

Śraddhā



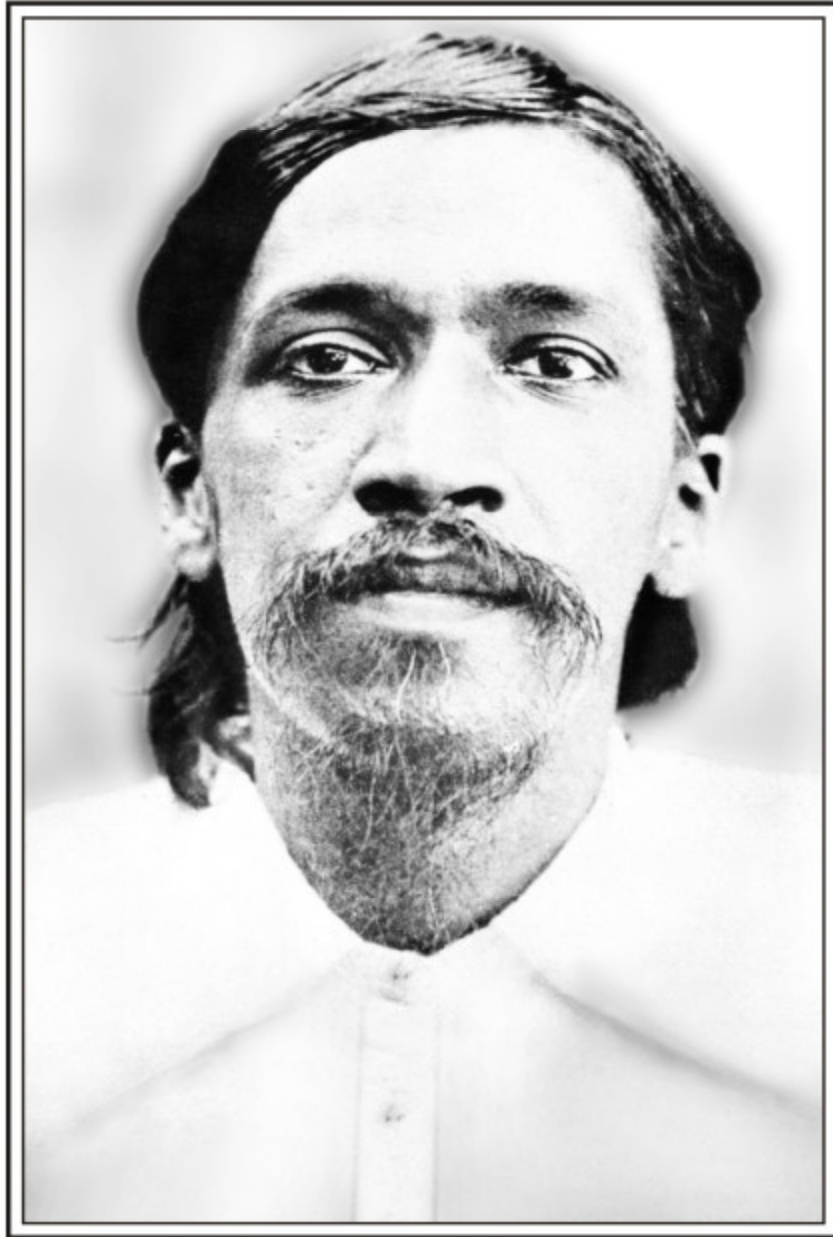
श्रद्धा

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15 August, 2011

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From a tutor of few youths he thus became the teacher of a whole nation
—Bepin Chandra Pal

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*A Quarterly devoted to an exposition of the teachings of
The Mother and Sri Aurobindo*

Vol.3 No. 1

**Special issue
on**

The Political and Social writings of Sri Aurobindo

15 August, 2011



Sri Aurobindo Bhavan
8 Shakespeare Sarani • Kolkata 700 071

Publication Details

Frequency of publication : Quarterly. Published on 15 August, 24 November, 21 February, 24 April.

Annual Subscription : Rs 150.00 **Single copy** : Rs. 50.00 Those wishing to have the journal mailed to them may please send an additional Rs. 100.00.

Annual Subscription for soft copy of the journal : Rs.150.00

For overseas readers : Annual subscription :US\$ 45 inclusive of postal and bank charges
for hard copy;
US\$ 20 for soft copy

All payments to be made in favour of **Sri Aurobindo Centre for Research in Social Sciences.**

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Published by
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Printed by
Basab Chattopadhyaya
Shilalipi
16 A Tamer Lane
Kolkata 700 009
Phone 22414580

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ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

Śraddhāvāml labhate jñanam

Who has faith.he attains knowledge

—Gita IV. 39

Cover : Krishnalal's painting *Towards Inner Light*

Editorial

Mother once said ‘Sri Aurobindo does not belong to the past nor to history. Sri Aurobindo is the Future advancing towards its realisation’. What is this Future that beckons us? Sri Aurobindo’s message is very simple and clear. He says that man is a transitional being, a growing organism, that he is not the last term or the end product in the evolutionary process. He has to grow further and expand in consciousness till he reaches the perfect and complete consciousness. And what is that state of perfect consciousness? Sri Aurobindo says that just as life has evolved out of matter and mind out of life, so there rise beyond mind other statuses of consciousness, tier upon tier, where man can go, live and even bring down their powers into his normal life and transform it into their pattern. And the highest of these planes is what Sri Aurobindo calls Supermind or Truth-Consciousness. Its original stuff is made not of ignorance, but of truth. Unlike in the mental ranges, where there is always an element of doubt, uncertainty, groping and partial perception and realisation, where one moves from greater darkness to a shade of lesser hue, here in the Truth-Consciousness one lives always in full daylight and in the plenitude of consciousness and delight and ‘fulfilled harmony’ and the only progress is from light to a greater light, from knowledge to a superior knowledge. Such was the life mission of Sri Aurobindo, ‘the builder of the Life Divine’ – to build a new foundation for a new world. To follow Sri Aurobindo in this great adventure one has to be a warrior and a heroic soul. On this hallowed day of his 139th birth anniversary, let us once again rededicate ourselves unreservedly with a total submission and complete surrender of all the parts and planes of our being to his ideal and lay ourselves open to the dynamic or the supramental Divine which he calls the incarnate Divine Mother.

We have chosen to name this anniversary number a special issue on the Social and Political Writings of Sri Aurobindo as the bulk of the papers, with a few exceptions, concentrates on this theme. Readers will find special interest in the article by Paul Richard on Sri Aurobindo, taken from his book *The Dawn of Asia* published by Ganesh & Co. of Madras in 1919. The article has been translated by Sri Aurobindo himself.

In the intervening period since our last publication in April, we have witnessed the passing away of two of Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s dear children – Ranajit Sarkar in far away Amsterdam and KD Sethna, better known to all as Amal Kiran. Ranajit Sarkar, too, was a product of the Ashram and was its inmate for a long time before he moved and settled in the Netherlands. Readers may remember the excellent series on the Urvashi theme he penned for **Sraddha**, in which he compared the works of Madhusudan Dutt, Tagore and Sri Aurobindo on that particular subject. A person of great erudition and

learning and a man of admirable human qualities, Ranajit-da was most humble, modest and self-effacing. Amal Kiran, born in Nov 1904, passed away peacefully in the Ashram Nursing Home on 29 June at the ripe old age of 106. He lived a long and full life. He joined the Ashram in 1927 at the young age of 23 and was christened ‘Amal Kiran’ or the ‘Clear Ray’ by Sri Aurobindo himself. One of the foremost sadhaks, a literary stalwart and a multi-faceted genius, his publications covered more than 50 books spread over a variety of subjects, notably literature and literary criticism. His voluminous correspondence with Sri Aurobindo on *Savitri* can be rated as the high-water mark of what true literary analysis ought to be. Like his Guru, Amal Kiran, too, possessed a keen and a wonderful sense of humour. ‘Age could not wither him nor custom stale his infinite variety’.

We are grateful to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, for its permission to reproduce the excerpt ‘Our Ideal’ from the *Arya*, vol.2, pp.1-9, the photograph of Sri Aurobindo taken from the Ashram catalogue of photos and the painting ‘*Towards Inner Light*’ by Krishnalal for the cover of the journal. We owe special thanks to Samata in the Studio for spending time to identify this painting and to Chaitanya in the Sri Aurobindo Archives for making available in the shortest possible time its high resolution image. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are reproduced here with acknowledgements and thanks to the Trustees of Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Our Ideal

Sri Aurobindo

The aim which it (The “Arya”) holds before it has been conceived neither as a mirror of the fleeting interests and surface thoughts of the period we live in, nor as the mouthpiece of a sect, school or already organised way of thinking. Its object is to feel out for the thought of the future, to help in shaping its foundations and to link it to the best and most vital thought of the past.

We believe in the constant progression of humanity and we hold that that progression is the working out of a Thought in Life which sometimes manifests itself on the surface and sometimes sinks below and works behind the mask of external forces and interests. When there is this lapse below the surface, humanity has its periods of apparent retrogression or tardy evolution, its long hours of darkness or twilight during which the secret Thought behind works out one of its phases by the pressure mainly of economic, political and personal interests ignorant of any deeper aim within. When the thought returns to the surface, humanity has its periods of light and of rapid efflorescence, its dawns and splendid springtides; and according to the depth, vitality, truth and self-effective energy of the form of Thought that emerges is the importance of the stride forward that it makes during these Hours of the Gods in our terrestrial manifestation.

There is no greater error than to suppose, as the “practical” man is wont to do, that thought is only a fine flower and ornament of life and that political, economic and personal interests are the important and effective motors of human action. We recognise that this is a world of life and action and developing organism; but the life that seeks to guide itself only by vital and material forces is a slow, dark and blundering growth. It is an attempt to approximate man to the method of vegetable and animal existence. The earth is a world of Life and Matter, but man is not a vegetable nor an animal; he is a spiritual and a thinking being who is set here to shape and use the animal mould for higher purposes, by higher motives, with a more divine instrumentation.

Therefore by his very nature he serves the working of a Thought within him even when he is ignorant of it in his surface self. The practical man who ignores or despises the deeper life of the Idea, is yet serving that which he ignores or despises. Charlemagne hewing a chaotic Europe into shape with his sword was preparing the reign of the feudal and Catholic interpretation of human life with all that that great though obscure period of humanity has meant, for the thought and spiritual development of mankind. But it is when the Thought emerges and guides life that man grows towards his full humanity, strides forward on his path and begins to control the development of Nature in his destiny or at least to collaborate as a conscious mind and spirit with That which controls and directs it.

The progress of humanity has therefore been a constant revolution with its rhythm of alternative darkness and light, but both the day and the night have helped to foster that which is evolving. The periods have not been the same for all parts of the globe. In the historic ages of the present cycle of civilisation the movement has been almost entirely centred in the twin continents of Asia and Europe. And there it has been often seen that when Asia was moving through the light, Europe was passing through one of her epochs of obscurity and on the other hand the nights of Asia’s repose or stagnation have corresponded with the days of Europe’s mental vigour and vital activity.

But the fundamental difference has been that Asia has served predominantly (not exclusively) as a field for man’s spiritual experience and progression, Europe has been rather a workshop for his mental and vital activities. As the cycle progressed, the Eastern continent has more and more converted itself into a storehouse of spiritual energy sometimes active and reaching forward to new development, sometimes conservative and quiescent. Three or four times in history a stream of this energy has poured out upon Europe, but each time Europe has rejected wholly or partially the spiritual substance of the afflatus and used it rather as an impulse to fresh intellectual and material activity and progress.

The first attempt was the filtering of Egyptian, Chaldean and Indian wisdom through the thought of the Greek philosophers from Pythagoras to Plato and the neo-Platonists; the result was the brilliantly intellectual and unspiritual civilisation of Greece and Rome. But it prepared the way for the second attempt when Buddhism and Vaishnavism filtered through the Semitic temperament entered Europe in the form of Christianity. Christianity came within an ace of spiritualising and even of asceticising the mind of Europe; it was baffled by its own theological deformation in the minds of the Greek fathers of the Church and by the sudden flooding of Europe with a German barbarism whose temperament in its merits no less than in its defects was the very antetype both of the Christian spirit and the Graeco-Roman intellect.

The Islamic invasion of Spain and the southern coast of the Mediterranean—curious as the sole noteworthy example of Asiatic culture using the European method of material and political irruption as opposed to the peaceful invasion by ideas—maybe regarded as a third attempt. The result of its meeting with Graecised Christianity was the reawakening of the European mind in feudal and Catholic Europe and the obscure beginnings of modern thought and science.

The fourth and last attempt which is as yet only in its slow initial stage is the quiet entry of Eastern and chiefly of Indian thought into Europe first through the veil of German metaphysics, more latterly by its subtle influence in reawakening the Celtic, Scandinavian and Slavonic idealism, mysticism, religionism, and the direct and open penetration of Buddhism, Theosophy, Vedantism, Baháism and other Oriental influences in both Europe and America.

On the other hand, there have been two reactions of Europe upon Asia; first, the invasion of Alexander with his aggressive Hellenism which for a time held Western Asia, created echoes and reactions in India and returned through Islamic culture upon mediaeval Europe; secondly, the modern onslaught of commercial, political, scientific Europe upon the moral, artistic and spiritual cultures of the East.

The new features of this mutual interpenetration are, first, that the two attacks have synchronised and, secondly, that they have encountered in each case the extreme exaggeration of their opposites. Intellectual and materialistic Europe found India, the Asia of Asia, the heart of the world's spiritual life, in the last throes of an enormous experiment, the thought of a whole nation concentrated for centuries upon the pure spiritual existence to the exclusion of all real progress in the practical and mental life of the race. The entering stream of Eastern thought found in Europe the beginning of an era which rejected religion, philosophy and psychology,—religion as an emotional delusion, philosophy, the pure essence of the mind, as a barren thought-weaving,—and resolved to devote the whole intellectual faculty of man to a study of the laws of material Nature and of man's bodily, social, economic and political existence and to build thereon a superior civilisation.

That stupendous effort is over; it has not yet frankly declared its bankruptcy, but it is bankrupt. It is sinking in a cataclysm as gigantic and as unnatural as the attempt which gave it birth. On the other hand, the exaggerated spirituality of the Indian effort has also registered a bankruptcy; we have seen how high individuals can rise by it, but we have seen also how low a race can fall which in its eagerness to seek after God ignores His intention in humanity. Both the European and the Indian attempt were admirable, the Indian by its absolute spiritual sincerity, the European by its severe intellectual honesty and ardour for the truth ; both have accomplished miracles; but in the end God and Nature have been too strong for the Titanism of the human spirit and for the Titanism of the human intellect.

The salvation of the human race lies in a more sane and integral development of the possibilities of mankind in the individual and in the community. The safety of Europe has to be sought in the recognition of the spiritual aim of human existence, otherwise she will be crushed by the weight of her own unilluminated knowledge and soulless organisation. The safety of Asia lies in the recognition of the material mould and mental conditions in which that aim has to be worked out, otherwise she will sink deeper into the slough of despond of a mental and physical incompetence to deal with the facts of life and the shocks of a rapidly changing movement. It is not any exchange of forms that is required, but an interchange of regenerating impulses and a happy fusion and harmonising.

The synchronism and mutual interpenetration of the two great currents of human effort at such a crisis in the history of the race is full of hope for the future of humanity, but full also of possible dangers. The hope is the emergence of a new and better human life founded on a greater knowledge, a pursuit of the new faculties and possibilities opening out before us and a just view of the problem which the individual, the society, the race have to solve. Mankind has been drawn together by the developments of material science and for good or evil its external future is henceforth one; its different parts no longer develop separately and in independence of each other. There opens out at the same time the possibility that by the development and practice of the science and the life of the soul it may be made one in reality and by an internal unity.

The idea by which the enlightenment of Europe has been governed is the passion for the discovery of the Truth and Law that constitutes existence and governs the process of

the world, the attempt to develop the life and potentialities of man, his ideals, institutions, organisations by the knowledge of that Law and Truth and the confidence that along this line lies the road of human progress and perfection.

The idea is absolutely just and we accept it entirely; but its application has been erroneous. For the Law and Truth that has to be discovered is not that of the material world—though this is required, nor even of the mental and physical—though this is indispensable, but the Law and Truth of the Spirit on which all the rest depends. For it is the power of the Self of things that expresses itself in their forms and processes.

The message of the East to the West is a true message, “Only by finding himself can man be saved,” and “what shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world, if he lose his own soul.” The West has heard the message and is seeking out the law and truth of the soul and the evidences of an inner reality greater than the material. The danger is that with her passion for mechanism and her exaggerated intellectuality she may fog herself in an external and false psychism, such as we see arising in England and America, the homes of the mechanical genius, or in intellectual, unspiritual and therefore erroneous theories of the Absolute, such as have run their course in critical and metaphysical Germany.

The idea by which the illumination of Asia has been governed is the firm knowledge that truth of the Spirit is the sole real truth, the belief that the psychological life of man is an instrument for attaining to the truth of the Spirit and that its laws must be known and practised with that aim paramount, and the attempt to form the external life of man and the institutions of society into a suitable mould for the great endeavour.

This idea, too, is absolutely just and we accept it entirely. But in its application, and in India most, it has deviated into a divorce between the Spirit and its instruments and a disparagement and narrowing of the mental and external life of the race. For it is only on the widest and richest efflorescence of this instrumental life that the fullest and most absolute attainment of the spiritual can be securely based. This knowledge the ancients of the East possessed and practised; it has been dimmed in knowledge and lost in practice by their descendants.

