The Real Awakener



The Light of lights

Words of Sri Aurobindo – 1

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"VALMIKI, Vyasa and Kalidasa are the essence of the history of ancient India; if all else were lost, they would still be its sole and sufficient cultural history. Their poems are types and exponents of three periods in the development of the human soul, types and exponents also of the three great powers which dispute and clash in the imperfect and half-formed temperament and harmonise in the formed and perfect. At the same time their works are pictures at once minute and grandiose of three moods of our Aryan civilisation, of which the first was predominatingly moral, the second predominatingly intellectual, the third predominatingly material."

– Sri Aurobindo
(CWSA 1, 156)

Selections from CWSA 1
I. The Harmony of Virtue

1. Logic, Duty, Culture and Principle and Virtue

"Logic dwindles the river of thought into a mere canal. The logician thinks so accurately that he is seldom right." (17)

* * *

"Duty is a phantasm spawned in the green morass of human weakness & ignorance, but perpetuated by vague thought and vaguer sentiment. And so long as we are imperatively told to do our duty, without knowing why we should do it, the vagueness of private judgment, the cruelty of social coercion will be the sole arbiters and the saint will be a worse enemy of virtue than the sinner." (18)

* * *

"**If culture and taste were universal, principle would then be a superfluous note in the world's composition.** But so long as men are crude, without tact, formless, incapable of a balanced personality, so long the banner of the ideal must be waved obtrusively before the eyes of men, and education remain a necessity… " (18)

* * *

"…virtue.. inherent meaning is manliness, in other words, the perfect evolution by the human being of the inborn qualities and powers native to his humanity." (19)

** Bold letters in the text, used here for emphasis, are from the editor and are not there in the original. The numbers at the end of the quotations are the page numbers of the original reference.*

2. The India of Vikramaditya

"How gorgeous was her beauty! how Olympian the voices of her poets! how sensuous the pencil of her painters! how languidly voluptuous the outlines of her sculpture! In those days every man was marvellous to himself and many were marvellous to their fellows; but the mightiest marvel of all were the philosophers. What a Philosophy was that! For she scaled the empyrean on the wingèd sandals of meditation, soared above the wide fires of the sun and above the whirling stars, up where the flaming walls of the universe are guiltless of wind or cloud, and there in the burning core of existence saw the face of the most high God. She saw God and did not perish; rather fell back to earth, not blasted with excess of light, but with a mystic burden on her murmuring lips too large for human speech to utter or for the human brain to understand." (21)

3. Beauty

"…beauty is that which fills us with a sense of satisfying pleasure and perfect fitness?" (25)

"…in what lies the beauty of a rose if not in its symmetry? Why has the whole effect that satisfying completeness which subjugates the senses, if not because Nature has blended in harmonious proportion **the three elements of beauty; colour, perfume, and form?** Now beauty may exist separately in any two of these elements and where it does so, the accession of the third would probably mar the perfection of that species of beauty; as in sculpture where form in its separate existence finds a complete expression and is blended harmoniously with perfume – for character or emotion is the perfume of the

human form; just as sound is the perfume of poetry and music – but if a sculptor tints his statue, the effect displeases us, because it seems gaudy or tinsel, or in plain words disproportionate." (25-26)

"…would music be music if not harmoniously blended with form and colour, or as we usually call them, technique and meaning." (26)

"The criticism of ages has shown a fit appreciation of these harmonies by adjudging the highest scale of beauty to those forms which blend the three elements and the lowest to those which boast only of one. Thus sculpture is a far nobler art than architecture, for while both may compass an equal perfection of form, sculpture alone possesses the larger harmony derived by the union of form and perfume. Similarly the human form is more divine than sculpture because it has the third element, colour; and the painting of figures is more beautiful than the portrayal of landscapes, because the latter is destitute of perfume, while figures of life have always that character or emotion which we have called the perfume of the living form.

Again if we take two forms of beauty otherwise exactly on the same level, we shall find that the more beautiful in which the three elements are more harmoniously blended. As for instance a perfect human form and a perfect poem;…" (26)

"The three elements of beauty do not blend with absolutely perfect harmony in a human face. Have you not frequently noticed that those faces which express the most soul, the most genius, the most character, are not perfectly harmonious in their form?" (26-27)

"And the reason is that to emphasize the character, the divine artist has found himself compelled to emphasize certain of the features above the others, for instance, the lips, the eyes, the forehead, the chin, and to give them an undue prominence which destroys that proportion without which there can be no perfect harmony." (28)

II. Bankim Chandra Chatterji

1. Our Education System

"Bankim had always an extraordinary luck. …his fine promise was saved by the prudence of its guardians from **the altar of High Education, the Moloch to whom we stupidly sacrifice India's most hopeful sons,…**" (91)

"…our system of public instruction, the most ingeniously complete machine for murder that human stupidity ever invented, and murder not only of a man's body but of a man's soul, of that sacred fire of individuality in him which is far holier and more precious than this mere mortal breath." (105)

2. Bankim and Madhusudan

"Young Bengal gets its ideas, feelings and culture not from schools and colleges, but from Bankim's novels and Robindranath Tagore's poems; so true is it that language is the life of a nation.

Many are carrying on the great work in prose and poetry: Hemchandra, Nobin, Kamini Sen, Robindranath and Robindranath's sister, that flower of feminine culture in Bengal, Swarna Kumari Devi, and many more whose names it would take long to repeat; but another Bankim, another Madhu Sudan comes not again." (118)

"Bankim and Madhu Sudan have given the world three noble things. They have given it Bengali literature, a literature whose princelier creations can bear comparison with the proudest classics of modern Europe. They have given it the Bengali language. The dialect of Bengal is no longer a dialect,

but has become the speech of Gods, a language unfading and indestructible, which cannot die except with the death of the Bengali nation, and not even then. And they have given it the Bengali nation; a people spirited, bold, ingenious and imaginative, high among the most intellectual races of the world, and if it can but get perseverance and physical elasticity, one day to be high among the strongest. This is surely a proud record." (119)

III. On Poetry

1. What is Poetry

"We have also to ask, does the language & verse harmonise with the emotion, become part of it & expressive of it, swell with its fullness and yet bound & restrain it? If it does, then we have poetry, a thing mighty & unanalysable, to usurp whose place prose vainly aspires. Matter by itself does not make poetry; skill in verse & diction is not poetry; striking & brilliant phrases, melodious weavings of sound are not poetry; it is the natural & predestined blending or rather inseparable existence of great matter with great verse producing high emotions or beautiful matter with beautiful verse producing soft emotions that gives us genuine poetry. An identity of word & sound, of thought & word, of sound & emotion which seems to have been preordained from the beginning of the world and only awaited its destined hour to leap into existence, or rather was there from the beginning of the world & only dawned into sight at the right time, this rare identity is what we call poetry." (123-24)

"Poetry as generally understood, the poetry of Shakespeare and Wordsworth, may be defined as a deeper and more imaginative perception of life and nature expressed in the language and rhythm of restrained emotion. In other words its subject-matter is an interpretation of life and nature which goes deeper into the truth of things than ordinary men can do, what has been called a poetic criticism of life; its spirit is one of imagination and feeling, it is not intellectual but imaginative, not rational but emotional; and its form is a

language impassioned and imaginative but restrained by a desire for perfect beauty of expression." (126)

2. Rhythm and Rhetoric

"…a rhythm generally taking the form of metre,.. naturally suits the expression of deep feeling. It differs from rhetoric in this that rhetoric expresses feeling which is not deep & not quite sincere, and tries to strike and influence the reader instead of being satisfied with expressing itself and for that purpose relies mainly on tricks of language such as antithesis, epigram etc. Rhetoric tries to excite admiration and appeals to the intellect; poetry is content with adequate self-expression and appeals to the heart." (126)

3. The Spirit of Eighteenth Century English Poetry

"The spirit of ordinary poetry is one of imagination and feeling, that is to say imaginative and emotional; that of eighteenth century poetry is one of commonsense and reason, that is to say intellectual and rational. Pope and Johnson are the two chief critics of the school. Pope expressly lays it down in his Essay on Criticism that sense and wit are the bases of all true Poetry… In their opinion nothing should be admitted in poetry which is not consistent with sense & wit, that is to say which is not intellectual and rational. Accordingly we find no striking imagery & no passion in eighteenth-century poetry; the poets as a rule avoid subjects in which emotion is required and when they do try to deal with the passions and feelings, they fail, their expression of these is rhetorical and not poetic. This is the reason why the drama in the eighteenth century is such an utter failure."(126-27)

4. The English Classical Poetry

"By classical poetry is meant verse which with entire correctness and perfection of form, i.e. of metre and language and a careful observance of restraint, i.e. to say avoidance of that extravagance & excess which injure the work of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, unites a high imagination and deep emotion. This is the character of Milton's poetry, which is based upon Greek & Latin models. Pope and his school aimed at correctness & restraint without high imagination and deep emotion; their poetry is therefore not really classical. Gray, Collins and Akenside endeavoured by study of Milton & the Greek writers to recover the true classical style. They were however all greatly hampered by the traditions of eighteenth-century poetry and none of them quite succeeded." (131)

IV. Originality in National Literatures

"**Let us suppose that all historical documents, archives, records were destroyed or disappeared in the process of Time and the catastrophes of civilisation, and only the pure literature survived. Of how many nations should we have the very life, heart & mind, the whole picture of its life & civilisation and the story of its development adequately revealed in its best writing? Three European nations would survive immortally before the eyes of posterity, the ancient Greeks, the modern English and French, and two Asiatic nations, the Chinese & the Hindus, – no others.**

Of all these the Hindus have revealed themselves the most perfectly, continuously and on the most colossal scale, precisely because they have been the most indomitably original in the form & matter of their literature. The Vedas, Upanishads & Puranas are unique in their kind; the great Epics in their form and type of art stand apart in the epic literature of the world, the old Sanscrit drama has its affinities with a dramatic species which developed itself in Europe more than a thousand years later, and the literary epic follows laws of form and canons of art which are purely indigenous. And this immense body of first rate work has left us so intimate & complete a revelation of national life & history, that the absence of pure historical writings becomes a subject of merely conventional regret. The same intense originality and depth of self-expression are continued after the decline of the classical language in the national literatures of Maharashtra, Bengal & the Hindi-speaking North." (147)

V. The Poetry of Kalidasa

1. The Malavas*

"The country of Avunti had always played a considerable part in our ancient history for which the genius, taste and high courage of its inhabitants fitted it & Ujjaini their future capital was always a famous, beautiful & wealthy city; but until the rise of Vikrama it seems to have been disunited and therefore unable to work out fully the great destiny for which the taste, genius [ ] marked it out. Moreover the temperament of the nation had not fitted it to be the centre of Aryan civilisation in the old times when that civilisation was preponderatingly moral and intellectual. Profoundly artistic and susceptible to material beauty and the glory of the senses, they had neither the large, mild and pure temperament, spiritual & emotional, of the eastern nations which produced Janaca, Valmekie & Buddha, nor the bold intellectual temperament, heroic, ardent and severe, of the Central nations which produced Draupadie, Bhema, Urjouna, Bhishma, Vyasa and Srikrishna; neither were they quite akin to the searchingly logical, philosophic & scholastic temperament of the half Dravidian southern nations which produced the great grammarians and commentators and the mightiest of the purely logical philosophers, Madhva, Ramanuja, Shankaracharya. The Malavas were Westerners and the Western nations of India have always been material, practical & sensuous. For the different races of this country have preserved their basic temperaments with a marvellous conservative power; modified & recombined they have been

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** The titles marked with an * are from the original. All the unmarked titles in the text are from the editor.*

in no case radically altered. Bengal colonised from the west by the Chedies & Haihayas & from the north by Coshalas & Magadhans, contains at present the most gentle, sensitive and emotional of the Indian races, also the most anarchic, self-willed, averse to control and in all things extreme; there is not much difference between the characters of Shishupal and that thoroughly Bengali king & great captain, Pratapaditya; the other side shows itself especially in the women who are certainly the tenderest, purest & most gracious & loving in the whole world. Bengal has accordingly a literature far surpassing any other in an Indian tongue for emotional and lyrical power, loveliness of style & form and individual energy & initiative. The North West, inheritor of the Kurus, has on the other hand produced the finest modern Vedantic poetry full of intellectual loftiness, insight and profundity, the poetry of Suradasa & Tulsi; its people are still the most sincerely orthodox and the most attached to the old type of thought & character, while the Rajputs, who are only a Central Nation which has drifted westward, preserved longest the heroic & chivalrous tradition of the Bharatas. **The Dravidians of the South, though they no longer show that magnificent culture and originality which made them the preservers & renovators of the higher Hindu thought & religion in its worst days, are yet, as we all know, far more genuinely learned & philosophic in their cast of thought & character than any other Indian race.** Similarly the West also preserves its tradition; the Punjab is typified by its wide acceptance of such crude, but practical & active religions as those of Nanak & Dayanunda Saraswati, religions which have been unable to take healthy root beyond the frontier of the five rivers; Gujarat & Sindh show the same practical temper by their

success in trade & commerce, but the former has preserved more of the old Western materialism & sensuousness than its neighbours. Finally **the Mahrattas, perhaps the strongest and sanest race in India today,** present a very peculiar & interesting type; they are southwestern & blend two very different characters; fundamentally a material and practical race – they are for instance extremely deficient in the romantic & poetical side of the human temperament – a race of soldiers & politicians, they have yet caught from the Dravidians a deep scholastic & philosophical tinge which along with a basic earnestness & capacity for high things has kept them true to Hinduism, gives a certain distinction to their otherwise matter-of-fact nature and promises much for their future development.

