gauri, Parul and me who went together daily to see the Mother upstairs in her room. One day, while we were with her, she announced that she was going to hold special classes at the Playground for us on Wednesdays. On the 6th of June, she gave each of us individually a numbered copy of the second edition of *Prayers and Meditations* in French and began our classes in the ‘Guest House’ verandah of the children’s courtyard. Besides the six of us, the Mother asked my sister, Chitra, to join. So, there were seven of us. From then on, every class-day, the Mother accepted new members. The number of students grew rapidly and, at the end of a few sessions, we were almost thirty. All the students were from group B except Manoj (group C of the early years) and Chitra (group A). After this, for some time, the Mother did not accept any new students, but people continued to ask for permission, hoping to participate. She gave them permission to come and sit at the back of the circle of regular students. By then, the classes had become so large that they were held in the children’s courtyard of the Guest House. The Mother sat on a chair and we sat cross-legged on the floor, making a big

circle around her.

But as the rains sometimes disturbed us, the Mother decided to take the classes in her own room in the Playground. When her room became too small for the increasing number of participants, she brought the class outdoors, into the Playground itself. She sat in front of the map of India, we students sat around her and the others who wanted to listen to her, sat at the back. Most Ashramites, even those who did not understand French, came to these classes. Eventually, loudspeakers were installed so that everyone could hear.

From 1953, whatever she said was tape-recorded. Portions of her talks were first published in the *Bulletin of Physical Education* and later as a series of books entitled *Questions and Answers*. These Wednesday classes continued until December 1958 when the Mother stopped all her activities in the Playground.

In this class, she read out to the students books written by her and Sri Aurobindo. The students asked questions and the Mother answered them. The first book read out by her was *Prayers and Meditations* [. . .]. The commentaries of this class were not recorded so we have no record of these.

From 1953 onwards, the following books were taken up: in 1953, *Conversations with the Mother 1929* and *Words of the Mother*; in 1954, *On Education* by the Mother and *Elements of Yoga* and *Bases of Yoga* by Sri Aurobindo; from 1955 to 1958, different essays written by the Mother, the first part of *The Synthesis of Yoga, Thoughts and Glimpses, The Supramental Manifestation* and the last six chapters of *The Life Divine* by Sri Aurobindo.

Each time at the end of the class there used to be a short meditation for about 10 to 20 minutes. Sometimes, the Mother would give a topic for the meditation.

* * *

The Mother held a class for the few lady-inmates who were with her in the Playground every day. This class was held in the interview-room. Each one of these ladies chose a poem in French by a well-known author and recited it to her. The Mother granted permission to a few other people to be present in this class.

* * *

For some time, the Mother took a class for a few of us — Priti, Chitra, Tapati, Minoo and Violette. This was held on Tuesdays after the March Past by the men's group. She would sit in front of the map and we five sat around her. I shall share with the readers a few words I remember from what she had said: "Think clearly and you will express yourself well." The first homework she gave us was to write in three

sentences the difference between ‘ambition’ and ‘aspiration’. She encouraged us to express our thoughts in precise language and liked one of our answers very much — “Both are an attempt to surpass oneself. For ambition, the effort is made by oneself, whereas aspiration is a call towards the Divine so that one can surpass oneself.” But this class had to be discontinued as she granted interviews at that particular time.

(To be continued)

CHITRA SEN

On the next four pages:

The Mother’s classes in the Playground