The message the West brings to the East is a true message. Man also is God and it is through his developing manhood that he approaches the godhead; Life also is the Divine, its progressive expansion is the self-expression of the Brahman, and to deny Life is to diminish the Godhead within us. This is the truth that returns to the East from the West translated into the language of the higher truth the East already possesses; and it is an ancient knowledge. The East also is awaking to the message. The danger is that Asia may accept it in the European form, forget for a time her own law and nature and either copy blindly the West or make a disastrous amalgam of that which she has in its most inferior forms and the crudenesses which are invading her.

The problem of thought therefore is to find out the right idea and the right way of harmony; to restate the ancient and eternal spiritual truth of the Self so that it shall embrace, permeate and dominate the mental and physical life; to develop the most profound and vital methods of psychological self-discipline and self-development so that the mental and psychical life of man may express the spiritual life through the utmost possible expansion of its own richness, power and complexity; and to seek for

the means and motives by which his external life, his society and his institutions may remould themselves progressively in the truth of the spirit and develop towards the utmost possible harmony of individual freedom and social unity.

This is our ideal and our search in the “Arya”. Throughout the world there are plenty of movements inspired by the same drift, but there is room for an effort of thought which shall frankly acknowledge the problem in its integral complexity and not be restrained in the flexibility of its search by attachment to any cult, creed or extant system of philosophy.

The effort involves a quest for the Truth that underlies existence and the fundamental Law of its self-expression in the universe—the work of metaphysical philosophy and religious thought; the sounding and harmonising of the psychological methods of discipline by which man purifies and perfects himself,—the work of psychology, not as it is understood in Europe, but the deeper practical psychology called in India Yoga ; and the application of our ideas to the problems of man’s social and collective life.

Philosophy and religious thought must be the beginning and the foundation of any such attempt; for they alone go behind appearances and processes to the truth of things. The attempt to get rid of their supremacy must always be vain. Man will always think and generalise and try to penetrate behind the apparent fact, for that is the imperative law of his awakened consciousness ; man will always turn his generalisations into a religion, even though it be only a religion of positivism or of material Law. Philosophy is the intellectual search for the fundamental truth of things, religion is the attempt to make the truth dynamic in the soul of man. They are essential to each other; a religion that is not the expression of philosophic truth, degenerates into superstition and obscurantism, and a philosophy which does not dynamise itself with the religious spirit is a barren light, for it cannot get itself practised.

Our first preoccupation in the “Arya” has therefore been with the deepest thought that we could command on the philosophical foundations of the problem; Our second preoccupation has been with the psychological disciplines of Yoga; but here also we have been obliged to concern ourselves with a deep study of the principles underlying the methods rather than with a popular statement of methods and disciplines. But without this previous study of principles the statement of methods would have been unsound and not really helpful. There are no short cuts to an integral perfection....

.... at present we content ourselves with restating our ideal. Unity for the human race by an inner oneness and not only by an external association of interests; the resurgence of man out of the merely animal and economic life or the merely intellectual and aesthetic into the glories of the spiritual existence; the pouring of the power of the spirit into the physical mould and mental instrument so that man may develop his manhood into that true supermanhood which shall exceed our present state as much as this exceeds the animal state from which science tells us that we have issued. These three are one; for man’s unity and man’s self-transcendence can come only by living in the Spirit.

(This is a slightly edited version of the article which appeared in vol. 2 of the “Arya”, pp.1-9)

Aurobindo Ghosh

Paul Richard

[The following extract has been taken from Chapter VII of the book entitled ‘*The Dawn Over Asia*’ by Paul Richard and published by Ganesh & Co, Madras, 1920.

Author’s Note: These addresses were originally delivered in Japan, and interpreted from my French into Japanese. I am indebted, with deep gratitude, to my great Brother, Sri Aurobindo Ghose, for their present English translation.]

My friends, it is not only my word but my heart that I bring to you. It is my heart that salutes your young and fine association. For it unites two things that I love ; one as one loves a mother—Asia, for Asia is the spiritual mother of the world; and the other as one loves a child—youth, the dawn of the future; for in you is the future of Asia, the future of the world.

And you are doing the work that should be done. Your society in creating the bonds of fraternity between students of different nations, is creating them also between those nations. In working to unify the thinking youth of Asia, it is working for the unity of Asia. It is unifying the Asia of tomorrow. For tomorrow Asia will be one.

In this unity there lie for her the promises of the future, of a higher life, a more perfect civilisation, with a great soul in it that shall be formed of that which is best in each. All the sensibility of Japan, all the intellectuality of China, all the spirituality of India will there enter into association. In this soul of the future, all the great thoughts of Asia will take their place. They will assemble together the gods of Vedism and of Shinto, the sister religions of Buddhism and Taoism, the pacified cults of Christianity and Islam. For all are only multiple forms of a single cult offered to the Infinite Being. It is this soul of the future that will be created by the man of the future. Not the superman of Nietzsche, the superman of the West, all the vanity and pride of whose force has only succeeded in bringing down in ruin upon him the old world, but the diviner man, the humaner god of Asia, creator of a new world. It is for this creation that the whole earth is being changed into a chaos; it is for this renewal, for this remoulding, that all the peoples are now in revolt against what they were, against what they wish no longer to be. And if men nowhere listen any longer to those who speak to them of human duties, it is because all, in the depths of their heart, feel awakening superhuman possibilities.

Therefore, I come to say to you: prepare yourselves, prepare yourselves for the magnificent tomorrow. Prepare in yourselves that magnificent day. For the hour is coming of the great things, the hour of the great events, and also of the great men, the divine

men of Asia. For there are already these men, these divine men—in Asia. All my life I have sought for them across the world. For all my life I have felt that they must exist somewhere in this world, that this world would die if they did not live. For they are its light, its heat, its life. It is in Asia that I have found the greatest among them, the leader, the hero of tomorrow.

He is a Hindu, he is named Aurobindo Ghose. He was born at Calcutta on the 15th August 1872. He is today 47 years old. While yet quite young he was sent to England to commence his studies. He remained there fourteen years. He acquired there all the knowledge of the West. And to him that did not suffice. He possesses also all the profound science, all the ancient wisdom of the East.

He returned to India at the age of twenty, was chosen for works of confidence by the Maharajah of Baroda, and occupied in the State an advantageous situation which would have satisfied the ambitions of many. But his were of another kind. In him lived the love of the Indian Motherland. Therefore he made this vow: “There is a burden on the breast of my mother. I will take no rest till I have delivered her.” He made too this greater vow: “One day I will see God face to face.” It is thus that he left one day the court of the Maharajah. As formerly the Buddha had done, he abandoned the sweets of his position, his worldly and material advantages. He departed to do his work, to accomplish his great and perilous mission.

At Calcutta to which he returned, he participated in the foundation of the National College, in order to save first of all the soul of his young fellow citizens from the alien domination. He participated also in the conduct of a free organ “*Bande Mataram*,” around which organised itself a large group of enthusiastic young men. He wrote and he spoke. He spoke, and as his voice came from the depths of the soul, from the depths of the past and the future. Bengal hearing him awoke. It was the beginning of the great Hindu Renaissance, the beginning of the national movement which afterwards, from year to year, from province to province, gained the whole of India, preparing the irresistible impetus of today, and the victory of tomorrow.

Then he was put in prison—the school of the great and the just. But as no crime could be proved against him, no crime other than that of being the inspired prophet of the Indian Motherland, the voice announcing her liberation, he was released at the end of a year. But in this prison he had understood that his human strength would not suffice, that he needed the strength of the gods. And the gods came and spoke to him. Henceforth he looked only towards Heaven. Henceforth he saw Heaven everywhere and the Divine in all beings. While he was being tried before the tribunal, he had this experience that he saw no longer before him men, judges, jailers and prisoners, but in each of them, in the most honoured as in the despicable, the one image of Krishna, the individual form of the infinite Brahman.

He wrote still and founded the “*Karmayogin*” But it was to give this message to his people: “There can be no material Mukti, unless there is first a spiritual Mukti”. Afterwards he retired into solitude. He came to the South of India, to Pondicherry, where ten years ago, by a providential course of events, I met him for the first time, there he entered in the silence of a yoga which deepened during five years. When I met him again after

these five years, he had gained the light, he had gained the power, the light owing to which nothing more henceforth, in heaven or on earth or in any world, can remain hidden from him. And the power through which everywhere his sovereign thought, without desire, without trouble, without haste, without fear, realises the will of the Eternal Truth.

Five other years have passed since then. Five years in the course of which, at my request, he has exposed in five volumes of a monthly publication, the most masterly, the most magnificent teaching of philosophy, of human and divine wisdom that men have ever received. Now, the day is coming when, after having been in the obscurity of his silence and retreat the saviour of India, he will become in the full light of day the Guru of Asia, the teacher of the world. For it is always from Asia that have come the Saviours and the Teachers of this world.

Today for the first time I proclaim in public his name. For it is without doubt you who should hear it the first. Let this name be henceforth to you, to your association, to the youth of Asia—to Asia, a symbol, a rallying cry, a programme.

For this name signifies Asia free and one—Asia resurgent. Asia in her glory!

(An address delivered to the “Students Asiatic Union” on May 3rd, 1919, at Waseda University in Tokio)

Prophet Of Nationalism And His Call

Dasharathi Sengupta

1

More than a century has passed since the publication of the *Doctrine of Passive Resistance*¹. More than a century has passed since the author himself left the shores of Bengal and retired from the turmoil of politics. More than sixty years have passed since the British left India to muddle through by herself. The person, whose innovative genius conceived and developed the Theory of Non-Cooperation as an effective technique of anti-colonial struggle during the days of Swadeshi Movement, left this world physically in December, 1950 – in less than two years after his dream of an independent India came to fruition. And the man who sought to apply this technique, in his own way and with some degree of success, ended at the hands of an assassin before independent India was six months old. This man, Mahatma Gandhi, is remembered today only on 2nd October and 30th January through ‘ramdhon’, charkha and spinning khadi, with floral tributes at Rajghat. And very few remember or care to revisit Sri Aurobindo’s early political writings (1893-1910)², even though these writings are not only seminal in nature but also open up new vistas. It is unfortunate that though we have detailed historical accounts of our national struggle, we hardly have any theory of nationalist movement. Sri Aurobindo’s early writings may, however, help us to build such a theory – a theory of praxis, and not some abstruse philosophical exercise.

2

It should be borne in mind that the Doctrine of Passive Resistance, as a theoretical construct by Sri Aurobindo, was not an isolated exercise in time or an occasional tract. It had an ideological source as well as a political background. The ideas presented and developed in this Doctrine were products of a deep study of progressive movements in Euro-American political history. They reveal a penetrating analysis of political reality pertaining to India. They are complemented by articles, notes and commentaries that preceded or followed the publication of the *Doctrine of Passive Resistance*. The latter lays down the strategy of mass movement in detail. But there is enough indication that the *New Lamps for Old* anticipated it more than a decade earlier. *Morality of Boycott* that followed the *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* was a fitting reply to those who were disturbed by what they thought to be trends of violence within the Swadeshi Movement. The introductory chapter of *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance* (11.04.1917) deals, among other things, with the rationale of freeing India from British rule. The same theme recurs in *Nationalism Not Extremism* published in *Bande Mataram* on 26.04.1907. All

these writings belonging to the Bengal Chapter of Sri Aurobindo’s life reveal the ideological undercurrent of his political Vedantism.

Political Vedantism is an attitude that rejects the Gandhian doctrine of ‘End-means’ interchangeability as irrelevant when the stakes are very high. It judges the rationality of means not in the light of universal ethical norms, but in the light of goal-oriented strategy. Let us listen to Sri Aurobindo’s own words :

Vedantism accepts no distinction of true or false religions, but considers only what will lead more or less surely, more or less quickly to *moksa*, spiritual emancipation and the realisation of the Divinity within. Our attitude is a political Vedantism. India, free, one and indivisible, is the divine realisation to which we move, – emancipation our aim; to that end each nation must practise the political creed which is the most suited to its temperament and circumstances... But whatever leads only to continued subjection must be spewed out as mere vileness and impurity³.

Let us take a humble reappraisal of Sri Aurobindo’s views on passive resistance in the light of this political Vedantism.

3

The Doctrine of Passive Resistance appears to have anticipated the succeeding course of our freedom movement. It seems to lay down the techniques and prerequisites of future Gandhian movements. Though there are important and significant differences between Sri Aurobindo’s theory of Resistance and that of Gandhi, there is remarkable convergence of views also in some areas at least. Both find willing cooperation by subjects as the key to stable and enduring subjection. While referring to the need for passive resistance, Sri Aurobindo wrote in most clear terms that it is ‘especially suitable to countries where the Government depends mainly for the continuance of its administration on the voluntary help and acquiescence of the subject people’⁴. This finds almost an echo in Gandhi. ‘They (the English) are not in India because of their strength’, he tells his reader in *Hind Swaraj*, ‘but because we keep them’⁵.

Both Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi hit upon Non-Cooperation as a strategy and a weapon to undermine colonial rule. Non-Cooperation, Boycott and Swadeshi were different aspects of the same strategy. The Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-22 followed a programme of Boycott that was laid down more than a decade ago in Sri Aurobindo’s *Doctrine of Passive Resistance*. Would it then be historically wrong to say that though Gandhi organised and led the Non-Cooperation Movement, he was not the author of its agenda and that he was carrying, in a sense, the political legacy of Sri Aurobindo?

To make Boycott or Non-Cooperation an effective weapon against their political opponent, both Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi turned towards the masses almost simultaneously – Gandhi in South Africa and Sri Aurobindo in India. There was, however, one crucial difference. Gandhi’s starting-point was civil disobedience as an active protest against racial discrimination in a land which was a part of British Empire, but not of India. The scope of this technique was broadened only with time and in the course of

Indian National Movement. Sri Aurobindo's sole concern was India and her deliverance from the colonial yoke. His programme was not intended to remedy any particular malady. It was a direct challenge to colonial authority. It sought to fight not the symptoms, but the disease itself. It was an integrated programme that provided direction to Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), to Civil Disobedience Movement, known also as Salt Satyagraha (1930-34), and even in a sense to Quit India Movement of 1942.

The latter was a violent outburst as un-Gandhian as imaginable, but not beyond the ambit of Sri Aurobindo's scheme of Resistance. He, as is well known, never absolutised non-violent resistance as a matter of immutable principle. Violence for him – or non-violence for that matter – was not intrinsic to a movement against an oppressive regime. In Sri Aurobindo's theory of resistance, like that of John Locke (1637-1734)⁶, they are tactical considerations dictated by external determinants. [This, strangely enough, is also the view of one who organised and led one of the bloodiest revolutions in human history – V I Lenin.]

The question of violence or non-violence – to put it differently – is situational and not integral to the strategy of resistance. A movement can be non-violent as long as the adversary acts within the laws of law, as long as it does not seek to undermine a legitimate struggle through illegitimate means. Sri Aurobindo is very categorical in prescribing a qualitative change in the form of struggle if the opposite happens. He writes in very clear terms :

To submit to illegal or violent methods of coercion, to accept outrage and hooliganism as part of the legal procedure of the country is to be guilty of cowardice, and, by dwarfing national manhood, to sin against the divinity within ourselves and the divinity in our motherland. The moment coercion of this kind is attempted, passive resistance ceases and active resistance becomes a duty. If the instruments of the executive choose to disperse our meeting by breaking the heads of those present, the right of self-defence entitles us not merely to defend our heads but *to retaliate on those of the head-breakers*⁷. (italics mine)

Perfectly predictive and vindicative of the events of August, 1942! What Gandhi himself said about the 'un-Gandhian' nature of Quit India Movement is also noteworthy in this connexion. Refusing to condemn the violence resorted to by the participants in that movement in absolute terms, he went to the length of saying that if the government unleashed unprecedented violence on unharmed people and the latter commit untoward acts in desperation, '...history will pronounce their violence to be non-violent in comparison with the violence of the government...'⁸. Gandhi not only echoes Sri Aurobindo in these lines, but also appears to accept his observation that '...beyond a certain point passive resistance puts a strain on human endurance which our nature cannot endure'⁹.

4

Sri Aurobindo's *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* was published in the second half of April, 1907. The time of its publication is noteworthy and historically significant. Swadeshi Movement was gathering momentum in Bengal, but its spread was uneven in

other parts of India. 'Counter-elite' movements, that resented Bengali domination in services and professions, acted as a break on radical Swadeshi politics in some provinces¹⁰. Moderate stronghold in some areas, Hindu-Muslim conflict in others (like in United Province and Bengal itself) prevented spread of extremism, both horizontal and vertical. Despite these, Swadeshi made notable progress in Punjab, Bengal, Madras Residency and specially in Maharashtra under Tilak's leadership.

But the scenario as a whole was confused, both politically and ideologically. There were divisions and conflicts within the political section of Indians. They were mainly between the still entrenched Moderates, who favoured collaboration with the British rulers as a way to achieve Dominion status at some future date and the radicals who demanded complete independence. [Sri Aurobindo, incidentally, was the first to voice this demand]. The former also had a loyalist section whose constituents were satisfied with the 'efficient' British rule and a limited share in the administration. The latter – the radicals – rejected collaborationist politics. They favoured and urged for confrontationist politics. They regarded and identified themselves as 'Nationalists'. It is the older Congress leadership who branded them as extremists. [The name, unfortunately, stuck] The difference between them was multi-dimensional, not merely political or ideological. Its roots ran deeper.