But the Malavas were a far greater, more versatile and culturable race than any which now represent the West; they had an aesthetic catholicity, a many sided curiosity and receptiveness which enabled them to appreciate learning, high moral ideals and intellectual daring & ardour and assimilate them as far as was consistent with their own root-temperament. Nevertheless that root-temperament remained material and sensuous. When therefore the country falling from its old pure moral ideality and heroic intellectualism, weakened in fibre & sunk towards hedonism & materialism, the centre of its culture & national life began to drift westward. Transferred by Agnimitra in the second century to Videsha of the Dasharnas close to the Malavas, it finally found its true equilibrium in the beautiful and aesthetic city of Ujjaini which the artistic & sensuous genius of the Malavas had prepared to be a fit & noble capital of Hindu art, poetry and greatness throughout its most versatile & luxurious age. That position

Ujjaini enjoyed until the nation began to crumble under the shock of new ideas & new forces and the centre of gravity shifted southwards to Devagirrie of the Jadhavas and finally to Dravidian Vijayanagara, the last considerable seat of independent Hindu culture & national greatness. The consolidation of the Malavas under Vikramaditya took place in 56 BC, and from that moment dates the age of Malava preeminence, the great era of the Malavas afterwards called the Samvat era. It was doubtless subsequent to this date that Kalidasa came to Ujjaini to sum up in his poetry, the beauty of human life, the splendours of art & the glory of the senses." (152-55)

2. Valmiki, Vyasa and Kalidasa – the Essence of the History of Ancient India

"VALMIKI, Vyasa and Kalidasa are the essence of the history of ancient India; if all else were lost, they would still be its sole and sufficient cultural history. Their poems are types and exponents of three periods in the development of the human soul, types and exponents also of the three great powers which dispute and clash in the imperfect and half-formed temperament and harmonise in the formed and perfect. At the same time their works are pictures at once minute and grandiose of three moods of our Aryan civilisation, of which the first was predominatingly moral, the second predominatingly intellectual, the third predominatingly material. The fourth power of the soul, the spiritual, which can alone govern and harmonise the others by fusion with them, had not, though it pervaded and powerfully influenced each successive development, any separate age of predominance, did not like the others possess

the whole race with a dominating obsession. It is because, conjoining in themselves the highest and most varied poetical gifts, they at the same time represent and mirror their age and humanity by their interpretative largeness and power that our three chief poets hold their supreme place and bear comparison with the greatest world-names, with Homer, Shakespeare and Dante." (156)

3. The Ramayana of Valmiki

"It has been said, truly, that the Ramayana represents an ideal society and assumed, illogically, that it must therefore represent an altogether imaginary one. The argument ignores the alternative of a real society idealised. **No poet could evolve entirely out of his own imagination a picture at once so colossal, so minute and so consistent in every detail.** No number of poets could do it without stumbling into fatal incompatibilities either of fact or of view, such as we find defacing the Mahabharata. This is not the place to discuss the question of Valmiki's age and authorship. This much, however, may be said that after excluding the Uttarakanda, which is a later work, and some amount of interpolation, for the most part easy enough to detect, and reforming the text which is not unfrequently in a state of truly shocking confusion, the Ramayana remains on the face of it the work of a single mighty and embracing mind. It is not easy to say whether it preceded or followed in date Vyasa's epic; it is riper in form and tone, has some aspects of a more advanced and mellow culture, and yet it gives the general impression of a younger humanity and an earlier less sophisticated and complex mind. The nature of the poem and much of its subject matter might at least justify the

conclusion that Valmiki wrote in a political and social atmosphere much resembling that which surrounded Vyasa. He lived, that is to say, in an age of approaching if not present disorder and turmoil, of great revolutions and unbridled aristocratic violence, when the governing chivalry, the Kshatriya caste, in its pride of strength was asserting its own code of morals as the one rule of conduct. We may note the plain assertion of this stand-point by Jarasandha in the Mahabharata and Valmiki's emphatic and repeated protest against it through the mouth of Rama. **This ethical code was like all aristocratic codes of conduct full of high chivalry and the spirit of *noblesse oblige*, but a little loose in sexual morality on the masculine side and indulgent to violence and the strong hand.** To the pure and delicate moral temperament of Valmiki, imaginative, sensitive, enthusiastic, shot through with rays of visionary idealism and ethereal light, this looseness and violence were shocking and abhorrent. He could sympathise with them, as he sympathised with all that was wild and evil and anarchic, with the imaginative and poetical side of his nature, because he was a universal creative mind driven by his art-sense to penetrate, feel and re-embody all that the world contained; but to his intellect and peculiar emotional temperament they were distasteful. He took refuge therefore in a past age of national greatness and virtue, distant enough to be idealised, but near enough to have left sufficient materials for a great picture of civilisation which would serve his purpose, – an age, it is important to note, of grandiose imperial equipoise, such as must have existed in some form at least since a persistent tradition of it runs through Sanskrit literature. In the framework of this imperial age, his puissant imagination

created a marvellous picture of the human world as it might be if the actual and existing forms and material of society were used to the best and purest advantage, and an equally marvellous picture of another non-human world in which aristocratic violence, strength, self-will, lust and pride ruled supreme and idealised or rather colossalised. He brought these two worlds into warlike collision by the hostile meeting of their champions and utmost evolutions of their peculiar character-types, Rama and Ravana, and so created **the Ramayana, the grandest and most paradoxical poem in the world, which becomes unmatchably sublime by disdaining all consistent pursuit of sublimity, supremely artistic by putting aside all the conventional limitations of art, magnificently dramatic by disregarding all dramatic illusion, and uniquely epic by handling the least as well as the most epic material.** Not all perhaps can enter at once into the spirit of this masterpiece; but those who have once done so, will never admit any poem in the world as its superior.

My point here, however, is that it gives us the picture of an entirely moralised civilisation, containing indeed vast material development and immense intellectual power, but both moralised and subordinated to the needs of purity of temperament and delicate ideality of action. Valmiki's mind seems nowhere to be familiarised with the high-strung intellectual gospel of a high and severe Dharma culminating in a passionless activity, raised to a supreme spiritual significance in the Gita, which is one great keynote of the Mahabharata. Had he known it, the strong leaven of sentimentalism and femininity in his nature might well have rejected it; such temperaments when they admire strength, admire it manifested and forceful rather than self-contained.

Valmiki's characters act from emotional or imaginative enthusiasm, not from intellectual conviction; an enthusiasm of morality actuates Rama, an enthusiasm of immorality tyrannises over Ravana. Like all mainly moral temperaments, he instinctively insisted on one old established code of morals being universally observed as the only basis of ethical stability, avoided casuistic developments and distasted innovators in metaphysical thought as by their persistent and searching questions dangerous to the established bases of morality, especially to its wholesome ordinariness and everydayness. Valmiki, therefore, the father of our secular poetry, stands for that early and finely moral civilisation which was the true heroic age of the Hindu spirit." (156-59)

4. The Mahabharata of Vyasa

"The poet of the Mahabharata lives nearer to the centre of an era of aristocratic turbulence and disorder. If there is any kernel of historic truth in the story of the poem, it records the establishment of those imperial forms of government and society which Valmiki had idealised. Behind its poetic legend it celebrates and approves the policy of a great Kshatriya leader of men who aimed at the subjection of his order to the rule of a central imperial power which should typify its best tendencies and control or expel its worst. But while Valmiki was a soul out of harmony with its surroundings and looking back to an ideal past, Vyasa was a man of his time, profoundly in sympathy with it, full of its tendencies, hopeful of its results and looking forward to an ideal future. The one might be described as a conservative idealist advocating return to a better but departed model, the other is a progressive realist looking forward to a better but unborn model. Vyasa

accordingly does not revolt from the aristocratic code of morality; it harmonises with his own proud and strong spirit and he accepts it as a basis for conduct, but purified and transfigured by the illuminating idea of the *nikāma dharma*.

But above all intellectuality is his grand note, he is profoundly interested in ideas, in metaphysics, in ethical problems; he subjects morality to casuistic tests from which the more delicate moral tone of Valmiki's spirit shrank; he boldly erects above ordinary ethics a higher principle of conduct having its springs in intellect and strong character; he treats government and society from the standpoint of a practical and discerning statesmanlike mind, idealising solely for the sake of a standard. He touches in fact all subjects, and whatever he touches he makes fruitful and interesting by originality, penetration and a sane and bold vision. In all this he is the son of the civilisation he has mirrored to us, a civilisation in which both morality and material development are powerfully intellectualised. Nothing is more remarkable in all the characters of the Mahabharata than this puissant intellectualism; every action of theirs seems to be impelled by an immense driving force of mind solidifying in character and therefore conceived and outlined as in stone. This orgiastic force of the intellect is at least as noticeable as the impulse of moral or immoral enthusiasm behind each great action of the Ramayana. Throughout the poem the victorious and manifold mental activity of an age is prominent and gives its character to its civilisation. There is far more of thought in action than in the Ramayana, far less of thought in repose; the one pictures a time of gigantic creative ferment and disturbance; the other, as far as humanity is concerned, an ideal age of equipoise, tranquillity and order." (159-60)

5. The Age of Kalidasa*

"Many centuries after these poets, perhaps a thousand years or even more, came **the third great embodiment of the national consciousness, Kalidasa.** There is a far greater difference between the civilisation he mirrors than between Vyasa's and Valmiki's. He came when the daemonic orgy of character and intellect had worked itself out and ended in producing at once its culmination and reaction in Buddhism. There was everywhere noticeable a petrifying of the national temperament, visible to us in the tendency to codification; philosophy was being codified, morals were being codified, knowledge of any and every sort was being codified; it was on one side of its nature an age of scholars, legists, dialecticians, philosophical formalisers. On the other side the creative and aesthetic enthusiasm of the nation was pouring itself into things material, into the life of the senses, into the pride of life and beauty. The arts of painting, architecture, song, dance, drama, gardening, jewellery, all that can administer to the wants of great and luxurious capitals, received a grand impetus which brought them to their highest technical perfection. That this impetus came from Greek sources or from the Buddhists seems hardly borne out: the latter may rather have shared in the general tendencies of the time than originated them, and the Greek theory gives us a maximum of conclusions with a minimum of facts. I do not think, indeed, it can be maintained that this period, call it classical or material or what one will, was marked off from its predecessor by any clear division: such a partition would be contrary to the law of human development. Almost all the concrete features of the age may be found as separate facts in ancient India: codes existed from old time; art and drama

were of fairly ancient origin, to whatever date we may assign their development; physical yoga processes existed almost from the first, and the material development portrayed in the Ramayana and Mahabharata is hardly less splendid than that of which the Raghuvamsa is so brilliant a picture. But whereas, before, these were subordinated to more lofty ideals, now they prevailed and became supreme, occupying the best energies of the race and stamping themselves on its life and consciousness. In obedience to this impulse the centuries between the rise of Buddhism and the advent of Shankaracharya became, though not agnostic and sceptical, for they rejected violently the doctrines of Charvak, yet profoundly scientific and outward-going even in their spiritualism. It was therefore the great age of formalised metaphysics, science, law, art and the sensuous luxury which accompanies the arts.

Nearer the beginning than the end of this period, when India was systematising her philosophies and developing her arts and sciences, turning from Upanishad to Purana, from the high rarefied peaks of early Vedanta and Sankhya with their inspiring sublimities and bracing keenness to physical methods of ascetic yoga and the dry intellectualism of metaphysical logic or else to the warm sensuous humanism of emotional religion, – before its full tendencies had asserted themselves, in some spheres before it had taken the steps its attitude portended, Kalidasa arose in Ujjayini and gathered up in himself its present tendencies while he foreshadowed many of its future developments. He himself must have been a man gifted with all the learning of his age, rich, aristocratic, moving wholly in high society, familiar with and fond of life in the most luxurious metropolis of his time, passionately

attached to the arts, acquainted with the sciences, deep in law and learning, versed in the formalised philosophies. He has some notable resemblances to Shakespeare; among others his business was, like Shakespeare's, to sum up the immediate past in the terms of the present: at the same time he occasionally informed the present with hints of the future. Like Shakespeare also he seems not to have cared deeply for religion. In creed he was a Vedantist and in ceremony perhaps a Sivaworshipper, but he seems rather to have accepted these as the orthodox forms of his time and country, recommended to him by his intellectual preference and aesthetic affinities, than to have satisfied with them any profound religious want. In morals also he accepted and glorified the set and scientifically elaborate ethics of the codes, but seems himself to have been destitute of the finer elements of morality. We need not accept any of the ribald and witty legends with which the Hindu decadence surrounded his name; but **no unbiassed student of Kalidasa's poetry can claim for him either moral fervour or moral strictness.** His writings show indeed a keen appreciation of high ideal and lofty thought, but the appreciation is aesthetic in its nature: he elaborates and seeks to bring out the effectiveness of these on the imaginative sense of the noble and grandiose, applying to the things of the mind and soul the same aesthetic standard as to the things of sense themselves. He has also the natural high aristocratic feeling for all that is proud and great and vigorous, and so far as he has it, he has exaltation and sublimity; but aesthetic grace and beauty and symmetry sphere in the sublime and prevent it from standing out with the bareness and boldness which is the sublime's natural presentation. His poetry has, therefore, never been, like the poetry of Valmiki and Vyasa, a great

dynamic force for moulding heroic character or noble or profound temperament. In all this he represented the highly vital and material civilisation to which he belonged.

Yet some dynamic force a poet must have, some general human inspiration of which he is the supreme exponent; or else he cannot rank with the highest**. Kalidasa is the great, the supreme poet of the senses, of aesthetic beauty, of sensuous emotion.** His main achievement is to have taken every poetic element, all great poetical forms, and subdued them to a harmony of artistic perfection set in the key of sensuous beauty. In continuous gift of seizing an object and creating it to the eye he has no rival in literature. A strong visualising faculty such as the greatest poets have in their most inspired descriptive moments, was with Kalidasa an abiding and unfailing power, and the concrete presentation which this definiteness of vision demanded, suffused with an intimate and sovereign feeling for beauty of colour and beauty of form, constitutes the characteristic Kalidasian manner. He is besides a consummate artist, profound in conception and suave in execution, a master of sound and language who has moulded for himself out of the infinite possibilities of the Sanskrit tongue a verse and diction which are absolutely the grandest, most puissant and most full-voiced of any human speech, a language of the Gods. The note struck by Kalidasa when he built Sanskrit into that palace of noble sound, is the note which meets us in almost all the best work of the classic literature. Its characteristic features of style are a compact but never abrupt brevity, a soft gravity and smooth majesty, a noble harmony of verse, a strong and lucid beauty of chiselled prose, above all an epic precision of phrase, weighty, sparing and yet full of colour and sweetness. Moreover it is admirably

flexible, suiting itself to all forms from the epic to the lyric, but most triumphantly to the two greatest, the epic and the drama. In his epic style Kalidasa adds to these permanent features a more than Miltonic fullness and grandiose pitch of sound and expression, in his dramatic an extraordinary grace and suavity which makes it adaptable to conversation and the expression of dramatic shade and subtly blended emotion.

With these supreme gifts Kalidasa had the advantage of being born into an age with which he was in temperamental sympathy and a civilisation which lent itself naturally to his peculiar descriptive genius. It was an aristocratic civilisation, as indeed were those which had preceded it, but it far more nearly resembled the aristocratic civilisations of Europe by its material luxury, its aesthetic tastes, its polite culture, its keen worldly wisdom and its excessive appreciation of wit and learning. Religious and ethical thought and sentiment were cultivated much as in France under Louis XIV, more in piety and profession than as swaying the conduct; they pleased the intellect or else touched the sentiment, but did not govern the soul. It was bad taste to be irreligious, but it was not bad taste to be sensual or even in some respects immoral. The splendid and luxurious courts of this period supported the orthodox religion and morals out of convention, conservatism, the feeling for established order and the inherited tastes and prejudices of centuries, not because they fostered any deep religious or ethical sentiment. Yet they applauded high moral ideas if presented to them in cultured and sensuous poetry much in the same spirit that they applauded voluptuous description similarly presented. The ideals of morality were much lower than of old; free drinking was openly recognised and indulged in by both sexes; purity

of life was less valued than in any other period of our civilisation. Yet the unconquerable monogamous instinct of the high-class Hindu woman seems to have prevented promiscuous vice and the disorganisation of the home which was the result of a similar state of society in ancient Rome, in Italy of the Renascence, in France under the Bourbons and in England under the later Stuarts. The old spiritual tendencies were also rather latent than dead, the mighty pristine ideals still existed in theory, – they are outlined with extraordinary grandeur by Kalidasa, – nor had they yet been weakened or lowered to a less heroic key. **It was a time in which one might expect to meet the extremes of indulgence side by side with the extremes of renunciation; for the inherent spirituality of the Hindu nature finally revolted against the splendid and unsatisfying life of the senses. But of this phase Bhartrihari and not Kalidasa is the poet.** The greater writer lived evidently in the full heyday of the material age, and there is no sign of any setting in of the sickness and dissatisfaction and disillusionment which invariably follow a long outburst of materialism." (160-64)

"As in the Ramayana and Mahabharata we have an absorbing intellect impulse or a dynamic force of moral or immoral excitement driving the characters, so we have in Kalidasa an intense hedonistic impulse thrilling through speech and informing action. An imaginative pleasure in all shades of thought and of sentiment, a rich delight of the mind in its emotions, a luxuriousness of ecstasy and grief, a free abandonment to amorous impulse and rapture, a continual joy of life and seeking for beauty mark the period when India, having for the time exhausted the possibilities of soul-experience attainable through the spirit and the imaginative

reason, was now attempting to find out the utmost each sense could feel, probing and sounding the soul-possibilities in matter and even seeking God through the senses. The emotional religion of the Vaishnava Puranas which takes as its type of the relation between the human soul and the Supreme the passion of a woman for her lover, was already developing. The corresponding Tantric development of Shaivism may not yet have established itself fully; but the concretisation of the idea of Purusha-Prakriti, the union of Ishwara and Shakti, from which it arose, was already there in the symbolic legends of the Puranas and one of these is the subject of Kalidasa's greatest epic poem. **The Birth of the War-God stands on the same height in classical Sanskrit as the Paradise Lost in English literature: it is the masterpiece and *magnum opus* of the age on the epic level.** The central idea of this great unfinished poem, the marriage of Siva and Parvati, typified in its original idea the union of Purusha and Prakriti, the supreme Soul and dynamic Nature by which the world is created; but this type of divine legend was used esoterically to typify also the Nature-Soul's search for and attainment of God, and something of this conception pierces through the description of Parvati's seeking after Siva. Such was the age of Kalidasa, the temper of the civilisation which produced him; other poets of the time expressed one side of it or another, but his work is its splendid integral epitome, its picture of many composite hues and tones. Of the temperament of that civilisation the Seasons is an immature poetic self-expression, the House of Raghu the representative epic, the Cloud Messenger the descriptive elegy, Shakuntala with its two sister loveplays intimate dramatic pictures and the Birth of the War-God the grand religious fable. Kalidasa, who expressed so many sides and

facets of it in his writings, stands for its representative man and genius, as was Vyasa of the intellectual mood of Indian civilisation and Valmiki of its moral side." (165-66)

6. The Inrush of Barbarians and the Failure of India to Complete the Cycle of Her Experience

"It was the supreme misfortune of India that before she was able to complete the round of her experience and gather up the fruit of her long millenniums of search and travail by commencing a fourth and more perfect age in which moral, intellectual and material development should be all equally harmonised and all spiritualised, the inrush of barbarians broke in finally on her endless solitary tapasya of effort and beat her national life into fragments. A preparation for such an age may be glimpsed in the new tendencies of spiritual seeking that began with Shankara and continued in later Vaishnavism and Shaivism and in new turns of poetry and art, but it found no opportunity of seizing on the total life of the nation and throwing it into another mould. The work was interrupted before it had well begun; and India was left with only the remnants of the culture of the material age to piece out her existence. Yet even the little that was done afterwards, proved to be much; for it saved her from gradually petrifying and perishing as almost all the old civilisations, Assyria, Egypt, Greece, Rome, petrified and perished, **as the material civilisation of Europe, unless spiritualised, must before long petrify and perish.** That there is still an unexhausted vitality in her, that she yet nourishes the seeds of re-birth and renewal, we owe to Shankara and his successors and the great minds and souls that came after them. Will she yet arise, new combine her past and continue the great dream where she left

it off, shaking off on the one hand the soils and filth that have grown on her in her period of downfall and futile struggle, and re-asserting on the other her peculiar individuality and national type against the callow civilisation of the West with its dogmatic and intolerant knowledge, its still more dogmatic and intolerant ignorance, its deification of selfishness and force, its violence and its ungoverned Titanism? In doing so lies her one chance of salvation." (166-67)

7. The Poetic Genius of Kalidasa

"**There is no more many-sided, rich and flexible genius in literature than Kalidasa's…**" (176)

"Kalidasa with his fine artistic feeling, his vitality and warm humanism and his profound sense of what true poetry must be, appears to have divined from the beginning the true place of Nature in the poet's outlook. He is always more emotional and intellectual than spiritual, like Shakespeare to whom he has so many striking resemblances. We must not expect from him the magical insight of Valmiki, still less the spiritual discernment of Wordsworth. He looks inside, but not too far inside. But he realises always the supreme importance of life as the only abiding foundation of a poem's immortality." (178-79)

"The poetry of Kalidasa satisfies the sensuous imagination without enervating the virile chords of character; for virile energy is an unfailing characteristic of the best Sanskrit poetry, and Kalidasa is inferior to none in this respect." (179)

"…he reaches his goal in his crowning work, the Birth of the War-God, in which he takes up for treatment one of

the supreme fables of the life of the Gods and the Cosmos and in its handling combines sublimity with grace, height of speech with fullness and beautiful harmony of sound, boldness of descriptive line with magnificence of sensuous colour in a degree of perfection never before or afterwards surpassed or even equalled in poetic literature." (186)

8. Hindu Drama*

A. The English Versus the Hindu Mind in Literature

"National character, national prejudices, national training preordain for the bulk of us the spirit in which we shall approach unfamiliar poetry. Now the average English mind is capable of appreciating character as manifested in strong action or powerfully revealing speech, but constitutionally dull to the subtleties of civilized character which have their theatre in the mind and the heart and make of a slight word, a gesture or even silence their sufficient revelation. **The nations of Europe, taken in the mass, are still semicivilized; their mind feeds on the physical, external and grossly salient features of life;** where there is no brilliance & glare, they are apt to condemn the personality as characterless. A strength that shuns ostentation, a charm that is not luxuriant, not naked to the first glance, are appreciable only to the few select minds who have chastened their natural leanings by a wide and deep culture. The Hindu on his side distastes violence in action, excess in speech, ostentation or effusiveness in manner; he demands from his ideal temperance and restraint as well as nobility, truth and beneficence; the Aryan or true gentleman must be मिताचारः and मितभाषी, restrained in action and temperate in speech.