There was, to begin with, a generational gap. The Moderates belonged to a generation that prospered professionally under the British rule. A gainful land revenue system also favoured them. The Extremists belonged to a generation that faced a shrinking rather than an expanding job-market. The closing decades of 19th century saw a rapid increase in educated unemployment and no sign of industrial growth. They found agriculture stagnating within the framework of a crisis-ridden zamindari system. The British rule was not a 'Divine Dispensation' for them; it was rather, a curse. The new generation could not share with the Moderates a belief in the progressive role of colonial government, nor a faith in the British sense of justice. Unlike the older one, the younger generation had to put up with 'white racism' baring its fangs in commercial, professional and academic fields¹¹. The Moderates had found in English political development the model for India's political progress. The Extremists drew inspiration from continental radicalism, particularly from French Revolution. Different social basis and background had shaped their political outlook and their attitude towards the British rule¹². The Moderates were urban middle class products. They hailed generally from well-connected and comfortably well-off families. The Extremists emerged or were recruited from a comparatively lower strata, from comparatively poorer sections of middle class.

Thus two political classes with two parallel political programmes and strategies faced each other in a situation of conflict. The older strategy of constitutional agitation stood rejected by the rising generation. The latter advocated a programme of mass-mobilisation and mass-agitation, which the former found both immature and premature. This political situation was made more confusing by the emergence of terrorism, to which a section of frustrated Extremists were veering. The latter drew inspiration from diverse sources – from Russian nihilism, from revolutionary anarchism, from Bankim and Vivekananda and from a novel political interpretation of Gita's 'Karmayoga'. The

terrorists avoided open political activities, operating through secret societies and groups. They were all for what is known as the ‘Cult of Bomb’. But this line – the romantic, the spectacular, the violent, and, of course, risky – also attracted only a few and could not make much headway among the people. The latter admired them but also took care to avoid them.

5

A deeper study of Sri Aurobindo’s *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* would reveal that, from a historical perspective, it was dialectical and synthetic in character. It presented Passive Resistance as a negation of the other two methods – one depending on persuasion and collaboration, the other advocating terror or violence. At the same time Sri Aurobindo’s doctrine was an advancement on both. It neither supported diffidence in dealing with the British might nor adventurous daredevilry to rouse the masses. If politics is the art of the possible, passive resistance was good politics. It was a feasible mid-point, a golden mean between two forms of political movement. It sought to mobilise the masses and train them in defiance. But training them in procurement and use of arms had no place in Sri Aurobindo’s political agenda. To appreciate its novelty, one has to understand the core difference between Passive Resistance and the other two methods.

Though poles apart in terms of ideology and programme, the Moderates and the terrorists had one thing in common – an elitist approach to national movement. Both excluded the masses and sought to involve a few, though for different reasons. The Moderates had no faith in the possibility or efficacy of mass-movement. They assumed that for the time being political activity should be confined to ‘educated classes’. Hence they had no programme which could enthuse or involve the masses. Nor did the Moderates care to build a mass-base. The absence of a mass-base, in its turn, led them to political moderation. As they could not turn to the masses to build up political pressure, they could hardly move beyond ‘prayers and petition’. Being a small westernised elite, theirs was the helplessness of number¹³.

The terrorists or the national revolutionaries excluded the masses from their political agenda for a different reason. Their main appeal was to the lower middle class youth, mostly urban and educated, unemployed or under-employed. They could not penetrate the rural areas or the masses. This was a historical constraint. But more important was the constraint imposed by their strategy itself which required that they could and would recruit only a few. They were brought up on the ideology of ‘action’, and not on an ideology of ‘movement’. Programmes and preparations related to ‘action’ could not be carried out openly. They needed secrecy. They needed indoctrinated cadres absolutely dedicated to the Cause. They demanded rigid discipline and unflinching loyalty from their recruits. *The latter were expected to die for the people; but they were hardly trained to die with the people.*

Sri Aurobindo’s *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* has to be placed and studied in this historical context. It was a remarkably innovative synthesis, representing the third alternative strategy of anti-colonial national movement. It advocated confrontation,

but within the limits of law. It called for mobilisation of masses, but not for violent rebellion. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a leading Moderate leader excluded three things from constitutional agitation in a speech delivered from the Congress platform (1907). They were rebellion, aiding or abetting a foreign invasion and resort to crime¹⁴. Passive resistance was, by this token, nothing unconstitutional. It is not a violation of law if I purchase only indigenous goods. I shall be perfectly within my rights to send my children to schools outside the official education system. There cannot be any legal bar on resolution of disputes by the parties through peaceful methods of their own choice. There is no violation of the constitutional law if we do not go ‘to the executive for help or advice’ or if we do not allow ‘any paternal interference in our public activities’. The only breach of legal obligation would have been the refusal to pay taxes. Sri Aurobindo was prudent enough not to advocate such a step. For that would ‘...inevitably bring about the last desperate struggle between the forces of national aspiration and alien repression’¹⁵. The nation, Sri Aurobindo rightly realised, was not yet prepared for this showdown. The task he sought to assign immediate priority to was preparing and organising the people for resistance to colonial rule.

6

One of the prerequisites of successful passive resistance, as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo, was mass-involvement and its distinguishing feature was reliance on the people. For programmes proposed could not be effectively pursued without largescale and active popular participation – be it economic boycott, boycott of administration of law courts or of educational institutions. This would not or need not be the case with constitutional politics or terrorist programmes. None of them relied on the people. Neither of them required popular participation or expected sacrifice from them. Sri Aurobindo found Moderate politics confined to the drawing-rooms of a microscopic westernised Indians, some of whose leaders carried ‘the methods of the bar into politics’¹⁶ – a meaningful barb directed against Phirozeshah Mehta. The terrorists or the Nationalists, on the other hand, called for selfless and heroic sacrifice, but only from a relatively small minority. Masses were precluded from their politics also.

It is this idea of placing ‘People’ at the centre that raises passive resistance to a higher level even in comparison to revolutionary terrorism aiming at liberation – political or economic. The valour displayed by the participants in the latter may be awe-inspiring and spectacular. Their courage and readiness to pay for their convictions with their life are incomparable qualities. Still passive resistance is a higher form of struggle. The former, according to Sri Aurobindo, calls for sacrifice only from a small minority, while the latter demands a comprehensive and long-term sacrifice from the entire population. ‘It demands a country where the capacity for extreme self-denial is part of the national character or for centuries has taken a prominent place in the national discipline....it requires also an iron endurance, tenacity, doggedness, far above anything for the more usual military revolt or sanguinary revolution’¹⁷. It asks the people to venture into uncharted land and be ready to face unforeseen hardships or possible anarchy. Passive Resistance may be less bold or aggressive, but as Sri Aurobindo puts it with great clarity it ‘calls for perhaps as much heroism ... and certainly more universal endurance and suffering. In other methods, a daring minority purchase with their blood the freedom

of the millions; but for passive resistance it is necessary that all should share in the struggle and privation'¹⁸.

Passive Resistance, then, was a call for democratisation of a national movement. It laid down a programme of harnessing the power of the Demos for a national purpose. [The word 'Democracy', incidentally, is a compound of two Greek words – Demos (people) and Krotos (power)]. Irrespective of time and space, Passive Resistance represents a strategy of how Democratic Might can be applied against an oppressive adversary vastly superior in terms of material strength. It should be borne in mind that Democracy for Sri Aurobindo was not about elections, representative government and majority rule. His focus was on its content and not on its form. He was not concerned with whether a legitimate struggle was violent or non-violent. The crucial question for him was whether and to what extent the struggle had a democratic dimension, the determining factor being the degree of active popular participation.

Herein lies a major difference between Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo. Though both turned towards the people as object of mobilisation, the main question with Gandhi was not how many participated in Satyagraha. It is a non-violent moral protest and has to remain so if its goal is to be realised. A non-violent protest by a single individual is preferable to a violent mass movement. The question of material effectiveness or results was not very relevant to Gandhi. One of his weakest and least effective of campaigns was Individual Satyagraha (1940-41). The sudden end of Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22) shows that Gandhi would withdraw any mass movement, however formidable and effective, if it crossed the limits set by the principles of non-violence. He knew that few shared his commitment to non-violence, but that did not deter him from willing to strike a lonely furrow. One of his favourite songs begins with Rabindranath's stirring line : *Jodi tor daak shuney keu na aashey tabey ekla chalo re* (March alone if nobody responds to your call).

There was, however, no '*ekla chalo re*' for Sri Aurobindo. As a prophet of Nationalism, he was with the masses. His idea of nation was wider than that identified by his contemporaries. It was not confined to the urban middle class segment of society. He equated Nation with People – the silent and oppressed majority waiting for deliverance. His call for national struggle was a call for people's revolt. His ultimate call for sacrifice was not for solitary figures engaged in dissociated encounters, but for people grouped as masses. Politics, for Sri Aurobindo, 'is concerned with masses of mankind and not with individuals'¹⁹. It is the people who finally decide upon the course and character of the movement. It cannot be shackled by principles of prevailing ethics and subjective morality including the principle of non-violence. Gandhi learnt this in 1922 and again in 1942. But for Sri Aurobindo, the Nationalist, violence or non-violence ceases to be relevant in the course of a mass upsurge against any oppressive rule, foreign or native.

7

The political task Sri Aurobindo took upon himself in the pre-Pondicherry chapter of his life was to smash the socio-economic barriers that had fenced off the political arena from the larger segment of society. Passive Resistance was conceived as an

implement to achieve that purpose also. But those who would use it with decisive effect had to be roused from their long and deep slumber. Sri Aurobindo was one of the earliest nationalists to direct his attention towards them, to perceive their potentialities, to place his trust in them and to anticipate their role. Thus, he writes with reference to evolution of Nationalism in India

And Nationalism grew as Krishna grew who ripened to strength and knowledge, not in the courts of princes and the schools of the Brahmins, *but in the obscure and despised homes of the poor and ignorant...* in the hearts of young men and boys many of whom could not speak a word of English²⁰. [Italics mine]

This reminds us of Vivekananda's earlier call for the New India to emerge from the huts of peasants, from the hovels of cobblers and sweepers, from factory floors and bazaars²¹. The idea behind this call, however, found its earliest expression in the following prophetic words of Sri Aurobindo written even before Swamiji's triumphant return to India :

The proletariat among us is sunk in ignorance and overwhelmed with distress. But with that distressed and ignorant proletariat, – now that the middle class is proved deficient in sincerity, power and judgment – with that proletariat resides, whether we like it or not, our sole assurance of hope, our chance in the future²².

Sri Aurobindo returns to the theme in the last article of the series entitled '*New Lamps For Old*' :

Yet the proletariat is, as I have striven to show, the real key of the situation. Torpid he is and immobile; he is nothing of an actual force, but he is a very great potential force, and *whoever succeeds in understanding and eliciting his strength, becomes by the very fact master of the future*²³. [Italics mine]

These lines find echo in Vivekananda. The ideas permeating them reverberate in the speeches of the latter. Vivekananda looked forward to the time when the Sudras, the toiling masses, would inherit the earth. His theory of historical cycles predicted such a phenomenon. He even asserted that the middle class – the *bhadralok* class – had neither any future nor any historical role. He urged them to depart from the scene and leave the arena to the masses²⁴. Yet and in spite of all these, in chronological terms, it was not Vivekananda who was the earliest or the original author of the concept of *sudra-jagaran*. Sri Aurobindo preceded him almost imperceptibly and significantly.

These ideas of a young man, a thoroughbred Cantabrigian not even twenty-five years old, contain two visions. The first one is that of '*sudra-jagaran*' – arousal of the submerged. The second one is that of a mass movement organised and led by a charismatic mass leader. The second vision may well remind us of Gandhi. Whatever be his faults and failures in the eyes of, or in the judgment of, his critics he definitely was

the first leader who succeeded in drawing the masses into the vortex of freedom movement, into inspired and selfless political participation on their part. Sri Aurobindo's words quoted above (see ref. no.23) brings Gandhi's Dandi March (1930) to mind – a march by a sixty-year old man at the head of a swelling crowd determined to break an apparently inconsequential law. Gandhi fulfilled a visionary's hope, if only in parts.

8

Swaraj – self-government – is the other side of Passive Resistance. Unlike what Rabindranath and others thought, the latter was not merely negative in its methods and operation. For Sri Aurobindo's doctrine also laid down a mechanism for developing 'atmashakti' and the political prerequisites of what Rabindranath termed 'swadeshi samaj'²⁵. His call for passive resistance was not merely denying consent to be ruled and rejection of cooperation with the ruler. It also represented a course towards self-sufficiency and self-governance. It was about developing self-governing institutions that would make colonial dependence redundant. Thus in Section IV of the *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* Sri Aurobindo writes:

... self-development and such a scheme of passive resistance are supplementary... We cannot have the industrial boycott without Swadeshi and the expansion of indigenous industries... Just as Swadeshi is the natural accompaniment of an industrial boycott, so also arbitration stands in the same relation to a judicial boycott, national education to an educational boycott, a league of mutual defence to an executive boycott²⁶.

Passive Resistance, hence, is a way to build an alternative government. It initiates a process of transforming means to an end. Thus settlement of disputes through arbitration instead of lawsuits is a boycott of colonial judiciary as well as achievement of Swaraj in the administration of justice. The goal does not lie at the end of the road; it is achieved progressively, by degrees, as one moves along the path chalked out by the strategy of resistance. This is 'interchangeability of means and end' – an idea developed later on by Gandhi on one of the pillars of Satyagraha. It also had, like that of Gandhi, a moral component. It also emphasised the causal relation between 'doing' and 'being'. There is, however, one important difference between the two. The moral orientation of this aspect of Passive Resistance is political and collectivist, whereas it is apolitical and individualistic in respect of Gandhi's Satyagraha. The difference is also evident in their contrasting views about passive resistance as a learning process. To Gandhi, passive resistance is a training in non-violent civil disobedience by the individual self, a training in the use of soul-force²⁷. But to Sri Aurobindo, more concerned at that period of life with the national self than with an isolated individual self, found in passive resistance a way to develop moral qualities necessary for self-government. These qualities, he writes, had become 'atrophied by long disuse in our people and can only be restored either by the healthy air of a free national life... or by their rigorous exercise in the intensity of a national struggle for freedom... Passive Resistance affords the best possible training for these qualities'²⁸.

We find the same idea of passive resistance as a school of Swaraj repeated in one of the seminal speeches of Sri Aurobindo delivered at Kishoregunj, Mymensingh, on 26 April, 1908²⁹. There we also find the same equation involving boycott, self-help and swaraj. There also Sri Aurobindo refers, though indirectly, to the moral dynamism of passive resistance. Swaraj, he declares, is the organisation of national self-help, national self-dependence. Alien domination leads to the atrophy of national organs. The whole of national life is swallowed by this dependence on the alien power. 'Swaraj', writes Sri Aurobindo, 'will only be possible if this habit of subservience is removed and replaced by a habit of self-help'³⁰. In other words, a change in national psychology is demanded. This can come about only through the practice of boycott and swadeshi in every sphere of our national life. Passive resistance, in short, is an effective way to revive those qualities that are necessary to build and to operate institutions of self-rule.

9

If we study Sri Aurobindo's *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* from such a positive angle, we may wonder whether the term, even though a rejection of 'non-resistance', is not a misnomer. The former lays down a programme that demands intense activity and precludes passivity. Both in the Introduction and Section VII of the *Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, Sri Aurobindo refers to Defensive Resistance as a more comprehensive term that brings out the essence of his doctrine. It is worth recollecting that while the spiritual source of his Doctrine is the spirit of Gita and Vedanta, its intellectual roots can be traced to French and Irish radicalism. They may have issued from different soils and may have flowered into different traditions, yet they have one thing in common: they advocate activism and reject passivity in the face of adversity.

This is why charity for the adversary, passive resistance, legality of action or non-violence were never sacrosanct principles with the man engaged intensely and wholeheartedly in the politics of freedom movement. The passage of resistance from passive to active stage was for him a progress, and not a deviation from values and principles like Truth or Ahimsa, as Gandhi thought after Chauri-Chaura³¹. Truth, Sri Aurobindo believes, has a different connotation in politics, or even in different phases of politics to be more precise. The truth of Kurukshetra happens to be different from that of 'Shanti Parva', and Ahimsa as a principle of personal conduct is irrelevant in a public activity like politics. As Sri Aurobindo puts it succinctly 'Politics is concerned with masses of mankind and not with individuals. To ask masses of mankind to act as saints ... is to ignore human nature'³². He asserts unhesitatingly and without qualification that 'Politics is the ideal of the Kshatriya, and the morality of the Kshatriya ought to govern our political actions. To impose in politics the Brahmanical duty of saintly sufferance is to preach *varnasankara*'³³. What Sri Aurobindo means by these words is clear, logical and precise. Politics has its own dynamics. It sets its own goals and fashions its own methods. Ethics of the latter is conditioned by the rationality of the former. Politics, in other words, has its own laws. They issue from *Kshatradharma* – rules of conduct of the Kshatriya – and not from Brahmanic ideals of non-violence, saintly love and saintly sufferance. *Kshatradharma*, like any other dharma, is attached to a role. The role is determined by a mission, by a vocation. To Sri Aurobindo, liberating India from the

clutches of colonial rule was both. One of the demands this dharma — *Kshatradharma* — makes on its votary is unselfish and uncompromising devotion to the Cause, even if that leads to death on the gory field of Kurukshetra (in a figurative sense).

This was the call for Passive Resistance. A deeper reflection would suggest that this call was not primarily directed towards the masses as such, even though Boycott and Non-Cooperation demanded their mobilisation and participation. The main target audience of the call was middle class. It was this class, which represented, in demographic terms, a huge market for British goods, supplied nuts, bolts and cogs to the machinery of colonial administration, and sustained the colonial educational system both as tutors and pupils. It was, to be precise, the ‘historical bloc’ (in Gramscian sense) that generated consent for the colonial rule. Passive resistance demanded discontinuation of this role, this collaboration. That is why it hardly contains any programme for the peasants and the workers. If the latter were to be roused from their stupor, the umbilical cord between the colonial rule and the middle class had to be cut. The latter must no longer stretch its hands towards the former in supplication or to sustain it. They should be spread towards the marginal and the submerged. This, in its turn, demanded a profound psychological change and a real political conversion on the part of the middle class. The call of Passive Resistance was also, in the final analysis, a call for transformation.

Notes and References

1. The *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* was serially published in *Bande Mataram* from 11-24 April, 1907
2. *Bande Mataram*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, is an authentic compilation of all early political writings of Sri Aurobindo. They cover a period roughly of fifteen years (1893-1908). Quotations from 1972 edition of the volume have been used in this article. The rest of Sri Aurobindo’s political pieces and articles, written before his departure for Pondicherry, are to be found in the volumes of *Karmayogin*. For the sake of convenience, *Bande Mataram*, *New Lamps For Old* and the *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* have been abbreviated in this article as BM, NLO and DPR respectively.
3. DPR, Section 7, BM, p.122
4. DPR, Section 4, BM, p.101
5. *Hind Swaraj*, Navjivan Trust, Chapter VII
6. Published in 1690, John Locke’s *Two Treaties on Civil Government* justified the Glorious Revolution of 1688 that marked the end of absolute Monarchy and the beginning of Parliament’s supremacy in Britain. The most notable feature of this event was that not a single drop of blood was shed to bring about this revolutionary change that was later legitimised by the Bill of Rights (1689).
7. DPR, Section 6, BM, pp.114-5
8. Shukla, Chandrashekhar, cited in *Evolution of Political Philosophy of Gandhi*, Bhattacharya, B, Chapter 9 (Reference)
9. DPR, Section 3, BM, p.99
10. Sarkar, Sumit, *Modern India*, 1983, Chapter IV, p.112, MacMillan India (Paperback)

11. See Sarkar for a brief idea of how pervasive white racism was (Chapter II, pp.22-24). The reaction of the Anglo-Indian elite, ruling and non-ruling, including the English Press, against the Ilbert Bill (1883) was a typical representative phenomenon.
12. For a preliminary idea about the differences between the Moderates and the Extremists, see *Elements of Continuity and Change in the Early Nationalist Activity* by Bipan Chandra (*Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*, Orient Longman). Chandra’s article on Tilak, included in the same volume, also makes interesting reading. It brings out the general political stand of all the Extremists including Sri Aurobindo, whose nationalism the author characterises as mystic.
13. Bipan Chandra, *Early Nationalist Activity*.
14. Speeches, 2nd edition, pp.1105-06. Natesan & Co, New Delhi, quoted in Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*, p.129.
15. DPR, Section 4, BM, p.105
16. NLO (2), BM, p.13
17. DPR, Section 1, BM, p.87. Gandhi also appears to have perceived this aspect of Indian national character.
18. Ibid, Section 3, p.99.
19. *Morality of Boycott*, BM, p.124
20. *Life of nationalism*, BM, p.598
21. Works (Bengali), vol.6, 4th edition, Udbodhan, p.82
22. NLO (7), BM, p.44.
23. NLO (9), BM, p.54.
24. For Swamiji’s concept of Sudra Jagaran see Works, vol.VI, pp.381-2, 7th edition, Mayabati, Advaita Ashram.
25. Rabindranath’s concept of Swadeshi Samaj is part of his broader theory of National Self-help, presented and elaborated in a number of essays published collectively under the title *Atmashakti* in 1905. Refer to Rabindra Rachanabali, vol.XIII, Govt. of West Bengal, 1990.
26. DPR, Section 4, BM, p.103
27. *Hind Swaraj*, Chapter XVII
28. DPR, Section 3, BM, p.99
29. *Palli Samiti*, BM, pp.884-5
30. Ibid, p.885
31. Chauri-Chaura is the name of the village where in retaliation to their high-handedness and murderous firing, angry peasants burnt 22 policemen alive on 5th January, 1922. Following this incident, the Non- Cooperation Movement was abruptly called off by Gandhi on 11th February, 1922.
32. *Morality of Boycott*, BM, p.124
33. Ibid, p.125.

Identity And Difference : Some Reflections On Sri Aurobindo's Socio-Political Views

Aparna Banerjee

I

Human beings have both similarities and differences. We cannot say that the uniformities that they share are more important than their differences. The idea of justice cannot be addressed properly unless human differences are given due respect. In this paper, I have discussed this issue within the specific context of Sri Aurobindo's socio-political philosophy. In this context, I shall examine the question whether Sri Aurobindo's view about nationalism was hegemonic.

II

"The first principle of human unity", Sri Aurobindo wrote, "...should be a system of free and natural groupings which would leave no room for internal discords, mutual incompatibilities and repression and revolt as led race and race or people and people."¹ Sri Aurobindo had the right insight that the notion of the individual or the subject cannot be divorced from the notion of the group completely. Yet, the importance of human creativity and freedom is a central theme in all his writings— more specifically in his socio-political writings. The dangers of imposed unities have been pointed out by him with innumerable historical examples of the disasters and failures which these lead to. The puzzles and tensions that arise in man's endeavour to balance natural differences with natural cravings for unity, did not evade his attention. He, thus, points out that "Nothing is more obscure to humanity or less seized by its understanding, whether in the power that moves it or the sense of the aim towards which it moves, than its own communal and collective life... We talk of democracy, aristocracy and autocracy, collectivism and individualism, imperialism and nationalism, the State and the commune, capitalism and labour; we advance hasty generalisations and make absolute systems which are positively announced today only to be abandoned perforce tomorrow; we espouse causes and ardent enthusiasms whose triumph turns to an early disillusionment and then forsake them for others, perhaps for those that we have taken so much trouble to destroy"²

The problem has become more acute in today's world. Human history has come a

long way. When the first human beings started to move beyond small tribes and villages and started building up larger societies, they still had little influence beyond their local lives. However, through the development of science and technology in the last two centuries, human communities have gradually started to become a single web of commerce and information. This, in one sense, has brought the whole of human community closer. We have now come to a point where we can realistically imagine contacting any one of our global neighbours. This has also increased our willingness to understand those who are not the members of our families or nations. However, when we come across different cultural norms and practices which contradict our own beliefs and values, the ideal of unity begins to appear challenging.

The individual has various affiliations which makes his endeavour to unite with others so difficult. Man... "belongs also to his race-type, his class-type, his mental, vital, physical, spiritual type in which he resembles some, differs from others."³ The question is, given this reality of human nature are political structures necessarily hegemonic involving the marginalisation of some people? Today, post-structural and post-modern politics point out the needs of the marginalised other— women, non-white people, the poor and so on. While the conflicting needs of different people are in this way coming out in the forefront, revealing different types of silenced voices and their need for justice, these at the same time generate problems in so far as there is now an insistence on the universalisation of difference.

Traditionally philosophical approaches to moral discourse have grounded themselves in unified foundational accounts. The Kantian and Utilitarian accounts of morality may be mentioned in this context. But the worry of the post-structuralists is about the perniciousness of unified founding accounts; for they tend to force a blind conformity and marginalise those who do not conform. Thus, for example, Foucault has argued that the collusion between the idea of sexuality as the key to our identity and the project of normalisation as a moral ideal produces many of the patterns of conformity and marginalisation that we see around us today. For this reason, Foucault has tended to hold the position that those who are oppressed ought to be allowed to express their desires for themselves. This, however, need not mean a total rejection of values. The contrast between universal perspectives and aesthetic appreciation has been emphasized by Deluze, for instance. By 'aesthetic appreciation' is perhaps meant the enjoyment of a life in the particular vision it has or the qualities it possesses.

'Normalisation' is the process, according to Foucault, by which people are classified as more or less normal relative to a chosen category or activity. On the other hand, he holds that a classification of abnormal is made to constitute justification for intervention in order to make a person normal. The distinction is gradational and in the case of abnormality intervention is almost always justified. Hence, the areas of life, in which one may be left alone can become very restricted. The process of normalisation is insidious both because it narrows down the possibilities of living that people might engage in and because it reinforces other oppressive social relationships. Foucault discusses such constraints regarding psychology, sexuality and medicine. Derrida, the postmodern thinker, points out the constraining functions of psychoanalysis and philosophy. Lyotard had turned to the constraining forces which language can take.

In politics, if we want to arrive at a just social order and if people are not to be told what is good for them, then they need to be able to express their own needs and desires. Thus, political activists too need to listen more to the people themselves than to the experts. If power is not centred in a single source, then the attempt to locate a 'grand' politics that seeks change only from some specific privileged position like a nation, is hopeless. These are merely attempts to replace the locus of oppression into a different context.

Such post-structuralist readings are now being made in the context of our nationalist history. It is now being argued, e.g., that while certain articulations of the Indian National Self for both the secular and the religious discourses have been the same, there is also considerable difference. This difference centres around the question as to who belongs to the nation and in the assertion of the primacy of the Hindu people. The discourse of nationalism has within it certain tensions and contradictions regarding the Indian identity.

We may give a brief classification of the themes of this discourse as it has been made by Gitika Commuri. "Briefly, the discourse themes identified through thematic analysis are as follows. The first revolves around the theme that India is a 'great civilisation'. It, therefore, emphasises achievements of the past and claims that the seeds of the modern are visible in one of the most ancient sites of the past. It also claims that historically India had wielded cultural and political influence in Asia and out of this flows the argument that currently India has an important role to play as a great power on the world stages. The second theme emphasises that the Indian nation has existed for thousands of years and is not in fact a creation of British colonialism. The third theme seeks to delineate the original or authentic constituent peoples of this nation; it seeks to identify the 'original' inhabitants of India, and it is in this discourse that culture and religion play an important role. It is also in this discourse that clear distinctions are drawn between Self and Other. A fourth discourse portrays the Indian Self as a tolerant, inclusive and peaceful persona as opposed to the aggressive Other. It seeks to argue that India has historically been invaded and violated, but it itself has never been an aggressor. Within this discourse theme, there is also an emphasis on understanding India as a non-materialistic and spiritual entity, thereby making it unique on the world stage. In these discourses, we shall see an articulation of what 'we' are and associated with that an implicit or explicit understanding of what 'we' are not."⁴

During the nationalist movement, Sri Aurobindo had based his demand for independence on the inherent right of people to have self-rule as against foreign domination. But, at the same time, he had used Hindu religious terminology in his speeches and writings. In fact, all the above-mentioned four constructions of the Indian reality may be ascribed to his writings. He has, also, been accused of building an exclusionist Indian identity thereby, that has oversimplified the Indian national character, neglecting the inclusion of the 'non-Hindus'. The main aim of this paper is to contest such an interpretation of Sri Aurobindo's view. The accusation seems all the more interesting because in his later writings one idea that predominates is the danger of forced unity which he calls uniformity. He has very carefully distinguished it from real unity. One

possibility is that during the Pondicherry days he had changed his earlier sectarian view about national identity. However, I shall try to argue that this interpretation is not plausible because there is a clear continuity between his views during the two phases of his life.

III

The historical context of the Indian nationalist movement should be taken into account if we try to analyse Sri Aurobindo's idea of nationalism. The nationalist movement, under the leadership of Aurobindo Ghosh, had taken place within an already developing tradition. We have also to keep in mind the fact that western thought was not completely avoided by the nationalists. Thus, western historical studies made by European Indologists were accepted in so far as it could be justified as a resurrection of India's past. Western research in Indian history seemed to have come to the agreement that there was in Indian history a classical age of Hinduism which was followed by a period of medieval decline. This was for many the main reason why the country had been vanquished quickly by the Muslim invaders. The reading of Muslim rule as despotic also provided a historical justification for intervention to the colonial rulers. On the other hand, the nationalist movement received its impetus from thinkers like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Swami Vivekananda whose nationalist discourse was predominantly religious. It was within this continuing discourse that Aurobindo Ghosh gave expression to his nationalist views. Yet, at the same time, while participating in the on-going nationalist discourse, he did not accept the interpretation of western Indologists regarding the ancient and the medieval periods of Indian history. Reacting against western criticisms he says, "The ancient and mediaeval life of India was not wanting in any of the things that make up the vivid interesting activity of human existence. On the contrary, it was extraordinarily full of colour and interest."⁵ He points out that while the Rishis in ancient India had been great saints "...there have been also the remarkable achievements of statesmen and rulers, from the first dawn of ascertainable history which comes in with the striking figures of Chandragupta, Chanakya, Asoka, the Gupta emperors and goes down through the multitude of famous Hindu and Mahomedan figures of the middle age to quite modern times."⁶ This shows that he does not accept the interpretation of medieval Indian history as a period of decline. This is one instance of the fact that through all his earnest efforts to highlight a unified national identity Aurobindo Ghosh, the nationalist leader, did not make an oversimplification of the Indian cultural variety.

One theme that is uncontroversially present in all of Sri Aurobindo's political writings is that the nation was characterised by spirituality. If we turn to his idea of nationalism we find that it was based on the idea of Vedantic Hinduism; but he was sure that it was universal in nature with a natural capacity to unite not only all Indians but also the whole world. This view he held in his early writing in *Karmayogin* where he characterises it as encompassing not only Christianity, Mahomedanism and Buddhism but also science and every form of faith. Clearly, while speaking of Hindu nationalism, he did not mean Hinduism as a faith that is practised by a certain specific group of people.

In spite of an element of essentialism in it, Sri Aurobindo's socio-political philosophy cannot be characterised as Hindu revivalist. In fact, he was convinced that what he understood by Hinduism was 'the voice of the Eternal within the heart of all.'⁷ In his mature writings also, this theme remains. During this phase, even when he speaks of his conviction that a large and flexible civilisation for the whole of humanity will come about, the Hindu imagery of the Goddess Mother, has been used by him⁸. He also makes frequent references to the religious scriptures of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Puranas. Still, his position, against any attempt to impose some particular religious beliefs upon others, is very much clear. "The ambition of a particular religious belief and form to universalise and impose itself is contrary to the variety of human nature and to at least one essential character of the Spirit. For the nature of the spirit is a spacious inner freedom and a large unity into which each man must be allowed to grow according to his own nature."⁹ There are many such passages in Sri Aurobindo's writings where he expresses the dangers of imposed uniformity with a disregard for difference.

However, an essentialist interpretation of human nature in the model of the self-unfolding of the Divine is no less clear in Sri Aurobindo's writings. This makes his position classifiable under theories of normalisation that have been criticised by the post-structuralists like Foucault, who take the human subject as always a cultural construct through and through. Foucault's analysis makes us critical of the presumed rationality of our discourses and practices. He takes apart the facade of objectivity to reveal the operations of modern techniques of domination of which the self-examining, self-disciplining individual is a product. We are the effects of power, for the 'truth' that makes the laws, that produces the discourses which decide and transmit the effects of power, is itself a product of relations of power.

Power is, thus, seen by Foucault as a 'network' of relations which are responsible for the constitution of subjects as both the agents of power and also the products of power. In fact, the individual is not a pre-given entity who is seized by the exercise of power. He is the primary product of it. But, then, the liberal humanistic values that Sri Aurobindo upholds, like, autonomy, creativity, pursuit of the good life etc., are actually integral components through which discipline and normalisation occur. "Humanism invented a whole series of subjugated sovereignties: the soul (ruling the body, but subject to God), consciousness (sovereign in a context of judgment, but subjugated to the necessities of truth), the individual (a titular control of personal rights subjected to the laws of nature and society), basic freedom (sovereignty within but accepting the demands of an outside world and all allied with destiny). In short, humanism is everything in Western civilisation that restricts *the desire for power*: it prohibits the desire for power and excludes the possibility of power being seized."¹⁰

Without disavowing the importance of emphasising the differences between individuals and between communities, we may here point out one major weakness of post-structuralism. If we always equate any unity with the imposition of power, the whole possibility of formulating claims of freedom of the oppressed and the marginalised itself becomes problematic. Identity formation is a necessary step in any emancipatory political movement. But, the primacy of difference in post-structural philosophy, makes the

legitimacy of this process questionable. If subjects are incoherent because they are created by prevailing social, economic and cultural forces then any possibility of having useful political agenda is denied. Each one of us is no doubt radically plural with different identities; but if this is taken to imply closure of even provisional unity, we cannot ever have an acceptable politics of difference.

The lesson to be learnt from post-structuralism is that it reveals the element of repressiveness in every structure. On the other hand, even if we accept the related thesis that every unity has an element of incompleteness, there must be enough sameness for self-identification and group-identification, both of which are necessary for the identity formation of otherness.