This national tendency shows itself even in our most vehement work. The Mahabharat is that section of our literature which deals most with the external and physical and corresponds best to the European idea of the epic; yet the intellectualism of even the Mahabharat, its preference of mind-issues to physical and emotional collisions and catastrophes, its continual suffusion of these when they occur with mind and ideality, the civilisation, depth and lack of mere sensational turbulence, in one word the Aryan cast of its characters, are irritating to European scholars. Thus a historian of Indian literature complains that Bhema is the one really epic character in this poem. He meant, evidently, the one character in which vast and irresistible strength, ungovernable impetuousness of passion, warlike fury & destroying anger are grandiosely displayed. But to the Hindu, whose ideas of epic are not coloured with the wrath of Achilles, epic motive and character are not confined to what is impetuous, huge and untamed; he demands a larger field for the epic and does not confine it to savage and half savage epochs. Gentleness, patience, self-sacrifice, purity, the civilized virtues, appear to him as capable of epic treatment as martial fire, brute strength, revenge, anger, hate and ungovernable self-will. Rama mildly and purely renouncing the empire of the world for the sake of his father's honour seems to them as epic & mighty a figure as Bhema destroying Kechaka in his wild fury of triumphant strength and hatred. It is noteworthy that **the European temperament finds vice more interesting than virtue, and in its heart of hearts damns the Christian qualities with faint praise as negative, not positive virtues;** the difficulty European writers experience in making good men sympathetic is a commonplace of literary observation. In all these respects

the Hindu attitude is diametrically opposed to the European. This attitude of the Hindu mind as evinced in the Mahabharata is so intolerable to European scholars that they have been forced to ease their irritation by conjuring up the phantom of an original ballad-epic more like their notions of what an epic should be, an epic in which the wicked characters of the present Mahabharata were the heroes and the divine champions of right of the present Mahabharata were the villains! The present Mahabharata is, they say, a sanctimonious monastic corruption of the old vigorous and half-savage poem. To the Hindu the theory naturally seems a grotesque perversion of ingenuity but its very grotesqueness is eloquent of the soil it springs from, the soil of the half barbarous temperament of the martial & industrial Teuton which cannot, even when civilised, entirely sympathise with the intellectual working of more radically civilised types." (189-90)

B. The Elizabethan Versus Hindu Drama

"The Elizabethan drama was a great popular literature which aimed at a vigorous and realistic presentation of life and character such as would please a mixed and not very critical audience; it had therefore the strength and weakness of great popular literature; its strength was an abounding vigour in passion & action, and an unequalled grasp upon life; its weakness a crude violence, imperfection and bungling in workmanship combined with a tendency to exaggerations, horrors & monstrosities. The Hindu drama, on the contrary, was written by men of accomplished culture for an educated, often a courtly audience and with an eye to an elaborate and well-understood system of poetics.

The vital law governing Hindu poetics is that it does not

seek to represent life and character primarily or for their own sake; its aim is fundamentally aesthetic, by the delicate & harmonious rendering of passion to awaken the aesthetic sense of the onlooker and gratify it by moving or subtly observed pictures of human feeling; it did not attempt to seize a man's spirit by the hair and drag it out into a storm of horror & pity & fear and return it to him drenched, beaten and shuddering. To the Hindu it would have seemed a savage and inhuman spirit that could take any aesthetic pleasure in the sufferings of an Oedipus or a Duchess of Malfi or in the tragedy of a Macbeth or an Othello. Partly this arose from the divine tenderness of the Hindu nature, always noble, forbearing & gentle and at that time saturated with the sweet & gracious pity & purity which flowed from the soul of Buddha; but it was also a necessary result of the principle that aesthetic & intellectual pleasure is the first object of all poetic art. Certainly poetry was regarded as a force for elevation as well as for charm, but as it reaches these objects through aesthetic beauty, aesthetic gratification must be the whole basis of dramatic composition; all other objects are superstructural. The **Hindu mind therefore shrank not only from violence, horror & physical tragedy, the Elizabethan stock-in-trade, but even from the tragic moral problems which attracted the Greek mind;** still less could it have consented to occupy itself with the problems of disease, neurosis and spiritual medicology generally which are the staple of modern drama and fiction. An atmosphere of romantic beauty, a high urbanity and a gracious equipoise of the feelings, a perpetual confidence in the sunshine & the flowers, are the essential spirit of a Hindu play; pity and terror are used to awaken the feelings, but not to lacerate them, and

the drama must close on the note of joy and peace; the clouds are only admitted to make more beautiful the glad sunlight from which all came & into which all must melt away. It is in an art like this that the soul finds the repose, the opportunity for being, confirmed in gentleness and in kindly culture, the unmixed intellectual and aesthetic pleasure in quest of which it has turned away from the crudeness & incoherence of life to the magic regions of Art.…

Certainly if we expect a Beautiful White Devil or a Jew of Malta from the Hindu dramatist, we shall be disappointed; he deals not in these splendid or horrible masks. If we come to him for a Lear or a Macbeth, we shall go away discontented; for these also are sublimities which belong to cruder civilisations and more barbarous national types…" (191-93)

9. The Double Aspect of Hindu Temperament

"The Hindu has been always decried as a dreamer & mystic. There is truth in the charge but also a singular inaccuracy. The Hindu mind is in one sense the most concrete in the world; it seeks after abstractions, but is not satisfied with them so long as they remain abstractions. But to make the objects of this world concrete, to realise the things that are visited by sun & rain or are, at their most ethereal, sublimated figures of fine matter, that is comparatively easy, but the Hindu is not contented till he has seized things *behind* the sunlight also as concrete realities. He is passionate for the infinite, the unseen, the spiritual, but he will not rest satisfied with conceiving them, he insists on mapping the infinite, on seeing the unseen, on visualising the spiritual. The Celt throws his imagination into the infinite and is rewarded with beautiful phantoms out of which he evolves a pale, mystic and

intangible poetry; the Hindu sends his heart & his intellect & eventually his whole being after his imagination and for his reward he has seen God and interpreted existence. **It is this double aspect of Hindu temperament, extreme spirituality successfully attempting to work in harmony with extreme materialism, which is the secret of our religion, our life & our literature, our civilisation.** On the one side we spiritualise the material out of all but a phenomenal & illusory existence, on the other we materialise the spiritual in the most definite & realistic forms; this is the secret of the high philosophic idealism which to the less capable European mind seems so impossible an intellectual atmosphere and of the prolific idolatry which to the dogmatic & formalising Christian reason seems so gross. In any other race-temperament this mental division would have split into two broadly disparate & opposing types whose action, reaction & attempts at compromise would have comprised the history of thought. In the myriad minded & undogmatic Hindu it worked not towards mental division but as the first discord which prepares for a consistent harmony; the best & most characteristic Hindu thought regards either tendency as essential to the perfect & subtle comprehension of existence; they are considered the positive & negative sides of one truth, & must both be grasped if we are not to rest in a half light. Hence the entire tolerance of the Hindu religion to all intellectual attitudes except sheer libertinism; hence also the marvellous perfection of graded thought-attitudes in which the Hindu mind travels between the sheer negative & the sheer positive and yet sees in them only a ladder of progressive & closely related steps rising through relative conceptions to one final & absolute knowledge." (212-13)

10. The Words *Tripura* and Kinnaries

"The word *tripura* means the "three cities" [and] refers to the three material qualities of *rajas*, *sattva* & *tamas*, light, passion & darkness, which have to be slain by Sheva the emancipator before the soul can rejoin God;…

The Purana mythologising partly from false etymology has turned these Kinnars into men & women with horsefaces & this description has been copied down into all Sanscrit dictionaries, but the Kinnaries of Valmekie had little resemblance with these Puranic grotesques; they are beings of superhuman beauty, unearthly sweetness of voice & wild freedom who seldom appear on the earth, their home is in the mountains & in the skies; he speaks of a young Kinnar snared & bound by men & the mother wailing over her offspring; and Kekayie lying on the ground in her passion of grief & anger is compared to a Kinnarie fallen from the skies." (259)

11. The Meghaduta of Kalidasa

"The Meghaduta of Kalidasa is the most marvellously perfect descriptive and elegiac poem in the world's literature. Every possible beauty of phrase, every possible beauty of sound, every grace of literary association, every source of imaginative & sensuous beauty has been woven together into an harmony which is without rival & without fault; for amidst all its wealth of colour, delicacy & sweetness, there is not a word too much or too little, no false note, no excessive or defective touch; the colouring is just & subdued in its richness, the verse movement regular in its variety, the diction simple in its suggestiveness, the emotion convincing & fervent behind

a certain high restraint, the imagery precise, right & helpful, not overdone as in the Raghuvansa & yet quite as full of beauty & power. The Shacountala and the Cloud Messenger are the ne plus ultra of Hindu poetic art." (261-62)

12. The Phenomenon of the Exaltation of the Spirit

There are some poets who live by a single poem. In some moment of exaltation, of rapt excitement the spirit throws off for a moment the bonds of the flesh and compels the body to obey it. This is what is vulgarly termed inspiration. Everyone who has felt this state of mind, can recall its main features. There is a sudden exaltation, a glow, an excitement and a fiery and rapid activity of all the faculties; every cell of the body & of the brain feeling a commotion and working in excited unison under the law of something which is not themselves; the mind itself becomes illuminated as with a rush of light and grows like a crowded and surging thoroughfare in some brilliantly lighted city, thought treading on the heels of thought faster than the tongue can express or the hand write or the memory record them. And yet while the organs of sense remain overpowered and inactive, the main organs of action may be working with abnormal rapidity, not only the speech and the hand but sometimes even the feet, so that often the writer cannot remain still, but has to walk up and down swiftly or if he sits down, is subject to an involuntary mechanical movement of the limbs. When this state reaches beyond bounds, when the spirit attempts to impose on the mind & body work for which they are not fitted, the result is, in the lower human organisms insanity, in the higher epilepsy. In this state of inspiration every thought wears an extraordinary brilliance and even commonplace ideas strike

one as God-given inspirations. But at any rate the expression they take whether perfect or not is superior to what the same man could compass in his ordinary condition. Ideas & imaginations throng on the mind which one is not aware of having formerly entertained or even prepared for; some even seem quite foreign to our habit of mind. The impression we get is that thoughts are being breathed into us, expressions dictated, the whole poured in from outside; the saints who spoke to Joan of Arc, the daemon of Socrates, Tasso's familiar, **the Angel Gabriel dictating the Koran to Mahomet are only exaggerated developments of this impression due to an epileptic, maniac or excited state of the mind;** and this, as I have already suggested, is itself due to the premature attempts of the Spirit to force the highest work on the body. Mahomet's idea that in his epileptic fits he went up into the seventh heaven & took the Koran from the lips of God, is extremely significant; if Caesar & Richelieu had been Oriental prophets instead of practical & sceptical Latin statesmen they might well have recorded kindred impressions. In any case such an impression is purely sensational. It is always the man's own spirit that is speaking, but the sensational part of him feeling that it is working blindly in obedience to some irresistible power which is not itself, conveys to the mind an erroneous impression that the power comes from outside, that it is an inspiration and not an inner process; for it is as naturally the impulse of the body as of the mind to consider itself *the* self of the organism and all impressions & impulses not of its own sphere as exterior to the organism. If the understanding happens to be firm and sane, it refuses to encourage the mind in its error, but if the understanding is overexcited or is not sufficiently master of its instruments, it

easily allows itself to be deluded. Now when the spirit is no longer struggling with the body, but has become its master and lord, this state of inspiration ceases to be fortuitous and occasional, and becomes more and more within the will of the man and, subject to the necessarily long intervals of repose & recreation, almost a habitually recurring state. At the same time it loses its violent & abnormal character and the outward symptoms of it disappear; the outer man remains placid and the mind works with great power and illumination indeed, but without disturbance or loss of equilibrium." (268-70)

VI. On the Mahabharata

1. Notes on the Mahabharata of Krishna Dwypaiana Vyasa

Prepared by Sri Aurobindo "with a view to disengage the original epic of Krishna of the island from the enlargements, accretions and additions made by Vyshampaian, Ugrosravas & innumerable other writers." (277)

"Proposita.

An epic of the Bharatas was written by Krishna of the Island called Vyasa, in 24,000 couplets or something more, less at any rate than 27,000, on the subject of the great civil war of the Bharatas and the establishment of the Dhurmarajya or universal sovereignty in that house.

This epic can be disengaged almost in its entirety from the present poem of nearly 100,000 slokas." (277)

2. The Problem of Mahabharata

"European scholarship has shed no light whatever on the Mahabharata beyond the bare fact that it is the work of more than one hand. All else it has advanced, and fortunately it has advanced little, has been rash, arbitrary or prejudiced; theories, theories, always theories without any honestly industrious consideration of the problem. The earliest method adopted was to argue from European analogies, a method pregnant of error & delusion. If we consider the hypothesis of a rude ballad-epic doctored by "those Brahmins" – anyone who is curious on the matter may study with both profit & amusement Frazer's History of Indian Literature – we shall perceive how this method has been worked. A fancy was

started in Germany that the Iliad of Homer is really a pastiche or clever rifacimento of old ballads put together in the time of Pisistratus. This truly barbarous imagination with its rude ignorance of the psychological bases of all great poetry has now fallen into some discredit; it has been replaced by a more plausible attempt to discover a nucleus in the poem, an Achilleid, out of which the larger Iliad has grown. Very possibly the whole discussion will finally end in the restoration of a single Homer with a single poem, subjected indeed to some inevitable interpolation and corruption, but mainly the work of one mind, a theory still held by more than one considerable scholar. In the meanwhile, however, haste has been made to apply the analogy to the Mahabharata; lynx-eyed theorists have discovered in the poem – apparently without taking the trouble to study it – an early and rude ballad epic worked up, doctored and defaced by those wicked Brahmins, who are made responsible for all the literary and other enormities which have been discovered by the bushelful, and not by European lynxes alone – in our literature and civilisation. Now whether the theory is true or not, and one sees nothing in its favour, it has at present no value at all; for it is a pure theory without any justifying facts. It is not difficult to build these intellectual cardhouses; anyone may raise them by the dozen who can find no better manner of wasting valuable time. A similar method of "arguing from Homer" is probably at the bottom of Professor Weber's assertion that the War Purvas contain the original epic. An observant eye at once perceives that the War Purvas are far more hopelessly tangled than any that precede them except the first. It is here & here only that the keenest eye becomes confused & the most confident explorer begins to lose heart & self-reliance. But

the Iliad is all battles and it therefore follows in the European mind that the original Mahabharata must have been all battles. Another method is that of ingenious, if forced argument from stray slokas of the poem or equally stray & obscure remarks in Buddhist compilations. The curious theory of some scholars that the Pandavas were a later invention and that the original war was between the Kurus and Panchalas only and Professor Weber's singularly positive inference from a sloka which does not at first sight bear the meaning he puts on it, that the original epic contained only 8800 lines, are ingenuities of this type. They are based on the Teutonic art of building a whole mammoth out of a single and often problematical bone, and remind one strongly of Mr.. Pickwick and the historic inscription which was so rudely, if in a Pickwickian sense, challenged by the refractory [Mr.. Blotton.] All these theorisings are idle enough; they are made of too airy a stuff to last. 'Only a serious scrutiny of the Mahabharata made with a deep sense of critical responsibility and according to the methods of patient scientific inference, can justify one in advancing any considerable theory on this wonderful poetic structure.'

Yet to extricate the original epic from the mass of accretions is not, I believe, so difficult a task as it may at first appear. One is struck in perusing the Mahabharata by the presence of a mass of poetry which bears the style and impress of a single, strong and original, even unusual mind, differing in his manner of expression, tone of thought & stamp of personality not only from every other Sanscrit poet we know but from every other great poet known to literature. When we look more closely into the distribution of this peculiar style of writing, we come to perceive certain very suggestive

& helpful facts. We realise that this impress is only found in those parts of the poem which are necessary to the due conduct of the story, seldom to be detected in the more miraculous, Puranistic or trivial episodes, but usually broken up by passages and sometimes shot through with lines of a discernibly different inspiration. Equally noteworthy is it that nowhere does this poet admit any trait, incident or speech which deviates from the strict propriety of dramatic characterisation & psychological probability. Finally Krishna's divinity is recognized, but more often hinted at than aggressively stated. The tendency is to keep it in the background as a fact to which, while himself crediting it, the writer does not hope for universal consent, still less is able to speak of it as of a general tenet & matter of dogmatic belief; he prefers to show Krishna rather in his human character, acting always by wise, discerning and inspired methods, but still not transgressing the limit of human possibility. All this leads one to the conclusion that in the body of poetry I have described, we have the real Bharata, an epic which tells plainly and straightforwardly of the events which led to the great war and the empire of the Bharata princes. Certainly if Prof. Weber's venturesome assertion as to the length of the original Mahabharata be correct, this conclusion falls to the ground; for the mass of this poetry amounts to considerably over 20,000 slokas. Professor Weber's inference, however, is worth some discussion; for the length of the original epic is a very important element in the problem. If we accept it, we must say farewell to all hopes of unravelling the tangle. His assertion is founded on a single & obscure verse in the huge prolegomena to the poem which take up the greater part of the Adi Purva, no very strong basis for so far-reaching an assumption. The sloka itself says

no more than this that much of the Mahabharata was written in so difficult a style that Vyasa himself could remember only 8800 of the slokas, Suka an equal amount and Sanjaya perhaps as much, perhaps something less. There is certainly here no assertion such as Prof. Weber would have us find in it that the Mahabharata at any time amounted to no more than 8800 slokas. Even if we assume what the text does not say that Vyasa, Suka & Sanjaya knew the same 8800 slokas, we do not get to that conclusion. The point simply is that the style of the Mahabharat was too difficult for a single man to keep in memory more than a certain portion of it. This does not carry us very far. If however we are to assume that there is more in this verse than meets the eye, that it is a cryptic way of stating the length of the original poem; and I do not deny that this is possible, perhaps even probable – we should note the repetition of वेत्ति – अहं वेद्मि शुको वेत्ति सञ्जयो वेत्ति वा न वा. Following the genius of the Sanscrit language we are led to suppose the repetition was intended to recall अष्टौ श्लोकसहस्राणि etc. with each name; otherwise the repetition has no raison d'être; it is otiose & inept. But if we understand it thus, the conclusion is irresistible that each knew a different 8800, or the writer would have no object in wishing us to repeat the number three times in our mind. The length of the epic as derived from this single sloka should then be 26,400 slokas or something less, for the writer hesitates about the exact number to be attributed to Sanjaya. Another passage further on in the prolegomena agrees remarkably with this conclusion and is in itself much more explicit. It is there stated plainly enough that Vyasa first wrote the Mahabharata in 24,000 slokas and afterwards enlarged it to 100,000 for the world of men as well as a still more unconscionable number of verses for the Gandhurva and

other worlds. In spite of the embroidery of fancy, of a type familiar enough to all who are acquainted with the Puranic method of recording facts, the meaning of this is unmistakeable. The original Mahabharata consisted of 24,000 slokas, but in its final form it runs to 100,000. The figures are probably loose & slovenly, for at any rate the final form of the Mahabharata is considerably under 100,000 slokas. It is possible therefore that the original epic was something over 24,000 and under 26,400 slokas, in which case the two passages would agree well enough. But it would be unsafe to found any dogmatic assertion on isolated couplets; at the most we can say that we are justified in taking the estimate as a probable and workable hypothesis and if it is found to be corroborated by other facts, we may venture to suggest its correctness as a moral certainty.

But it is not from European scholars that we must expect a solution of the Mahabharata problem. They have no qualifications for the task except a power of indefatigable research and collocation; and in dealing with the Mahabharata even this power seems to have deserted them. It is from Hindu scholarship renovated & instructed by contact with European that the attempt must come. Indian scholars have shown a power of detachment and disinterestedness and a willingness to give up cherished notions under pressure of evidence, which are not common in Europe. They are not, as a rule, prone to the Teutonic sin of forming a theory in accordance with their prejudices and then finding facts or manufacturing inferences to support it. When therefore they form a theory on their own account, it has usually some clear justification and sometimes an overwhelming array of facts and solid arguments behind it." (280-84)

"I admit that even among Indians this advantage must vary with the amount of education and natural fineness of taste; but where other things are equal, they must possess it in an immeasurably greater degree than an European of similar information & critical power. For to the European Sanscrit words are no more than dead counters which he can play with and throw as he likes into places the most unnatural or combinations the most monstrous; to the Hindu they are living things the very soul of whose temperament he understands & whose possibilities he can judge to a hair. That with these advantages Indian scholars have not been able to form themselves into a great & independent school of learning, is due to two causes, the miserable scantiness of the mastery in Sanscrit provided by our Universities, crippling to all but born scholars, and our lack of a sturdy independence which makes us overready to defer to European authority. These however are difficulties easily surmountable.

In solving the Mahabharat problem this intimate feeling for the language is of primary importance; for style & poetical personality must be not indeed the only but the ultimate test of the genuineness of any given passage in the poem. If we rely upon any other internal evidence, we shall find ourselves irresistibly tempted to form a theory and square facts to it." (284-85)

"To a Hindu mind well equipped for the task there ought to be no insuperable difficulty in disengaging the style of a marked poetic personality from a mass of totally different work.…

In unravelling the Mahabharata especially the peculiar & inimitable nature of the style of Vyasa immensely lightens the

difficulties of criticism. Had his been poetry of which the predominant grace was mannerism, it would have been imitable with some closeness; or even had it been a rich & salient style like Shakespeare's, Kalidasa's or Valmekie's, certain externals of it might be reproduced by a skilled hand and the task of discernment rendered highly delicate and perilous. Yet even in such styles to the finest minds the presence or absence of an unanalysable personality within the manner of expression would be always perceptible. The second layer of the Mahabharata is distinctly Ramayanistic in style, yet it would be a gross criticism that could confuse it with Valmekie's own work; the difference as is always the case in imitations of great poetry, is as palpable as the similarity.*" (288-89)

"Now there are certain great poetical styles which are of a kind apart; they are so extraordinarily bare and restrained that the untutored mind often wonders what difficulty there can be in writing poetry like that; yet when the attempt is made, it is found that so far as manner goes it is easier to write somewhat like Shakespeare or Homer or Valmekie than to write like these. Just because the style is so bare, has no seizable mannerism, no striking & imitable peculiarities, the failure of the imitation appears complete & unsoftened; for in such poets there is but one thing to be caught, the unanalysable note, the personal greatness which like everything that comes straight from God it is impossible to locate or limit and precisely the one that most eludes the grasp. This poetry it is always possible to distinguish with some approach to certainty from imitative or spurious work. Very fortunately the style of Vyasa is exactly

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* Here an incomplete sentence is written between the lines in the manuscript: *This unanalysable quantity is as sure*

such a manner of poetry. Granted therefore adhikara in the critic, that is to say a natural gift of fine literary sensitiveness & the careful cultivation of that gift until it has become as sure a lactometer as the palate of the swan which rejects the water mingled with milk & takes the milk alone, we have in the peculiar characteristics of this poetry a test of unquestionable soundness & efficacy." (291)

3. The Aryan Nations and the Mahabharata War

"The Aryan nations may be divided into three distinct groups, the Eastern of whom the Coshalas, Magadhas, Chedies, Videhas & Haihayas were the chief; the Central among whom the Kurus, Panchalas & Bhojas were the most considerable; and the Western & Southern of whom there were many, small, & rude but yet warlike & famous peoples; among these there seem to have been none that ever became of the first importance. Five distinct times had these great congeries of nations been welded into Empire, twice by the Ixvaacous under Mandhata son of Yuvanuswa and King Marutta, afterwards by the Haihaya Arjouna Cartoverya, again by the Ixvaacou Bhogiratha and finally by the Kuru Bharata. That the first Kuru empire was the latest is evident not only from the Kurus being the strongest nation of their time but from the significant fact that the Coshalas by this time had faded into utter & irretrievable insignificance. The rule of the Haihayas had resulted in one of the great catastrophes of early Hindu civilization; belonging to the eastern section of the Continent which was always apt to break away from the strict letter of Aryanism, they had brought themselves by their pride & violence into collision with the Brahmins with the result of a civil war in which their Empire was broken for

ever by Parshurama, son of Jamadagni, and the chivalry of India massacred and for the time broken. The fall of the Haihayas left the Ixvaacous & the Bharata or Ilian dynasty of the Kurus the two chief powers of the continent. Then seems to have followed the golden age of the Ixvaacous under the beneficent empire of Bhogiratha & his descendants as far down at least as Rama. Afterwards the Coshalans, having reached their highest point, must have fallen into that state of senile decay, which once it overtakes a nation, is fatal & irremediable. They were followed by the empire of the Bharatas. By the times of Santanou, Vichitravirya and Pandou this empire had long been dissolved by the centrifugal force of Aryan politics into its constituent parts, yet the Kurus were yet among the first of the nations and the Bharata Kings of the Kurus were still looked up to as the head of civilisation. But by the time of Dhritarashtra the centripetal force had again asserted itself & the idea of another great empire loomed before the imaginations of all men; a number of nations had risen to the greatest military prestige & political force, the Panchalas under Drupada & his sons, the Bhojas under Bhishmuc & his brother Acrity who is described as equalling Parshurama in military skill & courage, the Chedies under the hero & great captain Shishupala, the Magadhas, built into a strong nation by Brihodruth; even distant Bengal under the Poundrian Vasudave and distant Sindhu under [Vriddhakshatra] and his son Jayadrath began to mean something in the reckoning of forces. The Yadava nations counted as a great military force in the balance of politics owing to their abundant heroism and genius, but seem to have lacked sufficient cohesion and unity to nurse independent hopes. Strong, however, as these nations were none seemed