Sri Aurobindo accepts the humanist ideal in so far as its main claim is that "Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, colour, nationality, status, political or social advancement"¹¹ But he believes that encroachment on human freedom is contingent, having its roots in human egoism both of the individual and of the group, class or nation. In this context, he agrees that our intellectual ideals remain incompetent. Moreover, that powerful institutions exert considerable influence, explicitly or implicitly over human lives cannot be doubted.

Here, the believers in the enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity point out that the use of rational ideals can serve human liberation. The use of human beings, they may point out, as objects of rational control does not derive from the operations of reason but from acts of will – the results of what Sri Aurobindo would call egoistic tendencies. Sri Aurobindo's solution to the problem is different. He points out that the above-mentioned three ideals of humanism are right as socio-political ideals, but actually they reveal a deeper spiritual truth which is not available to the intellect; this is the truth that human progress can be achieved only through spiritual transformation. The intellectual formulations of the ideal appeal primarily to the vital and physical force in man than to his soul. A real spiritual transformation of human nature alone can achieve freedom, equality and brotherhood which are the three godheads of the human soul. The ego always fails to grasp the sense of these ideals.

If we take the post-structuralist critique of power to its logical conclusion the result can be only anarchy. The question is whether we are prepared to accept such an outcome. Any extreme version of difference (where difference affects even the identity of the coherent subject), actually deprives the marginalised of any meaningful language of protest.

But this raises the important question whether there is a common humanity beyond difference or is such commonness always available only at the expense of difference? In that case, any politics of difference can only expect to change one power regime for another or try to do away with power altogether. But "...if it gets rid of mechanism, the one practical means of a rationalising organisation of life, on what will it build and with what can it create?"

Sri Aurobindo finds the solution not in reason but in 'Religion of Humanity'. This is, however, different from what is known as universal religion, which is only an intellectual creed. He would agree with the post-structuralists that through the intellectual

route one can aim only at outward uniformity, through mechanical means. It is only when such ideals become the truth of our inner beings that a real human unity would be possible. The sceptical conclusion of post-structuralism regarding the possibility of human unity is understandable because the power of human intelligence has its limits in spite of its utilities. In fact, Sri Aurobindo points out that the drawback of every effort to impose order on social life has a natural consequence of turning one to intellectual anarchism. He was convinced that the evolutionary urge of the hidden spiritual power in us would eventually take its step in the right direction. “Until then, the attempt to bring it about by mechanical means must proceed. But the higher hope of humanity lies in the growing number of men who will realise this truth and seek to develop it in themselves, so that when the mind of man is ready to escape from its mechanical bent, — perhaps when it finds that its mechanical solutions are all temporary and disappointing, — the truth of the spirit may step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible happiness and perfection.”¹²

Sri Aurobindo rightly observes that the felt necessity of an ordered life will not conflict with human autonomy only if ‘the outer law is replaced by an inner law’. Man wants to live with his fellow men in full harmony and cooperation without conflict. For this, however, intellect has proved to be inefficient as the guide. One alternative that is suggested by the relativists is cultivation of free dialogue and mutual respect. But, obviously, here again, the great obstacles are human ego and selfishness. Sri Aurobindo points out that ultimately only a deeper brotherhood that is based neither on instincts or vital needs nor on reason can make these possible. The essentialist characterisation of all men as expressions of the same godhead, does not allow for any exclusion. Here is a similarity that can accommodate every difference except those based on egoism.

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The Dynamics Of India’s Culture

Radharaman Chakrabarti

Indian culture is what we Indians think we understand for we are supposed to be embedded in it. Actually, however, we are not quite capable of comprehending it in its fullness. Though we participate in this culture and try to imbibe it, as an individual or as a group, much depends on the manner in which we identify ourselves. The extent of our real involvement is anything but complete except under certain propitious conditions or compelling situations. Obviously we cannot claim a profound understanding of Indian culture as long as we are not clear as to what it means being an Indian.

Indian culture is many-splendoured, variegated at times, vague and somewhat mystified. It can be blinding for the viewer, whether domiciled or alien – unless the eyes are trained to see and not just find what is there to see. One can look at it but cannot possibly see it through in its baffling details and, more importantly, in its extraordinary depth. Indians can legitimately claim that the culture belongs to them but can all of them affirm that they also belong to it heart and soul? They can selectively talk about this or that indicator. They can pick up some specific features or trends dominant in a particular period and remain engrossed therein. Some may even engage in a debate over some stray perceptions of it. On the whole, there is no denying the fact that very few among us can truly enter into its depth and comprehend its inherent spirit.

What then blocks our vision and blurs our conceptualisation of Indian culture? Unquestionably, it is all due to the distance that we have created, consciously or unwittingly, between our existential reality and our precious cultural heritage. That distance is as much material as is intellectual. The way we allow our life to be fashioned, the way we get swayed by critics who really have no title to critiquing as such and the smallness within which we confine and suppress our soulful yearnings are some of the factors that act as an impediment to understanding and appreciating our own culture. As a result, the true face of our culture continues to remain shrouded before our ordinary vision. To take that smoke-screen away, we need a searchlight, a very powerful searchlight. Thankfully that is not far to seek. It has been with us in the inimitable discourse of Sri Aurobindo, the seer and the shower. If we are to think and talk about Indian culture, we ought to proceed with that searchlight provided by Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo has made our task easier by laying down his wide-ranging thoughts specifically on this subject in a single compendium, *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (1953, hereinafter abbreviated as FIC), though his other writings, literary as well as speculative, contain plenty of cognate and supplementary materials. Citations in the

present article would not only authenticate my own approach to his ideas but also allow me to share the sheer delight of reading Sri Aurobindo's writings. We all know that this book was penned ostensibly in defence of Indian culture in the face of what Sri Aurobindo calls 'a sublime and confident ignorance' of a section of contemporary European critics of oriental, especially Indian, civilisation. Actually they were a self-righteous spiteful lot; and the sharp, though extremely refined, language in which Sri Aurobindo exposes their folly is decidedly the most fitting reply that they deserved. That apart, there is reason to think that even for the present generation of Indians, half anchored in, if not entirely cut off from, their tradition (and that includes a substantial section of P.I.O. settled abroad), Sri Aurobindo's exposition must serve as a corrective and an eye-opener. In fact, we are painfully aware that Indian culture is still not spared unfounded and unfair, though ill-informed and ill-willed, criticism – regrettably often by some of our own compatriots who feel ill at ease with their cultural antecedents. In passing we may only note the ultimate bewilderment of a worthy expatriate – Sri Vidyadhar Sryaprasad Naipaul, the celebrated author who wrote *India : A Wounded Civilisation* in 1977 and again *India: A Million Mutinees Now* in 1990. The first one takes an ill-considered sarcastic view of the traditional cultural moorings of the average Indian, mainly the Hindu. They appear to him as though habitually confined in 'an established past' (p.71), careless, if not entirely oblivious, of the changing outer world of the present times. Strikingly, in the second book the same Mr Naipaul gives us 'an engrossing account of the changes taking place in modern India' – obviously changes in the material circumstances, personal habits, thought patterns. Surprisingly, all that he attributes to an implicit indebtedness to western culture. That is, in a nutshell, Naipaul's own reading of all that he could make out of India today, moving away from the static to the changing realities. He does confess in the foreword to his first book that '*India is a difficult country for him*' and it has taken him much time to come to terms with the strangeness of India (p.8). Yes, he may have come to terms with facts he just cannot appreciate but he failed to understand India – not because he did not try hard (his homework has been quite outstanding) but because he got trapped by the multitude of particulars and stray specifics over which he added his own impressions. That way he just missed the wood for the trees – something we domiciled Indians also are sometimes inclined to do. The reason : we misread the pervasive ethos of an enduring civilisation.

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One ought to take an integral view of a civilisation before one can proceed to discern the quality of its culture. This is a sound piece of advice we get from Sri Aurobindo. In his opinion we need to look for 'a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body, which makes for true happiness and 'a culture is to be valued to the extent it has discovered the right key of this harmony'. That civilisation is progressive in which 'all its principles – ideas, forms, ways of living work to bring that harmony out' (FIC, Ch 1, p.1). Perhaps one cannot think of a better yardstick to measure the progress of Indian culture or any premier culture for that matter.

In the case of India the expression 'integral culture' refers to the process that allowed India over the ages to integrate a complex assortment which comprises (a) the material aspects of life (b) a conscious commitment to 'dharma' in the sense of ethically valid conduct (c) free flowering of individual qualities to which social control is a complement, not an impediment and (d) man's irrepressible urge to move forward in spiritual direction. As Sri Aurobindo elucidates :

India's social system is built upon this conception; her philosophy formulates it; her religion is an aspiration to spiritual consciousness...her art and literature have the same upward look; her whole 'dharma' or law of being is founded upon it'. (Ibid, p.2)

Culture in this sense is the product of a collective experiment happening within a community, and that community may not remain self-contained. In the case of India, the question of being self-contained simply would not arise as it has been historically ruled out by the fact that she embraced a whole stream of other cultures, many at odds with each other. Sri Aurobindo does not rule out the resultant tensions within and between such multiplicity of cultures. 'Cultures are bound to come into conflict' as he says but hastens to assure that 'conflict is not indeed the last the ideal stage'. Cultures vying with each other must sooner or later find the space to flourish freely in juxtaposition and also mingle with each other. The end result has to be the growth of an 'underlying sense of unity'. We know that many leading lights of the renaissance and post-renaissance periods in our country expressed the same belief. What is striking in Sri Aurobindo's assessment is that he does not decry the stage of conflict, but would rather ask men to get prepared for it. In exhortation he would say: 'So long as the principle of struggle prevails, one must face (it): for it is fatal to disarm in the midst of the battle'. (Ibid, p.5)

This is not advocating conflict for the sake of conflict. It is an exhortation so that a nation does not grow cold feet in a conflictual situation. Of course, Sri Aurobindo has an even higher consideration in dealing with conflict of cultures. He views it not in terms of 'crudest form of material conflict' – such as what Samuel Huntington had in mind while dealing with the 'clash of civilisations'. Sri Aurobindo contextualises it as a cultural struggle which can persist even when it is all quiet on the material front. The cultural struggle comes out in greater prominence only to lay bare the positive potential in all cultural dialectics. That is what ultimately leads to a concord – the 'stage of concert' as he calls it. But conciliation at this point does not and need not destroy differentiation. If it does, that would mean a civilisation could easily be swallowed up by another. Again Sri Aurobindo does not stop here. He awaits a final stage when groups of humanity representing different cultures are ready to recognise that all is but the manifestation of the 'One Self'.

Perhaps it may sound a bit odd but the fact is that the period of cultural struggle in India has not ended as yet. Rather it continues to come back, though in various forms. We cannot but feel embarrassed as we recall how we behaved when confronted by the dominant scientific culture of the West. We practically disarmed ourselves in the midst

of the struggle – which is why we had to suffer the prolonged agony of subjugation. At the cultural plane, we took nearly a century to regain our collective sense of pride to negotiate a respectable equation with the self-proclaimed superiority of the West. Later historian accounts depicted this reawakening as something comparable to what the Europeans termed ‘renaissance’ in their own context. To what extent this characterisation is valid or flawed is a matter to be discussed shortly. Let it be noted at this point that even today we are not quite sure how to react and respond to the current waves of a pervasive external impact popularly known as globalisation. In the face of the global cultural intrusion that came in the wake of globally sponsored economic integration, our posture has been noticeably diffident and somewhat unconcerned. When we are absorbing globalisation, much of which we must, we are doing it rather uncritically in the same manner when we are told (by some ideologues) to oppose it for the wrong reason. Our defence has been woefully feeble. We are persuaded to let the winds of change blow hard into our lives but we do not seem to stand firm enough not to be ‘swept off our feet’ – about which Gandhiji had forewarned us a long time back. Here again the antidote can be found in Sri Aurobindo. He wants us to adopt a positive but unswerving attitude and reject such propositions as that ‘European institutions are the standard by which the aspirations of India are (to be) set’. We need to put up a ‘strong, living and mobile defence’ (FIC, p.8) of all that constitutes our superiority, especially in the creative domain.

At the same time, we need to be on the right track of material development, or else putting up a purely cultural profile will be difficult to sustain. The national identity question is very vital here, and most importantly, it is not a question of political identity as such. Sri Aurobindo is very clear on this point.

‘Either India will be rationalised and industrialised out of all recognition, and she will be no longer India or else she will be leader in a new world phase’.

The choice is ours. Obviously, nobody would recognise us as leaders just because we have been able somehow to give our economy a strong push and somehow retain a democracy against heavy odds. ‘Brand India’ will be a hollow slogan unless we can establish what this ‘Brand India’ means culturally, intellectually and spiritually. With an expanding club of billionaires and a never disappearing multitude below poverty line, compounded by a monotony of ‘scams’ of frightening proportions, India’s rise in global estimation will remain highly compromised. If on top of that the people of this country and also PIOs abroad are seen to be slavishly imitating life that do not synch with our distinct cultural orientation, India will not carry any special meaning for the rest of the world. While the prosperity lag with the developed West must be removed, distributive justice has to be our first priority along with strict observance of probity and productivity in the public and private domain. After all we cannot afford to overlook the fundamental difference between Indian civilisation and western modernism. Where India once excelled and proved to be unique is the rich diversity of what Sri Aurobindo calls its ‘inner experience’ which informs every single sphere of India’s

cultural endeavours over the centuries.

Coming now to the question of a so-called ‘renaissance’ which is believed to have happened sometime in the 19th century in the urbanised, prosperous and western educated parts of the then Bengal – partly also spreading into other parts of the country, it is necessary to do away with certain misconceptions which worked either way. On the one hand, there was an attempt to superscribe the European type of Renaissance of the 15th century on the momentous changes that had seized the Indian society in more than one way. On the other, there was a pronounced tendency to give the forces of awakening a purely revivalist character. The fact of the matter is that the phenomenon of reawakening was real and had its manifestation both objectively and subjectively. It did originate in the push factor of the new culture that came from the west with a lot of admirable ingredients along with some inevitable trash. The failure to separate the grain from the chaff did happen without causing any permanent damage. The rot, if any, was duly arrested by a powerful indigenous urge to prove one’s ability to stand up to the new challenges. In this venture, the country’s glorious past came to the aid of its unfolding present, pointing to a far more promising future.

In this context, Sri Aurobindo posed the question: was there really a renaissance in India in the sense in which it could be attributed to or compared with the Teutonic version or the Latin spirit underlying the European renaissance? Sri Aurobindo wanted Indians to be cured of this colonialist construction. The Italian renaissance of the 15th century captured later European imagination by virtue of its humanist and rationalist ideology. There was little dearth of either humanism or rationalism in the Indian tradition, though these traits became clouded by obscurantist tendencies which overtook India for several centuries since the medieval period. If revival of classical thinking, ethical values and social practices was consciously used by some leading lights of contemporary India, to make good the resultant deficiencies there was an equal and parallel urge to jump-start a long arrested trajectory of progress. European modernism was not found incompatible with the overall spirit of Indian awakening. But the main emphasis was on rejuvenation and renewal of India’s own culture. In that sense, Sri Aurobindo found the so-called Indian renaissance more akin to the facts and spirit of the Irish renaissance of the 18th and 19th centuries with which are associated the contributions of such celebrities as Richard Sheridan, George Bernard Shaw, Eamon de Valera and so on.

However, Sri Aurobindo did not think India was wanting in its spirit of self-renewal, though the 19th century spurt was a necessary phase in effecting a restart of that spirit. According to Sri Aurobindo there is a sense of the Infinite in Indian psyche, something that is constant despite the phenomenal world around being in continuous flux. Indians are not unaware of the natural realities but know that its ‘sense of the natural can never be complete without relating it to the supranatural’. It is in one’s mundane activities to the overriding spirit of the supranatural, sometimes called the *Rtam* (} ; b) in spiritual discourses, that man can achieve his highest excellences. Furthermore, the spirituality of India teaches her people that each person has an inherent capacity to expand beyond himself, which helps one transcend one’s outward or

existential limitations. Once this unique realisation, a product of ages of spiritual 'sadhana', is restored, India can truly be regarded as having accomplished her 'renaissance' in the proper sense of the term.* To accomplish that kind of renaissance India needs to do three things, namely recovery of the ancient spiritual knowledge and experience, its infusion into every sphere of thought and action and an original mode of dealing with the problems of the modern age – ultimately to promulgate a greater synthesis for the emergence of a spiritually motivated society.

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Since modern India has to fall back upon its early cultural heritage as the largest source of sustenance, it needs to make a careful review of the past so as to distinguish 'the fundamental from the incidental, persistent from the temporary'. It also entails a readiness to overcome all that was 'deficient, ill-grasped' or 'just suited to the limiting conditions of a particular age'. In other words, today's search for renewable energy in the past should eschew any illusion that every bit of the old was gold or that the past can offer the best conceivable solution of every evil that one has to fight against today. Indeed, there are many things that need to be scrapped outright. The first among these, Sri Aurobindo would insist, are the caste-based disabilities which 'condemns one-sixth of the nation to permanent ignominy'. It is also necessary to rid the past of wherever it has been a fetish, making many of our social practices obsolete. The concord that was produced by early Indian civilisation was founded in human unity, in respectful recognition of the dignity of every single soul. It was a cultural project that was intended to be inclusionist.

The essence of this self-elevating culture, according to Sri Aurobindo, had three interrelated aspects, viz. (a) aspect consisting of thought, ideal, of upward will and the soul's aspiration (b) aspect of creative self-expression and appreciative aesthetics and (c) aspect of practical and outward formulation. Notably, culture here is taken in a comprehensive sense, in terms of activities as well as thoughts each reflecting a certain philosophy of life. Seen in this light, culture gets easily linked with the 'soul's aspirations' i.e. spiritual yearnings. True, such a cultural orientation creates an inward-looking mentality that distinguishes the Indian from the rest of humanity. This is what distinguishes India from the 'rationalistic modernism of the West'.

Indians belonging to the upper strata of the society (and that includes now a substantial chunk of the affluent middle class) have had a prolonged exposure to this kind of rationalistic modernism. The result is that they now find it useless and tiresome to recapture the traditional approach to what may be called 'spiritual modernism' – elaboration of which can be found in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition as well as in the message of liberation for the entire mankind that came from Sri Aurobindo. Be that as it may, are these votaries of rationalistic modernism doing what they should with respect to whatever comes from the West? Sri Aurobindo, though open to external influences,

* Readers may, in this connexion, go through a paper by Sri Dilip Kumar Ray entitled 'Sri Aurobindo on the possibility of Renaissance in India' in Indrani Sanyal and Krishna Roy (eds): *Sri Aurobindo and His Contemporary Thinkers*, DK Printworld, Delhi, 2007, pp.76-79

would not favour a mechanical amalgamation or a cultural truce of sorts. What he would advocate is a conscious assimilation after carefully assessing what the East and the West have to offer each other. He would not oppose 'acceptance and assimilation from the West of whatever in its knowledge, ideas, powers was assimilable' i.e. compatible with India's spirit and reconcilable with her time tested faculties. (FIC, p.386) There is no reason for Indian or any culture for that matter to stagnate or remain straitjacketed by things that are simply home-grown. All live cultures are expected to interact and enrich each other. Hence Sri Aurobindo's position is clear: all humanity is one but different peoples represent different soul forms of the common humanity. When we find the oneness, the principle of variation is not destroyed but finds rather its justification. It is not by abolishing the 'special' that we are to arrive at the 'general' but by raising the level of the former to bring it in line with the highest possibilities of mankind as a whole.

In taking this position in favour of a discreet exchange or rather mutually satisfying dialogue between cultures, one has often to resolve a basic question as what to take and what to leave. Conventional thinking has it that we need only to take over the best from an alien culture and reject the worse. This suffers from an erroneous faith in the infallibility of one's judgment. How would one be sure that a choice, made on whatever immediate consideration, would not be arbitrary in the long run? After all, cultural assimilation is not an act comparable to de-boning a fish or de-seeding a fruit for cooking purposes. In culture one has to deal with a living totality – skin, bone and all. As Sri Aurobindo puts it: 'to leave the bad and take the good sounds well' but the two are not separable mechanically. 'They are the inextricably mingled growth of one being, not separate blocs of a child's toy house... If we take over a Western ideal, we take it from a living form which strikes us, with the good and bad intertwined... and take united possession. Now if we simply imitate all that comes our way we tend to become like it and thus lose our own'. That would be creating, to use Sri Aurobindo's words, 'a bastard or a twy-natured culture'. Such a curious product is not far to seek but visible right under our nose even today as they used to make a disturbing spectacle during the wayward displays of the Young Bengal days.

What then is proper assimilation? The answer is : we need not take something at its crude manifestation but must go back to what actually worked as its inspiration and then 'work out its extent, degree, form, relation to other ideas, its application' and so on. (FIC, p.389) Inter-society exchange of cultural goods is thus advisable provided the recipient can process them in his own 'cultural lab' and recreate something that suits the organic structure and inner spirit of the native culture. There has to be a cultural preparedness to do all these things – instead of just whipping up cultural apathy at one extreme and advertising cultural appetizers at the other.

The expression 'culture' derived from Latin 'cultura' meaning nurturing/cultivating of which the best vernacular synonym is '*krishti*' 'कृष्टि' is etymologically associated with cultivation, which again presupposes agro-scientific knowledge, apparatus and aptitude. A culture is the quintessential product of material-intellectual-spiritual enterprise collectively conducted by a community immediately for its own good but ultimately for the good of whole humanity. Lofty as this view may sound, a community

can be called properly cultured when it can appreciate and admire the best in other peoples' cultures. Indian genius which absorbed Shakespeare-Keats-Shelley-Byron or drew the much needed scientific wisdom from Newton to Einstein did not lose anything but gained a lot for the uplift of itself and its posterity. At this point, one cannot but recall the strikingly original observation that Sri Aurobindo made:

'Mentally, vitally and physically I do not grow by a pure self-development from within in a virgin isolation... There is in every individual existence a double action, a self-development... and a reception of impacts from outside, which it has to accommodate to its own individuality. The two operations are not mutually exclusive nor is the second harmful to the first, except when the inner genius is too weak to deal victoriously with its environmental world'. (Ibid, p.390)

This means that we must develop healthy cultural lungs to breathe in the purest air blowing from many directions and be also able to snuff out any harmful virus that may sneak in. This principle is applicable as much to the individual as to the 'group soul' or social collectivity. The only point to note is that there may be differences in the level of individual adaptability and group adaptability. The former is a function of personal attitude to and yearnings for self-elevation – unless vitiated by smallness of mind and/or inherited rigidities. The latter is conditioned by the extent of transparency and freedom of thought and expression permitted by a given social order – unless arrested by some received wisdom propagated in distorted form. The upshot of the discussion, therefore, holds out a positive turn-around for a fast developing society like India as it negotiates the cultural fall out of globalisation. We need only to keep in mind the roadmap and the precautions given by Sri Aurobindo that we may fearlessly proceed towards our goal, despite all the rough-and-tumble on the way. The present times signify mankind's renewed efforts to attain universality in supersession of narrow identities and shallow self-perception. There is no reason why India cannot seize its own moment of fulfilment.

“Is India Civilised?” By Sri Aurobindo

Makarand Paranjape

Introduction

The Foundations of Indian Culture was a collection of three series of essays by Sri Aurobindo which originally appeared in the quarterly *Arya* from December 1918 to January 1921, “Is India Civilised?”, “A Rationalistic Critic on Indian Culture,” and “A Defence of Indian Culture.” Another essay, “Indian Culture and External Influence,” published in the *Arya* of March 1919, was also included in the book. The title of the book was not Sri Aurobindo's but was given when the book was first published posthumously in 1953 by the Sri Aurobindo Library, New York. The Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL) included all these essays and added the series called “*The Renaissance in India*” to constitute volume 14 which was titled *The Foundations of Indian Culture and the Renaissance in India*. In 1997 the ongoing *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA) series brought out the same material in a somewhat rearranged format as *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture*. The essays that made up *The Renaissance in India* were revised and issued as a separate booklet in 1920 by Sri Aurobindo. He intended to do the same for the essays that made up “Is India Civilised?” and “A Defence of Indian Culture.” “Is India Civilised?” was revised but not published during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime; the first eight and a half essays in “A Defence of Indian Culture” were also sporadically revised, but when publication was suggested in 1949, Sri Aurobindo replied that they lacked an ending and that he also would have liked to minimise the references to William Archer:

The Defence of Indian Culture is an unfinished book and also I had intended to alter much of it and to omit all but brief references to William Archer's criticisms. That was why its publication has been so long delayed. Even if it is reprinted as it is considerable alterations will have to be made and there must be some completion and an end to the book which does not at present exist. (CWSA.20: v; all quotations are from this edition.)

What follows is an edited transcript of my talk on the first of three essays in “*Is India Civilised?*”

The series of articles called “*Is India Civilised?*” by Sri Aurobindo was inspired by a book by the same title by Sir John Woodroffe first published in 1918.¹ Woodroffe

¹ The book was published by Ganesh and Company in Madras in 1918. The second edition of the book, published in 1919, is available online at <http://ia600407.us.archive.org/23/items/isindiacivilized00woodrich/isindiacivilized00woodrich.pdf>. Woodroffe was a famous scholar of Tantra who wrote under the pseudonym Arthur Avalon.

himself was fending off an attack on Indian civilisation by a British drama critic, William Archer.² William Archer and his diatribe are forgotten today, but Sri Aurobindo's defence has become a classic. Sri Aurobindo uses the same title as Woodroffe's to underscore the importance of Woodroffe's argument, whose gist he recapitulates in the first section.

Sri Aurobindo begins by stating unequivocally how a culture or civilisation may be evaluated:

A true happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organised its expressive motives and movements. (56)

If we were to really think about this statement, we could spend days teasing out its significance. First of all, Sri Aurobindo clearly avows that happiness is indeed the goal of human life. Such an admission is important because it shows how life-affirming Sri Aurobindo is. He does not regard human life as intrinsically full of *dukkha* or suffering. Next, it is important to realise that behind such a definition of what constitutes true happiness is a certain notion of what a human being is. In Sri Aurobindo's scheme of things, a human being possesses at least three levels of being — the physical, the mental, and the spiritual. And, what is more important, without a natural harmony between these three levels we can never be really happy.

When Sri Aurobindo wrote this there were no internationally recognised yardsticks for evaluating the quality of human life as there are these days. Now we have recognised indices such as the Human Development Index to measure such things, yet these never take into account the fact that we are spiritual beings too. The result is that in the most prosperous countries of the world, countries which score the highest on the quality of human life indices, there is still a high level of discontent. I am not only speaking of the discontent which comes from class and racial conflict or from poverty and unemployment, though such things are also found in these "advanced" societies. The fact is that the most privileged and affluent sections of these countries are also unhappy and discontented. How else can we account for the perennial fascination not only for drugs and alcohol in these countries, but for yoga, zen, and Eastern gurus?

As a corollary to Sri Aurobindo's statement, it follows that any country or society which caters only to the body or to the body and the mind, but leaves out the spirit cannot achieve true happiness. A culture, a society, a country should also make provisions to nourish the spirit of a human being, otherwise neither the society nor the individual can ever attain perfection. Such a society may attain very high levels of material prosperity, but it cannot attain or be conducive to true happiness. Our very nature is such that we cannot be truly happy until we have the opportunity to strive for

2 *India and the Future* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1917).

perfection. So, we see that behind Sri Aurobindo's whole outlook is a basic premise about the nature of the human being itself. If you deny that a human being is essentially a spiritual creature, then you can also deny the rest of Sri Aurobindo's argument.

Next, Sri Aurobindo tries to sum up the distinctive features of the Indian civilisation. He says:

India's central conception is that of the Eternal, the Spirit here incased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas and the realm of conscious morality, dharma. (56)

These lines sum up not only Sri Aurobindo's notion of India, but his whole philosophy itself. He holds that matter is but the Spirit in its involved form. Striving to recover its true self, the Spirit struggles through matter and through life, until it reaches the mental plane in the human being. After this, evolution is not automatic, not merely subject to the natural process, but can be conscious. Dharma is nothing but a system that leads us on the path of spiritual progress. To Sri Aurobindo, the notion of progress in India is primarily spiritual. It is this that makes India special and distinct.

Now if we pause for a minute and ask how come people in India decided that the realisation of the Spirit or of the Self was the most important thing to do, that that is the purpose of our birth? What made the Indians think this way? It seems to me that long ago, the best minds in India discovered that it was not very difficult to sustain life in this subcontinent. It was not very difficult to take care of all of one's bodily needs and necessities. They lived on fruits and roots; they bathed in the flowing streams; they lived in harmony with nature. Similarly, it was not very difficult to make a hut, a cottage, a hermitage. Nature provided enough. If taking care of one's material needs was so easy, surely the purpose of life was something else. Thus surmising, they retired into the forest, devoted themselves to contemplating the eternal truths. They came to the conclusion that more time and energy should be devoted to self-realisation, to *sadhana*, than simply to eking out a living. This does not mean that our ancient *rishis* and *munis* were isolated from society. Instead, they interacted with the kings and commoners, guiding both, helping to uphold Dharma. They held the remote control of our civilisation in their hands, letting the kings and courtiers to handle the mundane, material aspects of life. While other cultures thought that it was more important to build cities, to subdue enemies, to increase one's comfort and power, Indians recognised that all these activities were not as important as self-realisation. Without the latter, all human achievements were partial and transitory.

I believe that these ideals are still present in our culture. Everyone laments that we are becoming more and more materialistic, yet as a civilisation we have yet to admit that that is the supreme goal of human life. You must have read in the papers how some years ago, one of the richest diamond merchants in India, a young man, took *sannyas*. He distributed diamonds and pearls from atop a richly caparisoned elephant, which was taken out in procession through the streets of Ahmedabad. While you may or may not

approve of such ostentation, he believed that the life he was about to embrace was superior to all the wealth and riches that he had accumulated. Renunciation was superior to accumulation. This diamond merchant was a Jain, but all the religious traditions of this country, I think, share his outlook to the world, more or less. How else can you explain why Prince Siddhartha left all the comforts of the palace to look for the ultimate Truth? Or that Lord Rama, without a single moment of doubt or hesitation, renounced his kingdom in obedience of his father's command, preferring the life of a forest-dweller to the luxuries of the forest. Even today, our heroes, like Mahatma Gandhi, taught that simple living and high thinking are preferable to mindless consumption. All this means that in India we do not consider the satisfaction of bodily or mental needs to be the sole purpose or even the highest aim of life.

Sri Aurobindo does not stop here, but says that there are countries and cultures which are led by a different, even opposite conception of human life. Some centuries Europe have become material, predatory, aggressive, and have lost the harmony of the inner and outer man which is the true meaning of civilisation and the efficient condition of true happiness on earth. Both Woodroffe and Sri Aurobindo admit that Europe was not always thus, that in her medieval ages, she too was dominated by the religious ideal. Yet, as Sri Aurobindo clarifies, this idea was narrow and intolerant; it cramped the spirit of man. Moreover, Sri Aurobindo reminds us that Christianity itself was of Asiatic origin. Despite these origins of modern Europe, it now subscribes to a totally different civilisational ideal, which is largely materialistic, based on physical comforts and the seeking of pleasure.

Those of us who are mesmerised by the West would do well to reflect on Sri Aurobindo's statement. That Europe has become material, predatory, and aggressive should be obvious to anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of history. Since the 15th century or so, Europeans have overrun our earth, destroying entire civilisations, killing off populations, colonising continents, subduing people, taking slaves, fighting wars, conquering territories, and so on. The entire history of humankind has never witnessed the scale and degree of violence that modern Europe unleashed on the rest of the world. What they did to Africa, to South America, to the native communities of North America, to India, South East Asia, to China, and so on, is well recorded. All along, Europe considered itself to be the most civilised part of the world, the leader, the carrier of enlightenment. How ironic! Does the essence of civilisation lie in killing others, destroying their culture, enslaving them, grabbing their wealth, and ruling over the world?

However, the second part of Sri Aurobindo's statement is still perhaps difficult to accept for most of us. He says that the West has lost the harmony between the inner and the outer and thus what they have achieved cannot be considered to be true progress. Most of us are still dazzled and blinded by the achievements of the West. Naturally, we regard the West as our model; we must emulate them and try to have a similar society in India. We still regard progress as merely material progress; from such a standpoint the West is the most advanced society in the world. Yet, according to Sri Aurobindo, that is not true progress.

Sri Aurobindo believes that "Each nation is a Shakti or power of the evolving spirit in humanity and lives by the principle which it embodies" (57). If so, a clash and conflict between nations is inevitable. In fact, Sri Aurobindo defines the three stages of the interaction between nations. These are conflict and competition, concert, and sacrifice (59).³ At present, nations are in the first stage, that of competition and conflict. The second stage, that of cooperation, has hardly begun. People may talk of enlightened self-interest as the governing principle behind international diplomacy, but the word enlightened ought to be taken with a pinch of salt. What obtains more often is a brutal self-interest disguised behind high-sounding principles. As to the third stage, that will only happen after a nation has realised its Self. At present, only individuals have attained that high degree of realisation which allows them to sacrifice themselves for the good of others. According to Sri Aurobindo, "the perfected Sannyasin, the liberated man," may consider self-defence to be needless, but ordinarily, "To allow oneself to be killed, like the lamb attacked by the wolf, brings no growth, farther no development, assures no spiritual unity" (59). Concert, unity, may come at a future time, but for the present, we must go through conflict and competition.

For Sri Aurobindo, there has been a perennial conflict for supremacy between Europe and Asia. In this conflict, either Asia will become Europeanised or Europe Asiaticised. William Archer's attack on India is a part of Europe's hegemonising drive to subdue the rest of the world. Ever since England conquered India, it has endeavoured to subdue our civilisation. First, was the attack on Hinduism by the missionaries. That was successfully fended off, not only by a Hindu revival, but by West to East movements like Theosophy. Now, the second wave of the attack is not religious, but rationalistic and materialistic. (There is actually a third wave which Sri Aurobindo doesn't mention. This is the attack on India by modern science and technology.) Asia is rising, but this empowerment is not fully self-conscious. It is a Europeanised Asia that is rising, an Asia which has turned its back on the Asiatic ideal.

Sri Aurobindo admits that "Spirituality is not monopoly of India," but elsewhere it lies submerged beneath veils of intellectualism. What makes India special is "spirituality made the leading motive and the determining power of both the inner and the outer life" which is quite different from "spirituality suppressed, allowed only under disguises or brought in as a minor power, its reign denied or put off in favour of the intellect or of a dominant materialistic vitalism" (65). In other words, many other nations of Asia, from Turkey to Japan, have "grown rationalistic and materialistic"; "India alone is still obstinately recalcitrant" (65). So, in this conflict between India and Europe, "Will the spiritual motive which India represents prevail on Europe and create there new forms congenial to the West, or will European rationalism put an end for ever to the Indian type of culture?" (66) — this for Sri Aurobindo is the crucial question, the question at the heart of this essay.