able to dispute the prize of the coming empire with the Kurus, until under King Jarasundha the Barhodruth Magadha for a moment disturbed the political balance. The history of the first great Magadhan hope of empire and its extinction – not to be revived again until the final downfall of the Kurus – is told very briefly in the Sabhapurva of the Mahabharata. The removal of Jarasundha restored the original state of politics and it was no longer doubtful that to the Kurus alone could fall the future empire. But here a contest arose between the elder & younger branches of the Bharata house. The question being then narrowed to a personal issue, it was inevitable that it should become largely a history of personal strife & discord; other & larger issues were involved in the dispute between the Kaurava cousins; but whatever interests, incompatibilities of temperament & differences of opinion may divide brothers, they do not engage in fratricidal conflict until they are driven to it by a long record of collision & jealousy, ever deepening personal hatreds & the worst personal injuries. We see therefore that not only the early discords, the slaying of Jarasundha & the Rajasuya sacrifice are necessary to the epic but the great gambling & the mishandling of Draupadie. It cannot, however, have been personal questions alone that affected the choice of the different nations between Duryodhana and Yudhisthere. Personal relations like the matrimonial connections of Dhritarashtra's family with the Sindhus and Gandharas and of the Pandavas with the Matsyas, Panchalas & Yadavas doubtless counted for much, but there must have been something more; personal enmities [counted] for something as in the feud cherished by the Trigartas against Arjouna. The Madras disregarded matrimonial ties when they sided with Duryodhan; the Magadhas & Chedies put aside

the memory of personal wrongs when they espoused the cause of Yudhisthere. I believe the explanation we must gather from the hints of the Mahabharata is this, that the nations were divided into three classes, those who desired autonomy, those who desired to break the power of the Kurus and assert their own supremacy and those who imbued with old imperialistic notions desired an united India. The first followed Duryodhana because the empire of Duryodhana could not be more than the empire of a day while that of Yudhisthere had every possibility of permanence; even Queen Gandhari, Duryodhan's own mother, was able to hit this weak point in her son's ambition. The Rajasuya Sacrifice had also undoubtedly identified Yudhisthere in men's minds with the imperialistic impulse of the times. We are given some important hints in the Udyogapurva. When Vidura remonstrates with Krishna for coming to Hastinapura, he tells him it was highly imprudent for him to venture there knowing as he did that the city was full of kings all burning with enmity against him for having deprived them once of their greatness, driven by the fear of him to take refuge with Duryodhan and all eager to war against the Pandavas." (293-96)

"The belief that Krishna's policy & statesmanship was the really effective force behind Yudhisthere's greatness, pervades the epic. But who were these nations that resented so strongly the attempt of Yudhisthere & Krishna to impose an empire on them? It is a significant fact that the Southern and Western peoples went almost solid for Duryodhana in this quarrel – Madra, the Deccan, Avanti, Sindhu Sauvira, Gandhara, in one long line from southern Mysore to northern Candahar; the Aryan colonies in the yet half civilised regions of the Lower valley of the Ganges espoused the same cause.

The Eastern nations, heirs of the Ixvaacou imperial idea, went equally solid for Yudhisthere. The Central peoples, repositories of the great Kuru Panchala tradition as well as the Yadavas, who were really a Central nation though they had trekked to the West, were divided. Now this distribution is exactly what we should have expected. The nations which are most averse to enter into an imperial system & cherish most their separate existence are those which are outside the centre of civilisation, hardy, warlike, only partially refined; and their aversion is still more emphatic when they have never or only for a short time been part of an empire. This is the real secret of the invincible resistance which England has opposed to all Continental schemes of empire from Philip II to Napoleon; it is the secret of her fear of Russia; it is the reason of the singular fact that only now after many centuries of great national existence has she become imbued with the imperial idea on her own account. The savage attachment to their independence of small nations like the Dutch, the Swiss, the Boers is traceable to the same cause; the fierce resistance opposed by the greater part of Spain to Napoleon was that of a nation which once imperial & central has fallen out of the main flood of civilisation & is therefore becoming provincial & attached to its own isolation. That the nations of the East & South and the Aryan colonies in Bengal should oppose the imperialist policy of Krishna & throw in their lot with Duryodhana is therefore no more than we should expect. On the other hand nations at the very heart of civilisation, who have formed at one time or another dominant parts of an empire fall easily into imperial schemes, but personal rivalry, the desire of each to be the centre of empire, divides them and brings them into conflict not any difference of political

temperament. For nations have very tenacious memories and are always attempting to renew the great ages of their past. In the Eastern peoples the imperialistic idea was very strong and having failed to assert a new empire of their own under Jarasundha, they seem to have turned with one consent to Yudhisthere as the man who could alone realise their ideal." (297-98)

4. The Most Important Parts of the Mahabharata and the Poetic Style and Genius of Vyasa

"…the portions of the Mahabharata which bear the high, severe and heroic style and personality I have described, are also the portions which unfold consecutively, powerfully and without any incredible embroidery of legend this story of clashing political & personal passions & ambitions. It is therefore not a mere assumption, but a perfectly reasonable inference that these portions form the original epic.… Now the most essential part of a story is the point from which the catastrophe started; in the Mahabharata this is the mishandling of Draupadie & the exile of the Pandavas; but this again leads us back to the Rajasuya sacrifice & the imperial Hall of the Pandavas from which the destroying envy of Duryodhan took its rise. In the Sabhapurva therefore we must seek omissis omittendis for the hand of the original poet; & the whole of the Sabhapurva with certain unimportant omissions is in that great & severe style which is the stamp of the personality of Vyasa. This once established we argue farther from the identity of style, treatment & personality between the Viratapurva & the Sabhapurva, certain passages being omitted, that this book is also the work of Vyasa. From these two large & mainly homogeneous bodies of poetical work we shall be able to

form a sufficient picture of the great original poet, the drift of his thought and the methods of his building. This we shall then confirm, correct & supplement by a study of the Udyogapurva which up to the marching of the armies presents, though with more but still separable alloy breaking in, the same clear, continuous & discernible vein of pure gold running through it. Thus armed we may even rely on resolving roughly the tangle of the Adi & Vana Purvas and it is only when the war begins, that we shall have to admit doubt, faltering and guesswork; even here however we shall not be without some light even in its thickest darkness. That the poem can be disentangled, I hold then to be beyond dispute, but it can only be done by a long and voluminous critical analysis, and even this must be supported by a detailed edition of the whole Mahabharat in which each canto & chapter shall be discussed on its own merits. At present therefore I propose to pass over the method after once indicating its general nature and present certain definite results only. I propose solely to draw a picture, in outline merely, of the sublime poetical personality which an analysis of the work reveals as the original poet, the Krishna Dwaipayana who wrote the Bharata of the 24,000 [slokas] and not the other Vyasa, if Vyasa he was, who enlarged it to something approaching its present dimensions. And let me express at once my deep admiration of the poetical powers & vast philosophic mind of this second writer; no mean poet was he who gave us the poem we know, in many respects the greatest and most interesting & formative work in the world's literature. If I seem to speak mainly in dispraise of him, it is because I am concerned here with his defects and not with his qualities; for the subject I wish to treat is Krishna of the Island, his most important

characteristics and their artistic contrast with those of our other greater, but less perfect epic poet, Valmekie." (301-03)

"**..Vyasa is the most masculine of writers.** When Coleridge spoke of the femineity of genius he had in mind certain features of temperament which whether justly or not are usually thought to count for more in the feminine mould than in the masculine, the love of ornament, emotionalism, mobile impressionability, the tyranny of imagination over the reason, excessive sensitiveness to form and outward beauty; a tendency to be dominated imaginatively by violence & the show of strength, to be prodigal of oneself, not to husband the powers, to be for showing them off, to fail in self-restraint is also feminine. All these are natural properties of the quick artistic temperament prone by throwing all itself outward to lose balance and therefore seldom perfectly sane and strong in all its parts. So much did these elements form the basis of Coleridge's own temperament that he could not perhaps imagine a genius in which they were wanting. Yet Goethe, Dante & Sophocles show that the very highest genius can exist without them. But none of the great poets I have named is so singularly masculine, so deficient in femineity as Vyasa, none dominates so much by intellect and personality, yet satisfies so little the romantic imagination. Indeed no poet at all near the first rank has the same granite mind in which impressions are received with difficulty but once received are ineffaceable. In his austere self-restraint and economy of power he is indifferent to ornament for its own sake, to the pleasures of poetry as distinguished from its ardours, to little graces & self-indulgences of style; the substance counts for everything & the form has to limit itself to its proper work of expressing with precision & power the substance. Even his most romantic

pieces have a virgin coldness & loftiness in their beauty.… It is indeed, I believe, the general impression of many "educated" young Indians that the Mahabharata is a mass of old wives' stories without a spark of poetry or imagination. But to those who have bathed even a little in the fountain-heads of poetry & can bear the keenness & purity of those mountain sources, the naked & unadorned poetry of Vyasa [is a perpetual refreshment.]" (304-05)

"Vyasa takes little trouble with similes, metaphors, rhetorical turns, the usual paraphernalia of poetry; nor when he uses them, is he at pains to select such as shall be new & curiously beautiful; they are there to define more clearly what he has in mind, and he makes just enough of them for that purpose, never striving to convert them into a separate grace or a decorative element. They have force & beauty in their context but cannot be turned into elegant excerpts; in themselves they are in fact little or nothing. When Bhema is spoken of as breathing hard like a weakling borne down by a load too heavy for him, there is nothing in the simile itself. It derives its force from its aptness to the heavy burden of unaccomplished revenge which the fierce spirit of the strong man was condemned to bear. We may say the same of his epithets, that great preoccupation of romantic artists; they are such as are most natural, crisp & firm, best suited to the plain idea & only unusual when the business in hand requires an unusual thought, but never recherché or existing for their own beauty. Thus when he is describing the greatness of Krishna and hinting his claims to be considered as identical with the Godhead, he gives him the one epithet अप्रमेयः immeasurable, which is strong and unusual enough to rise to the thought, but not to be a piece of literary decoration or a

violence of expression. In brief, he religiously avoids overstress; his audacities of phrase are few, and they have a grace of restraint in their boldness. There is indeed a rushing vast Valmekeian style which intervenes often in the Mahabharata; but it is evidently the work of a different hand; for it belongs to a less powerful intellect, duller poetical insight and coarser taste, which has yet caught something of the surge and cry of Valmekie's Oceanic poetry. Vyasa in fact stands at the opposite pole from Valmekie. The poet of the Ramayan has a flexible & universal genius embracing the Titanic and the divine, the human and the gigantic at once or with an inspired ease of transition. But Vyasa is unmixed Olympian; he lives in a world of pure verse and diction, enjoying his own heaven of golden clearness. We have seen what are the main negative qualities of the style; pureness, strength, grandeur of intellect & personality are its positive virtues. It is the expression of a pregnant and forceful mind, in which the idea is sufficient to itself, conscious of its own intrinsic greatness; when this mind runs in the groove of narrative or emotion, the style wears an air of high and pellucid ease in the midst of which its strenuous compactness and brevity moves & lives as a saving and strengthening spirit; but when it begins to think rapidly & profoundly as often happens in the great speeches, it is apt to leave the hearer behind; sufficient to itself, thinking quickly, briefly & greatly it does not care to pause on its own ideas or explain them at length, but speaks as it thinks, in a condensed often elliptical style, preferring to indicate rather than expatiate, often passing over the steps by which it should arrive at the idea and hastening to the idea itself; often also it is subtle & multiplies many shades & ramifications of thought in a short compass. From this arises

that frequent knottiness & excessive compression of logical sequence, that appearance of elliptical & sometimes obscure expression, which so struck the ancient critics in Vyasa and which they expressed in the legend that when dictating the Mahabharata to Ganesha, the poet in order not to be outstripped by his divine scribe – for it was Ganesha's stipulation that not for one moment should he be left without matter to write – threw in frequently knotty and closeknit passages which forced the lightning-swift hand to pause & labour slowly over its work. To a strenuous mind these passages, from the exercise they give to the intellect, are an added charm just as a mountainclimber takes an especial delight in steep ascents which let him feel his ability. Of one thing, however, we may be confident in reading Vyasa, that the expression will always be just to the thought; he never palters with or labours to dress up the reality within him. For the rest we must evidently trace this peculiarity to the compact, steep & sometimes elliptical, but always strenuous diction of the Upanishads in which the mind of the poet was trained & his personality tempered. At the same time like the Upanishads themselves or like the enigmatic Aeschylus, he can be perfectly clear, precise & full whenever he chooses; and he more often chooses than not. His expression of thought is usually strong and abrupt; his expression of fact and of emotion strong and precise.His verse has similar peculiarities. It is a golden and equable stream that sometimes whirls itself into eddies or dashes upon rocks; but it always runs in harmony with the thought. Vyasa has not Valmekie's movement as of the sea, that wide and unbroken surge with its infinite variety of waves, which enables him not only to find in the facile anustubh metre a sufficient vehicle for his

vast & ambitious work but to maintain it through [ ] couplets without its palling or losing its capacity of adjustment to evervarying moods & turns of narrative. But in his narrower limits & on the level of his lower flight Vyasa has great subtlety & finesse. Especially admirable is his use, in speeches, of broken effects such as would in less skilful hands have become veritable discords; and again in narrative of the simplest & barest metrical movements, as in the opening Surga of the Sabhapurva to create certain calculated effects. But it would be idle to pretend for him any equality as a master of verse with Valmekie. When he has to rise from his levels to express powerful emotions, grandiose eloquence or swift & sweeping narrative, he cannot always effect it in the anustubh metre; he falls back more often than not on the rolling magnificence of the [tristubh] which best sets & ennobles his strong-winged austerity.