There are several people who have told me how uncomfortable they feel with this framework of confrontation. There are three chief ways in which their discomfort is

3 These ideas are drawn directly from Woodroffe who has a whole chapter devoted to "Competition, Concert, Sacrifice" (113-120)

articulated. On the one hand, they claim that both Sri Aurobindo in particular and Indian spirituality in general are universal. There is no distinction between countries and cultures. So, why am I harping on this conflict between India the West? One lady even suggested that these essays represent the early phase of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and that later he outgrew his views! In fact, for some time, this interjector thought that I was making up all the quotations that I had been attributing to Sri Aurobindo and wished to see the text from which I was reading. I not only showed her the book but also pointed out how Sri Aurobindo's thought was mature and ripe when he wrote this and that he never detracted from his positions in the years to come.

The second kind of objection comes from those who are quite comfortable with the level of synthesis that they seem to have achieved between their Indian heritage and the modern world. They have made the required adjustments and believe that we can have the best of both worlds. What is the need to confront the West or to confront ourselves? Why not go on living in this convenient synthesis?

The third kind of objection comes from those who consider Sri Aurobindo to be both outdated and essentialistic. They believe that such generalisations about cultures and civilisations are mistaken and unjustified. Each individual and culture is different and that it is pointless to attribute any special characteristics to nations, peoples, or communities.

I shall respond only briefly to these interjections. Let me put my case rhetorically: what does it matter if Indian civilisation is destroyed? So many civilisations have been destroyed in the past. Why not let this one be destroyed too? Actually, that is what these objections really imply, but they don't say so clearly. There is, first of all, a denial of the spiritual; then a denial that India is any more spiritual than any other country; finally, some other basis for difference such as class or gender, rather than geo-cultural tradition.

If that is what we believe—that there is nothing spiritual about India—then that is what we will get. It will happen by default, if not by deliberation. So many of us are already devoting our energies to destroying our culture, our civilisation, so what's new about it? There is a Latin American proverb which comes to mind: when the axe came to cut the trees, some trees said that the handle is one of us. Similarly, there are several of us who are actively assisting in the destruction of Indian civilisation. Contrarily, there are several Westerners who have devoted their lives to its preservation.

The question is not that of us versus them, but about two competing and conflicting value systems. To those of us who love India and what she stands for, the question of protecting Indian civilisation or of fending off the West does not arise in necessarily confrontational manner. If we believe that the highest goal of human life is self-realisation, then it is natural for us to strive for it. We don't need any special inducements or incentives to work for this ideal. To pursue *svaraj* according to our lights is only natural to us. But if the world, with its emphasis on consumption or competition, is going contrary to our civilisational genius, only then does the issue of saving what we believe in arise.

To me, every Indian is a *sadhak* or *sadhika*, whether we realise it or not. This is a *punya bhoomi*, a holy land, where every inch of soil has been irradiated by the *tapas* of

our seers and mahatmas. It is in our very blood to walk this path; it is natural for us. Ultimately, it does not matter if we are defeated or if we triumph. What is important is to uphold the life that we believe in. People may laugh at such a view; they may point to all the *bhrashtachar*—corruption—in our midst and ask, “Where is your fabled spirituality?!” But the moment these very people step abroad or live in another country, they *feel* the difference, the shift in consciousness, however subtle. India *is* different; it does stand for truths that are not so important to other peoples and climes. Just to live here is a kind of *sadhana*; abroad we tend to forget what the true purpose of our lives is.

That is why when he finds Indian culture under attack, Sri Aurobindo urges us not only to a vigorous self-defence as Woodroffe had advocated because “defence by itself in the modern struggle can only end in defeat, and if battle there must be, the only sound strategy is a vigorous and aggression based on a strong, living and mobile defence” (62). Here Sri Aurobindo, like Mahatma Gandhi, does not advocate a weak-kneed, apologetic response to the West. He is saying that if our ideal is worth preserving, we must be bold and take the battle into the enemy's camp. This is precisely what Swami Vivekananda did. Similarly, Gandhiji believed in an aggressive *ahimsa*, not in cowardly non-violence. Indian spirituality, thus, needs to be aggressive, not cowardly.

But what does aggression mean? It means that we should actually teach the West: look here, you have solved several material problems with your high levels of prosperity. But you have not solved all human problems. That is why there is so much discontent in your societies. If there is an irreducible spiritual core to human beings, how can that core be satisfied by material prosperity? Therefore, the mastery of the material can only be the foundation or the basis for a flight to the higher life. But if that flight is blocked, then there is so much misery, with people seeking drugs or sex or some other form of escape from the travail of living.

Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? What is the purpose of life? And so on. Every civilisation needs to answer these questions, too, if it wants to develop a very high standard of living. You cannot make people compete, work hard, earn lots of money, but then not give them some higher purpose to live for. Again, art, music, theatre, and literature—however noble—are not enough to feed the human spirit. It craves for the higher sublimates that is the elixir of the spiritual life.

Moreover, the prosperity of the advanced countries is based on the exploitation of non-renewable human and natural resources, resources which rightfully belong to the whole of humankind. Such hedonism, luxury, and waste may lead not only to their own destruction, but to the destruction of the earth. So, before it's too late, these countries must alter their civilisational goals. This is what we can tell them when they try to paint us in terms of our poverty, inequality, and backwardness.

But what right do we have to teach others when we ourselves don't live by these ideals, when, instead, we are copying and outdoing the West in our conspicuous consumption? So we must begin with ourselves without waiting for our neighbours or friends to change. When there is a power failure, do we wait for our neighbours to light their candles, hoping thereby to get some borrowed light into our benighted houses? Or do we light a candle ourselves to dispel the darkness that surrounds us? Sri

Aurobindo does not intend us to become second-rate imitations of the West. He wants us to become world-leaders. But we can do so only if we spiritualise our lives now, without postponing it to some future date. No doubt, this is a slow process, but we must make a beginning. That is what is implied in Sri Aurobindo's words.

In the concluding paragraph of this section, Sri Aurobindo explains what he means by aggressive spirituality:

India must defend herself by reshaping her cultural forms to express more powerfully, intimately and perfectly her ancient ideal. Her aggression must lead the waves of light thus liberated in triumphant self-expanding rounds all over the world which it once possessed or at least enlightened in far-off ages. (66)

This belief in India's unique destiny as a world-Guru was not confined to Sri Aurobindo alone. Several people believe that if the world is to be saved, the light has to come from India. Fuji Guruji, the well-known Japanese saint and friend of Mahatma Gandhi also believed that India had this special responsibility. The Rev. Samdhong Rimpoche, Director of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies and the former Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile, also told me that Buddhists believe that India, which is the Arya Bhoomi, will point the way to the world.

When we look at the corruption, lawlessness, and inhumanity of our ruling classes and at the poverty, disease, and misery of our toiling masses, we may be tempted to yield to despair. But we must never forget that every inch of this soil is irradiated by the lives and teachings of countless sages and saints who have demonstrated how an ideal human life may be lived. The seeds of their *sanskaras* are within us. They will sprout and flower if we water them with our devotion and commitment. India is a *punya bhoomi*, a holy land; but it is not enough to say this. We have to live it. Our lives must reflect it now, not at some future date. True, the spiritualisation of our daily lives is an arduous and slow process, but we must embark upon it immediately. The beginning must be made in the here and the now.

Sri Aurobindo also ends on a note of hope and optimism for those who dislike conflicts. He says "An appearance of conflict must be admitted for a time, for as long as the attack of an opposite culture continues." But later, this very conflict, because it will help to bring out the best in us and in our adversaries, will "culminate in the beginning of a concert on a higher plane" (66). These are words not of an ordinary man, but of a yogi and visionary. We must therefore take them seriously. It is only when a culture is under attack that it is impelled to bring out the best in itself. While we are under attack, we can use this opportunity to renew and revitalise the best in our traditions. Thus, even our follies and failures, conflicts and quarrels may serve to assist the mysterious workings of Divine Providence.

Indian Democracy – Part 1

Kittu Reddy

In the following articles, we are presenting Sri Aurobindo's views on some aspects of the Indian political system; it is not an exhaustive presentation, but in the present churning that is taking place in India, it will be useful to comprehend the deeper vision of Sri Aurobindo in politics. This view might help us to steer the national political mind in the desired direction.

Soon after attaining independence, India gave herself a constitution and became a democratic Republic on 26 January 1950 and has since been governed by this Constitution. This was indeed a commendable achievement, more particularly when one looks at some of the countries in our neighbourhood and even around the world. For it established a system of governance, a sound legal system and a fairly sound basis for a democratic socialistic society where elections were held regularly and the popular mandate was respected.

We may thus say that the democratic system has been established and accepted as an indispensable part of Indian political life; yet we have to recognise that in practice, there have been serious shortcomings and these will have to be addressed sooner rather than later.

As a matter of fact, right from the beginning there were voices which raised doubts about the efficacy of this system and its suitability to the Indian nation. These voices increased with time and have now reached a crescendo in the last few months. Here is an extract from an article written by Retd Justice Santosh Hegde: "The situation in India today is drastic, and drastic situations require drastic measures. While corruption has existed from time immemorial, the last year has probably seen the maximum number of scams being unearthed. And mind you, these are only the scams that have been exposed; there could be a thousand others that have gone unexposed. Earlier, we used to say that corruption exists only in government service; today it has seeped into every single profession. Doctors, lawyers, engineers, the media, and the judiciary— nothing is spared. This is a very dangerous scenario for the country."

The question that arises is: how much of the fault lies in the system itself and how much in the misapplication that arises due to human frailty? If the fault lies in the system, we should take a close look at it and suggest changes more suited to the Indian temperament. Regarding the aspect of human weakness which is undoubtedly an important factor we shall not discuss it in this article for it will demand a deeper psychological approach. In this article, I shall try to present Sri Aurobindo's views on Democ-

racy and more particularly Parliamentary Democracy. We shall follow it up by making some suggestions for evolving a better democratic system more in tune with the Indian genius and temperament.

Sri Aurobindo was in active politics during the years 1906-1910. During that period in a comment he wrote:

“Socialistic democracy is the only true democracy, for without it we cannot get the equalised and harmonised distribution of functions, each part of the community existing for the good of all and not struggling for its own separate interests, which will give humanity as a whole the necessary conditions in which it can turn its best energies to its higher development. To realise those conditions is also the aim of Hindu civilisation and the original intention of caste. The fulfilment of Hinduism is the fulfilment of the highest tendencies of human civilisation and it must include in its sweep the most vital impulses of modern life. It will include democracy and Socialism also, purifying them, raising them above the excessive stress on the economic adjustments which are the means, and teaching them to fix their eyes more constantly and clearly on the moral, intellectual and spiritual perfection of mankind which is the end”.

Sri Aurobindo withdrew from active politics in 1910; but he continued taking active interest in politics and even wrote extensively on political thought in the *Arya*, a philosophical journal, in Pondicherry.

In 1911, Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter on Parliamentary Democracy. We are quoting a portion of that letter:

“Be very careful to follow my instructions in avoiding the old kind of politics. Spirituality is India’s only politics, the fulfilment of the Sanatana Dharma its only Swaraj. I have no doubt we shall have to go through our Parliamentary period in order to get rid of the notion of Western democracy by seeing in practice how helpless it is to make nations blessed. India is passing really through the first stages of a sort of national Yoga. It was mastered in the inception by the inrush of divine force which came in 1905 and aroused it from its state of complete tamasic *ajñānam* [ignorance]. But, as happens also with individuals, all that was evil, all the wrong samskaras and wrong emotions and mental and moral habits rose with it and misused the divine force..... It is only when this foolishness is done with that truth will have a chance, the sattwic mind in India emerge and a really strong spiritual movement begin as a prelude to India’s regeneration. No doubt, there will be plenty of trouble and error still to face, but we shall have a chance of putting our feet on the right path. In all I believe God to be guiding us, giving the necessary experiences, preparing the necessary conditions.”

In another context, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

It is the European idea that makes you think that the parliamentary form or constitution is the best. The parliamentary form would be hardly suitable for our people. Of

course, it is not necessary that you should have today the same old forms [as in ancient India]. But you can take the line of evolution and follow the bent of the genius of the race.

All these statements were made long before India attained its independence; yet we see how prophetic they are.

In this article, we shall first show that Democracy is not a modern phenomenon; it was practised with some measure of success in ancient Athens and in ancient India; also they laid down some of the fundamental principles of a democratic society which will be very relevant to us even in modern times. We shall not go into any detailed study of these systems, but we shall point out some striking features which show how well they understood the true meaning of Democracy. Some of those features are relevant even today and will have to be taken into consideration in devising a new political system for India.

Later, we shall analyse the psychological roots of modern Parliamentary democracy in the light of Sri Aurobindo.

Democracy in the ancient Athens

We start with some interesting features of Athenian democracy. Here is a story taken from the *Republic* of Plato; although it is a simple story, it has profound political and philosophical implications. The story goes like this:

Gyges was a shepherd in the service of the king of Lydia; there was a great storm, and an earthquake made an opening in the earth at the place where he was feeding his flock. Amazed at the sight, he descended into the opening, where, among other marvels, he beheld a hollow brazen horse, having doors, at which he stooping and looking in saw a dead body of stature, as appeared to him, more than human, and having nothing on but a gold ring; this he took from the finger of the dead and re-ascended. Now the shepherds met together, according to custom, that they might send their monthly report about the flocks to the king; into their assembly he came having the ring on his finger, and as he was sitting among them he chanced to turn the collet of the ring inside his hand, when instantly he became invisible to the rest of the company and they began to speak of him as if he were no longer present. He was astonished at this, and again touching the ring he turned the collet outwards and reappeared; he made several trials of the ring, and always with the same result — when he turned the collet inwards he became invisible, when outwards he reappeared. Whereupon he contrived to be chosen one of the messengers who were sent to the court; where as soon as he arrived he seduced the queen, and with her help conspired against the king and slew him, and took the kingdom.

This story remains important to us even today because it concerns what we can expect humans to do when they have power over others. In politics, we give power to others, hoping that they will do what is right. If Plato’s allegory of the ring is right,

then we had better watch out. Anyone who gains power without accountability is liable to use it unjustly. Secrecy is a form of invisibility, and for the purposes of power, as effective as a magic ring. The question “What is Justice?” remains as crucial today as it was a few thousand years ago. This explains the insistent demand today for the Right to Information Bill and many other radical measures.

Another interesting feature of Athenian democracy was the composition of the Council and the method of selection. The Council consisted of 500 members who were neither selected nor elected; they were chosen by lottery. They functioned for one year only with the provision that any individual could be a member of the Council only twice. In this way, the number of participants over the years in the Assembly was large. What were the reasons behind this mode of selection? It was based on two assumptions. Firstly, the greater the number of participants in governance, the more it helped in creating a democratic society. Secondly a legislator who has assumed responsibility during his one year tenure, would be more understanding and careful in his criticism and demands – in other words more responsible. The Athenians were clear that a democratic society demands a sense of responsibility from its citizens. It is evident that the Athenians had a sound and fine understanding of democratic principles.

Democracy in ancient India

Similarly regarding the practice of Democracy in the ancient Indian polity, we shall note some of the striking features.

The evolution of the ancient political system in India started from the unit of the village in Vedic times and moved later to the large kingdoms; in this process, it threw up certain very striking peculiarities which owing to the unique mentality of the race fixed themselves and became prominent and permanent characteristics and gave a different and unique stamp to the political, economic and social factors of Indian civilisation. It is important that we identify those characteristics for they can be signposts when we set out in search for a new political system for India.

The first characteristic

The religious and spiritual inclination has been predominant from the earliest times of Indian civilisation and has been one of the striking characteristics of the Indian people. This naturally brought about at the top of the social system the growth of the Brahmin order, priests, scholars, legists, and repositories of the sacred lore of the Vedas. This development was not unique to India but it was given an unequalled permanence and supreme importance in India. In other countries with a less complex mentality this predominance might have resulted in a theocracy: but the Brahmins in spite of their ever-increasing and predominant authority did not and could not usurp in India the political power. As sacrosanct priests and legists and spiritual preceptors of the monarch and the people there is no doubt that they exercised a very considerable influence, but the real or active political power remained with the king, the Kshatriya aristocracy and the commons. In other words, despite the strong religious leaning of the Indian people, a theocracy and theocratic rule is completely foreign to the Indian mentality. **There never was and never will be a theocracy in India.**

The second characteristic

Given this religio-spiritual inclination it was natural that the greatest reverence was reserved for the spiritual man. In ancient India he was known as the Rishi; he was the man of a higher spiritual experience and knowledge exercising an authority by his spiritual personality over all; he was revered and consulted by the king of whom he was sometimes the religious preceptor and was able to exercise an important role in evolving new basic ideas and effecting changes of the socio-religious ideas and customs of the people. It was a marked feature of the Indian mind that it sought to attach a spiritual meaning and a religious sanction to all, even to the most external social and political circumstances of its life, imposing on all classes and functions an ideal; it stressed on rights and powers, but much more importantly on duties, a dharma with a spiritual significance. It was the work of the Rishi to put this stamp enduringly on the national mind, to discover and interpret the ideal law and its practical meaning, to cast the life of the people into the well-shaped ideals and significant forms of a civilisation founded on the spiritual and religious sense. And even in later days, right till the modern times, this original character is still exercising its influence.