Be its limits what one will, this is certain that there was never a style & verse of such bare, direct & resistless strength as this of Vyasa's or one that went so straight to the heart of all that is heroic in a man. Listen to the cry of insulted Draupadie to her husband

उत्तिष्ठोत्तिष्ठ किं शेषे भीमसेन यथा मृतः।
नामृतस्य हि पापीयान्भार्यामालभ्य जीवति।।

'Arise, arise, O Bhemasena, wherefore sleepest thou like one that is dead? For nought but dead is he whose wife a sinful hand has touched and lives.", or the reproach of Krishna to Arjoun for his weak pity which opens the second surga of the Bhagavadgita. Or again hear Krishna's description of Bhema's rage and solitary brooding over revenge and his taunting accusations of cowardice: "At other times, O

Bhemasena, thou praisest war, thou art all for crushing Dhritarashtra's heartless sons who take delight in death; thou sleepest not at night, O conquering soldier, but wakest lying face downwards, and ever thou utterest dread speech of storm and wrath, breathing fire in the torment of thine own rage; and thy mind is without rest like a smoking fire; yea, thou liest all apart breathing heavily like a weakling distressed by his load; so that some who know not even think thee mad. For as an elephant tramples on uprooted trees and breaks them to fragments, so thou stormest along with labouring breath hurting earth with thy feet. Thou takest no delight in all the people but cursest them in thy heart, O Bhema, son of Pandou, nor in aught else hast thou any pleasure night or day; but thou sittest in secret like one weeping and sometimes of a sudden laughest aloud, yea, thou sittest for long with thy head between thy knees & thy eyes closed; and then again thou starest before thee frowning and clenching thy teeth; thy every action is one of wrath. 'Surely as our father Sun is seen in the East when luminously he ascendeth, & surely as wide with rays he wheeleth down to his release in the West, so sure is this oath I utter and never shall be broken. With this club I will meet & slay the haughty Duryodhan', thus touching thy club thou swearest among thy brothers. And today thou, thou!, thinkest of peace, O warrior! Ah yes, I know the hearts of those that clamour for war, alter very strangely when war showeth its face, since fear findeth out even thee, O Bhema! Ah yes, son of Pritha, thou seest adverse omens both when thou sleepest & when thou wakest, therefore thou desirest peace. Ah yes, thou feelest no more the man in thyself, but an eunuch & thy heart sinketh with alarm, therefore art thou thus overcome. Thy heart quakes, thy mind fainteth, thou art seized with a trembling in

thy thighs, therefore thou desirest peace. Verily, O son of Pritha, wavering & inconstant is the heart of a mortal man, like the pods of the silk cotton driven by the swiftness of every wind. This shameful thought of thine, monstrous as a human voice in a dumb beast, makes the hearts of Pandou's sons to sink like (shipwrecked) men that have no raft. Look on thine own deeds, O seed of Bharat, remember thy lofty birth! arise, put off thy weakness; be firm, O heart of a hero; unworthy of thee is this languor; what he cannot win by the mightiness of him, that a Kshatriya will not touch.'

This passage I have quoted at some length because it is eminently characteristic of Vyasa's poetical method. Another poet would have felt himself justified by the nature of the speech in using some wild and whirling words, in seeking vividness by exaggeration, at the very least in raising his voice a little. Contrast with this the perfect temperance of this passage, the confident & unemotional reliance on the weight of what is said, not on the manner of saying it. The vividness of the portraiture arises from the quiet accuracy of vision and the care in the choice of simple but effective words; not from any seeking after the salient and graphic such as gives Kalidasa his wonderful power of description; and the bitterness of the taunts arises from the quiet & searching irony with which [each] shaft is tipped and not from any force used in driving them home. Yet every line goes straight as an arrow to its mark; every word is the utterance of a strong man speaking to a strong man and gives iron to the mind. **Strength is one constant term of the Vyasic style; temperance, justness of taste is the other.**

Strength and a fine austerity are then the two tests which

give us safe guidance through the morass of the Mahabharata; where these two exist together, we may reasonably presume some touch of Vyasa; where they do not exist or do not conjoin, we feel at once the redactor or the interpolator. I have spoken of another poet whose more turbid & vehement style breaks continually into the pure gold of Vyasa's work. The whole temperament of this redacting poet, for he is something more than an interpolator, has its roots in Valmekie; but likemost poets of a secondary and fallible genius, he exaggerates while adopting the more audacious and therefore the more perilous tendencies of his master. The love of the wonderful touched with the grotesque, the taste for the amorphous, a marked element in Valmekie's complex temperament, is with his follower something like a malady. He grows impatient with the apparent tameness of Vyasa's inexorable self-restraint, and restlessly throws in here couplets, there whole paragraphs of a more flamboyant vigour. Occasionally this is done with real ability & success, but as a rule they are true purple patches, daubs of paint on the stainless dignity of marble. For his rage for the wonderful is not always accompanied by the prodigious sweep of imagination which in Valmekie successfully grasps and compels the most reluctant materials. The result is that puerilities and gross breaches of taste fall easily & hardily from his pen. Not one of these could we possibly imagine as consistent with the severe, self-possessed intellect of Vyasa. Fineness, justness, discrimination & propriety of taste are the very soul of the man." (305-11)

In the story of Nal and Damayanti in the Mahabharata "we have the very morning of Vyasa's genius, when he was young and ardent; perhaps still under the immediate influence

of Valmekie (one of the most pathetic touches in the Nala is borrowed straight out of the Ramayana); at any rate able without ceasing to be finely restrained to give some rein to his fancy. The Nala therefore has the delicate & unusual romantic grace of a young & severe classic who has permitted himself to go-a-maying in the fields of romance. There is a remote charm of restraint in the midst of abandon, of vigilance in the play of fancy which is passing sweet & strange. The Savitrie is a maturer & nobler work, perfect & restrained in detail, but it has still some glow of the same youth and grace over it." (311)

"As Vyasa progressed in years, his personality developed towards intellectualism and his manner of expressing emotion became sensibly modified. In the Savitrie he first reveals his power of imparting to the reader a sense of poignant but silent feeling, feeling in the air, unexpressed or rather expressed in action, sometimes even in very silence; this power is a notable element in some of the great scenes of the Mahabharata; the silence of the Pandavas during the mishandling of Draupadie, the mighty silence of Krishna while the assembly of kings rage and roar around him and Shishupal again & again hurls forth on him his fury & contempt and the hearts of all men are troubled, the stern self-restraint of his brothers when Yudhisthere is smitten by Virata; are instances of the power I mean. In the Mahabharata proper we find few expressions of pure feeling, none at least which have the triumphant power of Damayanti's laments in the Nala. Vyasa had by this time taken his bent; his heart and imagination had become filled with the pomp of thought and genius and the greatness of all things mighty and bold and regal; when therefore his characters feel powerful emotion, they are

impelled to express it in the dialect of thought. We see the heart in their utterances but it is not the heart in its nakedness, it is not the heart of the common man; or rather it is the universal heart of man but robed in the intellectual purple. **The note of Sanscrit poetry is always aristocratic; it has no answer to the democratic feeling or to the modern sentimental cult of the average man, but deals with exalted, large and aspiring natures, whose pride it is that they do not act like common men (प्राकृतो जनः). They are the great spirits, the महाजनाः, in whose footsteps the world follows.** Whatever sentimental objections may be urged against this high and arrogating spirit, it cannot be doubted that a literature pervaded with the soul of hero worship and noblesse oblige and full of great examples is eminently fitted to elevate and strengthen a nation and prepare it for a great part in history. It was as Sanscrit literature ceased to be universally read and understood, as it became more & more confined to the Brahmins that the spirit of our nation began to decline. And it is because the echoes of that literature still lasted that the nation even in its downfall has played not altogether an ignoble part, that it has never quite consented as so many formerly great nations have done to the degradation Fate seemed determined to impose on it, that it has always struggled to assert itself, to live, to be something in the world of thought and action. And with this high tendency of the literature there is no poet who is so deeply imbued as Vyasa. Even the least of his characters is an intellect and a personality and of intellect and personality their every utterance reeks, as it were, and is full. I have already quoted the cry of Draupadie to Bhema; it is a supreme utterance of insulted feeling, and yet note how it expresses itself, in the language of intellect; in a thought.

उत्तिष्ठोत्तिष्ठ किं शेषे भीमसेन यथा मृतः।
नामृतस्य हि पापीयान्भार्यामालभ्य जीवति।।

The whole personality of Draupadie breaks out in that cry, her chastity, her pride, her passionate & unforgiving temper, but it flashes out not in an expression of pure feeling, but in a fiery and pregnant apophthegm. It is this temperament, this dynamic force of intellectualism blended with heroic fire and a strong personality that gives its peculiar stamp to Vyasa's writing and distinguishes it from that of all other epic poets. The heroic & profoundly intellectual national type of the great Bharata races, the Kurus, Bhojas and Panchalas who created the Veda & the Vedanta, find in Vyasa their fitting poetical type and exponent, just as the mild and delicately moral temper of the more eastern Coshalas has realised itself in Valmekie and through the Ramayana so largely dominated Hindu character. Steeped in the heroic ideals of the Bharata, attuned to their profound and daring thought & temperament, Vyasa has made himself the poet of the highminded Kshatriya caste, voices their resonant speech, breathes their aspiring and unconquerable spirit, mirrors their rich and varied life with a loving detail and moves through his subject with a swift yet measured movement like the march of an army towards battle." (319-21)

5. Vyasa and Valmekie

"A comparison with Valmekie is instructive of the varying genius of these great masters. Both excel in epical rhetoric – if such a term as rhetoric can be applied to Vyasa's direct & severe style, but Vyasa's has the air of a more intellectual, reflective & experienced stage of poetical advance.

The longer speeches in the Ramayan, those even which have most the appearance of set, argumentative oration, proceed straight from the heart; the thoughts, words, reasonings come welling up from the dominant emotion or conflicting feelings of the speaker; they palpitate and are alive with the vital force from which they have sprung. Though belonging to a more thoughtful, gentle and cultured civilisation than Homer's they have, like his, the large utterance which is not of primitive times, but of the primal emotions. Vyasa's have a powerful but austere force of intellectuality. In expressing character they firmly expose it rather than spring half-unconsciously from it; their bold and finely-planned consistency with the original conception reveals rather the conscientious painstaking of an inspired but reflective artist than the more primary and impetuous creative impulse. In their management of emotion itself a similar difference becomes prominent. Valmekie when giving utterance to a mood or passion simple or complex, surcharges every line, every phrase, turn of words or movement of verse with it; there are no lightning flashes but a great depth of emotion swelling steadily, inexhaustibly and increasingly in a wonder of sustained feeling, like a continually rising wave with low crests of foam. Vyasa has a high level of style with a subdued emotion behind it occasionally breaking into poignant outbursts. It is by sudden beauties that he rises above himself and not only exalts, stirs and delights as at his ordinary level, but memorably seizes the heart and imagination. This is the natural result of his peculiarly disinterested art which never seeks out anything striking for its own sake, but admits it only when it arises uncalled from the occasion.

From this difference in temper and mode of expression

arises a difference in the mode also of portraying character. Vyasa's knowledge of character is not so intimate, emotional and sympathetic as Valmekie's; it has more of a heroic inspiration, less of a divine sympathy. He has reached it not like Valmekie immediately through the heart and imagination, but deliberately through intellect and experience, a deep criticism and reading of men; the spirit of shaping imagination has come afterwards like a sculptor using the materials labour has provided for him. It has not been a light leading him into the secret places of the heart. Nevertheless the characterisation, however reached, is admirable and firm. It is the fruit of a lifelong experience, the knowledge of a statesman who has had much to do with the ruling of men and has been himself a considerable part in some great revolution full of astonishing incidents and extraordinary characters. With that high experience his brain and his soul are full. It has cast his imagination into colossal proportions & provided him with majestic conceptions which can dispense with all but the simplest language for expression; for they are so great that the bare precise statement of what is said and done seems enough to make language epical. His character-drawing indeed is more epic, less psychological than Valmekie's. Truth of speech and action give us the truth of nature and it is done with strong purposeful strokes that have the power to move the heart & enlarge and ennoble the imagination which is what we mean by the epic in poetry. In Valmekie there are marvellous & revealing touches which show us the secret something in character usually beyond the expressive power either of speech or action; they are touches oftener found in the dramatic artist than the epic, and seldom fall within Vyasa's method. It is the difference between strong

and purposeful artistic synthesis and the beautiful subtle & involute symmetry of an organic existence evolved and inevitable rather than shaped or purposed.

Vyasa is therefore less broadly human than Valmekie, he is at the same time a wider & more original thinker. His supreme intellect rises everywhere out of the mass of insipid or turbulent redaction and interpolation with bare and grandiose outlines. A wide searching mind, historian, statesman, orator, a deep and keen looker into ethics and conduct, a subtle and high aiming politician, a theologian & philosopher, – it is not for nothing that Hindu imagination makes the name of Vyasa loom so large in the history of Aryan thought and attributes to him work so important and manifold. The wideness of the man's intellectual empire is evident throughout his work; we feel the presence of the Rishi, the original thinker who has enlarged the boundaries of ethical & religious outlook.

Modern India, since the Musulman advent, has accepted the politics of Chanakya in preference to Vyasa's. Certainly there was little in politics concealed from that great and sinister spirit. Yet Vyasa perhaps knew its subtleties quite as well, but he had to ennoble and guide him a high ethical aim and an august imperial idea. He did not, like European imperialism, unable to rise above the idea of power, accept the Jesuitic doctrine of any means to a good end, still less justify the goodness of the end by that profession of an utterly false disinterestedness which ends in the soothing belief that plunder, arson, outrage & massacre are committed for the good of the slaughtered nation. Vyasa's imperialism frankly accepts war & empire as the result of man's natural lust for

dominion, but demands that empire should be won by noble and civilized methods, not in the spirit of the savage, and insists once it is won not on its powers, but on its duties. Valmekie too has included politics in his wide sweep; his picture of an ideal imperialism is sound and noble and the spirit of the Coshalan Ixvaacous that monarchy must be broad-based on the people's will and yet broader-based on justice, truth and good government, is admirably developed as an undertone of the poem. But it is an undertone only, not as in the Mahabharata its uppermost and weightiest drift. Valmekie's approach to politics is imaginative, poetic, made from outside. He is attracted to it by the unlimited curiosity of an universal mind and still more by the appreciation of a great creative artist; only therefore when it gives opportunities for a grandiose imagination or is mingled with the motives of conduct and acts on character. He is a poet who makes occasional use of public affairs as part of his wide human subject. The reverse may with some appearance of truth be said of Vyasa that he is interested in human action and character mainly as they move and work in relation to a large political background.

His deep preoccupation with the ethical issues of speech and action is very notable. His very subject is one of practical ethics, the establishment of a Dharmyarajya, an empire of the just, by which is meant no millennium of the saints but the practical ideal of a government with righteousness, purity and unselfish toil for the common good as its saving principles. It is true that Valmekie has a more humanely moral spirit than Vyasa, in as much as ordinary morality is most effective when steeped in emotion, proceeding from the heart & acting through the heart. Vyasa's ethics like everything else in him

takes a double stand on intellectual scrutiny and acceptance and on personal strength of character; his characters having once adopted by intellectual choice & in harmony with their temperaments a given line of conduct, throw the whole heroic force of their nature into its pursuit. He is therefore preeminently a poet of action. **Krishna is his authority in all matters religious and ethical and it is noticeable that Krishna lays far more stress on action and far less on quiescence than any other Hindu philosopher.**" (321-24)

" . .Vyasa has not only a high political & religious thought and deepseeing ethical judgments; he deals not only with the massive aspects & worldwide issues of human conduct, but has a keen eye for the details of government and society, the ceremonies, forms & usages, the religious & social order on the due stability of which the public welfare is grounded. The principles of good government & the motives & impulses that move men to public action no less than the rise and fall of States & the clash of mighty personalities and great powers form, incidentally & epically treated, the staple of Vyasa's epic. The poem was therefore, first & foremost, like the Iliad and Aeneid and even more than the Iliad and Aeneid, national – a poem in which the religious, social and personal temperament and ideals of the Aryan nation have found a high expression and its institutions, actions, heroes in the most critical period of its history received the judgments and criticisms of one of its greatest and soundest minds. If this had not been so we should not have had the Mahabharata in its present form. Valmekie had also dealt with a great historical period in a yet more universal spirit and with finer richness of detail but he approached it in a poetic and dramatic manner; he created rather than criticised; while Vyasa in his

manner was the critic far more than the creator. Hence later poets found it easier and more congenial to introduce their criticisms of life and thought into the Mahabharata than into the Ramayana. Vyasa's poem has been increased to threefold its original size; the additions to Valmekie's, few in themselves if we set apart the Uttarakanda, have been immaterial & for the most part of an accidental nature.

Gifted with such poetical powers, limited by such intellectual and emotional characteristics, endowed with such grandeur of soul and severe purity of taste, what was the special work which Vyasa did for his country and in what beyond the ordinary elements of poetical greatness lies his claim to world-wide acceptance? It has been suggested already that the Mahabharata is the great national poem of India. It is true the Ramayan also represents an Aryan civilisation idealised: Rama & Sita are more intimately characteristic types of the Hindu temperament as it finally shaped itself than are Arjouna & Draupadie; Srikrishna though his character is founded in the national type, yet rises far above it. But although Valmekie writing the poem of mankind drew his chief figures in the Hindu model and Vyasa, writing a great national epic, lifted his divine hero above the basis of national character into an universal humanity, yet the original purpose of either poem remains intact. In the Ramayan under the disguise of an Aryan golden age the wide world with all its elemental impulses and affections finds itself mirrored. The Mahabharata reflects rather a great Aryan civilization with the types, ideas, aims and passions of a heroic and pregnant period in the history of a high-hearted and deep-thoughted nation. It has, moreover, as I have attempted to indicate, a formative ethical and religious spirit which is absolutely corrective to the faults

that have most marred in the past and mar to the present day the Hindu character and type of thought. And it provides us with this corrective not in the form of an alien civilisation difficult to assimilate and associated with other elements as dangerous to us as this is salutary, but in a great creative work of our own literature written by the mightiest of our sages (मुनीनामप्यहं व्यासः Krishna has said), one therefore who speaks our own language, thinks our own thoughts and has the same national cast of mind, nature & conscience. His ideals will therefore be a corrective not only to our own faults but to the dangers of that attractive but unwholesome Asura civilisation which has invaded us, especially its morbid animalism and its neurotic tendency to abandon itself to its own desires.

But this does not say all. Vyasa too beyond the essential universality of all great poets, has his peculiar appeal to humanity in general making his poem of worldwide as well as national importance. By comparing him once again with Valmekie we shall realize more precisely in what this appeal consists. The Titanic impulse was strong in Valmekie. The very dimensions of his poetical canvas, the audacity and occasional recklessness of his conceptions, the gust with which he fills in the gigantic outlines of his Ravana are the essence of Titanism; his genius was so universal & Protean that no single element of it can be said to predominate, yet this tendency towards the enormous enters perhaps as largely into it as any other. But to the temperament of Vyasa the Titanic was alien. It is true he carves his figures so largely (for he was a sculptor in creation rather than a painter like Valmekie) that looked at separately they seem to have colossal stature but he is always at pains so to harmonise them that they shall appear measurable to us and strongly human. They are largely &

boldly human, impressive & sublime, but never Titanic. He loves the earth and the heavens but he visits not Pataala nor the stupendous regions of Vrishopurvan. His Rakshasas, supposing them to be his at all, are epic giants or matter-of-fact ogres, but they do not exhale the breath of midnight and terror like Valmekie's demons nor the spirit of worldshaking anarchy like Valmekie's giants. This poet could never have conceived Ravana. He had neither unconscious sympathy nor a sufficient force of abhorrence to inspire him. The passions of Duryodhana though presented with great force of antipathetic insight, are human and limited. The Titanic was so foreign to Vyasa's habit of mind that he could not grasp it sufficiently either to love or hate. His humanism shuts to him the outermost gates of that sublime and menacing region; he has not the secret of the storm nor has his soul ridden upon the whirlwind. For his particular work this was a real advantage. Valmekie has drawn for us both the divine and anarchic in extraordinary proportions; an Akbar or a Napoleon might find his spiritual kindred in Rama or Ravana; but with more ordinary beings such figures impress the sense of the sublime principally and do not dwell with them as daily acquaintances. It was left for Vyasa to create epically the human divine and the human anarchic so as to bring idealisms of the conflicting moral types into line with the daily emotions and imaginations of men. The sharp distinction between Deva & Asura is one of the three distinct & peculiar contributions to ethical thought which India has to offer. The legend of Indra & Virochana is one of its fundamental legends. Both of them came to Vrihaspati to know from him of God; he told them to go home & look in the mirror. Virochana saw himself there & concluding that he was God, asked no farther; he gave full

rein to the sense of individuality in himself which he mistook for the deity. But Indra was not satisfied: feeling that there must be some mistake he returned to Vrihaspati and received from him the true Godknowledge which taught him that he was God only because all things were God, since nothing existed but the One. If he was the one God, so was his enemy; the very feelings of separateness and enmity were no permanent reality but transient phenomena. The Asura therefore is he who is profoundly conscious of his own separate individuality & yet would impose it on the world as the sole individuality; he is thus blown along on the hurricane of his desires & ambitions until he stumbles & is broken, in the great phrase of Aeschylus, against the throne of Eternal Law. The Deva on the contrary stands firm in the luminous heaven of self-knowledge; his actions flow not inward towards himself but outwards toward the world. The distinction that India draws is not between altruism and egoism but between disinterestedness and desire. The altruist is profoundly conscious of himself and he is really ministering to himself even in his altruism; hence the hot & sickly odour of sentimentalism and the taint of the Pharisee which clings about European altruism. With the perfect Hindu the feeling of self has been merged in the sense of the universe; he does his duty equally whether it happens to promote the interests of others or his own; if his action seems oftener altruistic than egoistic it is because our duty oftener coincides with the interests of others than with our own. Rama's duty as a son calls him to sacrifice himself, to leave the empire of the world and become a beggar & a hermit; he does it cheerfully and unflinchingly: but when Sita is taken from him, it is his duty as a husband to rescue her from her ravisher and as a Kshatriya to put Ravana

to death if he persists in wrongdoing. This duty also he pursues with the same unflinching energy as the first. He does not shrink from the path of the right because it coincides with the path of self-interest. The Pandavas also go without a word into exile & poverty, because honour demands it of them; but their ordeal over, they will not, though ready to drive compromise to its utmost verge, consent to succumb utterly to Duryodhana, for it is their duty as Kshatriyas to protect the world from the reign of injustice, even though it is at their own expense that injustice seeks to reign. **The Christian & Buddhistic doctrine of turning the other cheek to the smiter, is as dangerous as it is impracticable. The continual European see-saw between Christ on the one side and the flesh & the devil on the other with the longer trend towards the latter comes straight from a radically false moral distinction & the lip profession of an ideal which mankind has never been either able or willing to carry into practice.** The disinterested & desireless pursuit of duty is a gospel worthy of the strongest manhood; that of the cheek turned to the smiter is a gospel for cowards & weaklings. Babes & sucklings may practise it because they must, but with others it is a hypocrisy." (332-36)

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