The third characteristic

Like in most other countries of the ancient world, the king was at the head of political power. But Indian monarchy was not, in spite of a certain sanctity and great authority conceded to the king as the representative of the divine Power and the guardian of the Dharma, in any way a personal despotism or an absolutist autocracy: it had no resemblance to the ancient Persian monarchy or the monarchies of western and central Asia or the Roman imperial government or later European autocracies: it was of an altogether different type from the system of the Pathan or the Mogul emperors. The Indian king exercised supreme administrative and judicial power, was in possession of all the military forces of the kingdom and with his Council alone responsible for peace and war and he had too a general supervision and control over the good order and welfare of the life of the community, but his power was not personal and it was besides hedged in by safeguards against abuse and encroachment and limited by the liberties and powers of other public authorities and interests who were, so to speak, lesser co-partners with him in the exercise of sovereignty and administrative legislation and control. He was in fact a limited or constitutional monarch, although the machinery by which the constitution was maintained and the limitation effected differed from the kind familiar in European history; and even the continuance of his rule was far more dependent than that of mediaeval European kings on the continued will and assent of the people.

The fourth characteristic

A greater sovereign than the king was the Dharma, the religious, ethical, social, political, and customary law organically governing the life of the people. This impersonal authority was considered sacred and eternal in its spirit and the totality of its

body, always characteristically the same, the changes organically and spontaneously brought about in its actual form by the evolution of the society; and it must be noted that with the Dharma no secular authority had any right of autocratic interference. The Brahmins themselves were recorders and exponents of the Dharma, not its creators nor authorised to make at will any changes, The king was only the guardian, executor and servant of the Dharma, charged to see to its observance and to prevent offences, serious irregularities and breaches. He himself was bound the first to obey it and observe the rigorous rule it laid on his personal life and action and on the province, powers and duties of his regal authority and office.

The fifth characteristic

This subjection of the sovereign power to the Dharma was not an ideal theory inoperative in practice; for the rule of the socio-religious law actively conditioned the whole life of the people and was therefore a living reality, and it had in the political field very large practical consequences. It meant first that the king had not the power of direct legislation and was limited to the issue of administrative decrees that had to be in consonance with the religious, social, political, economic constitution of the community, neither could he disregard in the general tenor and character and the effective result of his administration the express or tacit will of the people.

The religious liberties of the commons were assured and could not normally be infringed by any secular authority; each religious community, each new or long-standing religion could shape its own way of life and institutions and had its own authorities or governing bodies exercising in their proper field an entire independence. There was no exclusive State religion and the monarch was not the religious head of the people.

The social life of the people was similarly free from autocratic interference. Instances of royal legislation in this province are rare. Change in the society was brought about not artificially from above but automatically from within and principally by the freedom allowed to communities to develop or alter automatically their own rule of life.

In the sphere of administration the power of the king was similarly hedged in by the standing constitution of the Dharma. His right of taxation was limited in the most important sources of revenue to a fixed percentage as a maximum. The king was in person the Supreme Court and the highest control in the execution of the civil and criminal law, but here too his role was that of the executor: he was bound to administer the law faithfully as it stood through.

He had the complete and unfettered control in his Council only of foreign policy, military administration and war and peace and of a great number of directive activities. He was free to make efficient arrangements for all that part of the administration that served to secure and promote the welfare of the community, good order, public morals, and all such matters as could best be supervised or regulated by the sovereign authority.

We may thus conclude in the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“There could therefore be ordinarily little or no room in the ancient Indian system for autocratic freak or monarchical violence and oppression, much less for the savage cruelty and tyranny of so common an occurrence in the history of some other countries.

Nevertheless such happenings were possible by the sovereign's disregard of the Dharma or by a misuse of his power of administrative decree.... The legists provided for the possibility of oppression. In spite of the sanctity and prestige attaching to the sovereign it was laid down that obedience ceased to be binding if the king ceased to be faithful executor of the Dharma. Incompetence and violation of the obligation to rule to the satisfaction of the people were in theory and effect sufficient causes for his removal. Manu even lays it down that an unjust and oppressive king should be killed by his own subjects like a mad dog, and this justification by the highest authority of the right or even the duty of insurrection and regicide in extreme cases is sufficient to show that absolutism or the unconditional divine right of kings was no part of the intention of the Indian political system.”

A detailed study of the ancient Indian polity will show us that the system was very well thought out; it was based on the combination of a very complex communal freedom and self-determination, each group unit of the community having its own natural existence and administering its own proper life and business, set off from the rest by a natural demarcation of its field and limits, but connected with the whole by well-understood relations, each a co-partner with the others in the powers and duties of the communal existence, executing its own laws and rules, administering within its own proper limits, joining with the others in the discussion and the regulation of matters of a mutual or common interest and represented in some way and to the degree of its importance in the general assemblies of the kingdom or empire. The State, sovereign or supreme political authority, was an instrument of coordination and of a general control and efficiency and exercised a supreme but not an absolute authority; for in all its rights and powers it was limited by the Law and by the will of the people and in all its internal functions only a co-partner with the other members of the socio-political body.

The one principle permanent at the base of construction throughout all the building and extension and rebuilding of the Indian polity was the principle of an organically self-determining communal life,—self-determining not only in the mass and by means of the machinery of the vote and a representative body erected on the surface, representative only of the political mind of a part of the nation, which is all that the modern system has been able to manage, but in every pulse of its life and in each separate member of its existence.

To sum up: It is evident that the ancient world was keenly aware of the fundamentals of the democratic principle and tried in its own unique way to implement it in their collective life.

Modern Democracy

The modern democratic system took a distinct shape in the eighteenth century in England; it developed gradually into the parliamentary democratic system and has been adopted by many countries with some minor adjustments. India is one of those countries which based its constitution and model of governance on the British model.

The historical background

However, it is important to understand the psychological roots of this development for it is only then that one can truly understand its functioning, its strengths, its limitations and the changes that need to be made.

History tells us that after the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century AD, Europe was more or less dominated by the Church. The Christian religion through the organisation of the Church dominated the life of almost the whole of Western Europe. No doubt there were kings and powerful feudal lords but all of them had to pay some sort of allegiance to the Church. The power of the Church was based on Faith. The people and almost the whole community had full faith in the Christian religion. Consequently almost all decisions both in the individual and collective life of the society were taken by the Church or priestly class. In this process, many good things happened even though it is sometimes referred to as the Dark Ages. Some kind of peace was maintained among the warring lords, education was taken care of by the Church, the old manuscripts were preserved and hospitals were built to look after the sick and injured. There surely were many more benefits during this period. However, two important forces that strongly motivate the Western mind were suppressed. The first one was the Reason – the inquiring, defining, effective practical reason and the second one was the cult of Life. The Church did not allow any free thinking and suppressed the urge to a full life; these forces were not allowed to grow and quite inevitably after a few centuries, there was a revolt demanding a free room for these two forces. This revolt was aided by the rampant corruption that was then prevalent in the Church. This led to the two great movements of the Reformation and the Renaissance. The consequence of the Reformation was to split the Church into two groups, the Catholics and the Protestants thus weakening the influence of the Church considerably. The Renaissance on the other hand released the power of Reason and the flowering of the aesthetic development.

The free play and development of Reason led to momentous changes in the life of Europe. There was first an Intellectual Revolution followed by the Industrial Revolution, which is really the application of Reason to life. Europe progressed by leaps and bounds and soon became the dominant continent of the whole world. One of the most important consequences of these movements was the belief and conviction that Reason was the highest instrument of Knowledge and that Faith must bow down to the dictates of Reason.

The psychological roots of the Democratic system

But when Reason becomes the dominant power in human life, its role cannot be restricted to only a few areas; it is the natural and inevitable drive that it has to be applied to the whole of life in all its details. Consequently when man starts applying reason to life – becoming reasonable – and makes it his chief instrument of knowledge, it inevitably starts questioning everything and expects rational answers.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“Man may for a time, for a long time even, live by the mere tradition of things whose reality he has lost, but not permanently; the necessity of questioning all his conventions and traditions arises, and by that necessity reason gets her first real chance of an

entire self-development. Reason can accept no tradition merely for the sake of its antiquity or its past greatness: it has to ask, first, whether the tradition contains at all any still living truth and, secondly, whether it contains the best truth available to man for the government of his life. Reason can accept no convention merely because men are agreed upon it: it has to ask whether they are right in their agreement, whether it is not an inert and false acquiescence. Reason cannot accept any institution merely because it serves some purpose of life: it has to ask whether there are not greater and better purposes which can be best served by new institutions. There arises the necessity of a universal questioning, and from that necessity arises the idea that society can only be perfected by the universal application of the rational intelligence to the whole of life, to its principle as to its details, to its machinery and to the powers that drive the machine.”

The question that inevitably follows is: Whose Reason is to be applied to solve the problems of society?

In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“This reason which is to be universally applied, cannot be the reason of a ruling class; for in the present imperfection of the human race that always means in practice the fettering and misapplication of reason degraded into a servant of power to maintain the privileges of the ruling class and justify the existing order.

It cannot be the reason of a few pre-eminent thinkers; for, if the mass is infrarational, the application of their ideas becomes in practice disfigured, ineffective, incomplete, speedily altered into mere form and convention. It must be the reason of each and all seeking for a basis of agreement.

Hence arises the principle of individualistic democracy, that the reason and will of every individual in the society must be allowed to count equally with the reason and will of every other in determining its government, in selecting the essential basis and in arranging the detailed ordering of the common life.”

This is the psychological root of Democracy; man starts to govern his individual and collective life by reason and this gradually led to the system of Parliamentary Democracy; it took shape first in England and then spread to other nations in the world. This system leads to what may be called representative democracy as opposed to direct democracy practised in ancient Athens. In modern times it is impossible to have direct democracy because of the size of the population. In Representative democracy it is claimed that the members of Parliament are the representatives of the people and their aspirations. We shall see later the falsehood underlying this assertion.

To sum up, the rational age believed that this common judgment should be effectively organised only for the indispensable common ends of the society, while in all else men must be left free to govern their own life according to their own reason and will and find freely its best possible natural adjustment with the lives of others. It was a deep conviction of this age that in this way by the practice of the free use of reason men can grow into rational beings and learn to live by common agreement a liberal, a vigorous, a natural and yet rationalised existence.

The problems and the causes of failure

However, this did not work out in the actual practice.
In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“In practice it is found that these ideas will not hold for a long time.

For the ordinary man is not yet a rational being; emerging from a long infrarational past, he is not naturally able to form a reasonable judgment, but thinks either according to his own interests, impulses and prejudices or else according to the ideas of others more active in intelligence or swift in action who are able by some means to establish an influence over his mind.

Secondly, he does not yet use his reason in order to come to an agreement with his fellows, but rather to enforce his own opinions by struggle and conflict with the opinions of others. Exceptionally he may utilise his reason for the pursuit of truth, but normally it serves for the justification of his impulses, prejudices and interests, and it is these that determine or at least quite discolour and disfigure his ideals, even when he has learned at all to have ideals.

Finally, he does not use his freedom to arrive at a rational adjustment of his life with the life of others; his natural tendency is to enforce the aims of his life even at the expense of or, as it is euphemistically put, in competition with the life of others. There comes thus to be a wide gulf between the ideal and the first results of its practice. There is here a disparity between fact and idea that must lead to inevitable disillusionment and failure.

Consequences of the democratic system

The individualistic democratic ideal brings us at first in actual practice to the more and more precarious rule of a dominant class in the name of democracy over the ignorant, numerous and less fortunate mass.

Secondly, since the ideal of freedom and equality is abroad and cannot any longer be stifled, it must lead to the increasing effort of the exploited masses to assert their downtrodden right and to turn, if they can, this pseudo-democratic falsehood into the real democratic truth; therefore, to a war of classes.

Thirdly, it develops inevitably as part of its process a perpetual strife of parties, at first few and simple in composition, but afterwards as at the present time an impotent and sterilising chaos of names, labels, programmes, war-cries. All lift the banner of conflicting ideas or ideals, but all are really fighting out under that flag a battle of conflicting interests.

Finally, individualistic democratic freedom results fatally in an increasing stress of competition which replaces the ordered tyrannies of the infrarational periods of humanity by a sort of ordered conflict. And this conflict ends in the survival not of the spiritually, rationally or physically fittest, but of the most fortunate and vitally successful. It is evident enough that, whatever else it may be, this is not a rational order of society; it is not at all the perfection which the individualistic reason of man had contemplated as its ideal or set out to accomplish.”

We have shown the psychological roots of the modern democratic system as it is practised all over the world. As it should be clear, the system is based on the following premises:

Reason is the highest instrument of knowledge at the disposal of man. Therefore the perfection of life comes by the application of reason to both individual and collective life. In the individual life each man is expected to govern his life by his own reason without interfering with the same right in the life of other individuals. In the collective life the collective reason has to be applied only to the indispensable common ends of the society. The question is now what is meant by the collective reason? As already explained earlier, it cannot be the reason of the intellectual elite nor can it be the reason of the ruling power; it has to be the reason of each and every individual member of the society who has developed the capacity of reasoning. This has been fixed to adults who have crossed the age of eighteen.

The system failed for the following reasons: firstly a large number of men have not yet developed the power of using their reason and secondly because even those who have developed the power of reasoning use it to justify their interests and preferences or to justify their intellectual points of view. The consequence is the inevitable failure of the theory.

It would seem that the corrective to this is the introduction of universal rational education. This is a long term solution and would demand a strong political will, huge amounts of investment and a radical improvement in the methods of education and would take a long time to implement.

In the meanwhile all modern nations have devised a democratic system to implement these ideas; in India we have adopted the parliamentary democratic system based more or less on the British model. The question that we shall now raise is with the system that has been adopted in India. We shall take a look at the basic and essential features of the system and what it claims for itself.

Here is what Sri Aurobindo writes about modern democracy.

For that is what the modern democracy at present is in fact; the sole democratic elements are public opinion, periodical elections and the power of the people to refuse re-election to those who have displeased it. The government is really in the hands of the bourgeoisie, the professional and business men, the landholders, —where such a class still exists,—strengthened by a number of new arrivals from the working-class who very soon assimilate themselves to the political temperament and ideas of the governing classes.

Let us now take a look at the Parliamentary system in India.

The Parliamentary system in India

What are the essential elements on which the Parliamentary system in India is based? They are as follows:

1. Universal adult franchise with the eligible voters having the option to vote or not to vote.

2. Periodic elections are held at different levels, Parliament, State, districts right down to the Panchayats.
3. Single member constituencies with the first past-the-post winners.
4. The Government is formed by the party or the conglomerate of parties that gets a majority of seats in the legislature.
5. The leader elected by that party or conglomerate is nominated as the Prime Minister.
6. The Prime Minister selects his minister only from the legislature. The system is justified on some of these counts:
7. It is said to be representative of the people and their will.
8. It is said that the Government formed in this manner will be broad based, representative, stable, durable and effective.
9. It claims to ensure accountability – of each member to the Prime Minister, of each minister to his colleagues through the principle of collective responsibility and finally of the political Executive to the Parliament.

In the next part of the article, we shall make a detailed study of the system in its actual working in India.

Humanity At The Crossroads : Does Sri Aurobindo Offer an Alternative?

Shakuntala A and Ajai R Singh

Abstract

In the light of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, this paper looks into some of the problems of contemporary man as an individual, a member of society, a citizen of his country, a component of this world, and of nature itself. Concepts like Science; Nature; Matter; Mental Being; Mana-purusa; Prana-purusa; Citta-purusa; Nation-ego and Nation-soul; True and False Subjectivism; World-state and World-union; Religion of Humanism are the focus of this paper.

Nature: Beneath the diversity and uniqueness of the different elements in Nature, there is an essential unity that not only allows for this diversity but even supports it. Nature is both a benefactor and a force: a benefactor, because it acts to carry out the evolution of mankind; a force, because it also supplies the necessary energy and momentum to achieve it.

Natural calamities: If mankind can quieten the tsunamis and cyclones and droughts and earthquakes that rage within, and behave with care and compassion towards Nature, not exploiting, denuding, or denigrating it, there is a strong possibility that Nature too will behave with equal care and compassion towards man and spare him the natural calamities that rend him asunder.

Science: The limitations of science become obvious, according to Sri Aurobindo, when we realise that it has mastered knowledge of processes and helped in the creation of machinery but is ignorant of the foundations of being and, therefore, cannot perfect our nature or our life.

Science and philosophy: The insights of philosophy could become heuristic and algorithmic models for scientific experimentation.

Matter: An interesting aspect of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is his acceptance of the reality of matter even while highlighting its inadequacies; the ultimate goal, according to him, is the divination of matter itself.

Purusa: If the mana-purusa (mental being) were to log on to the genuine citta-purusa (psychic formation), without necessarily logging off from the prana-purusa (frontal formation), it may help quieten the turbulences within, which may be a prelude to the quietening of the disturbances without, whether it be physical maladies, cravings (for food, fame, fortune, etc.), destructive competitiveness; or wars, terror-

ism, ethnic conflicts, communal riots, and the other such social maladies that afflict mankind today.

Nation-ego (false subjectivism) and Nation-soul (true subjectivism): Sri Aurobindo considers Nation-ego an example of false subjectivism, in which national identity and pride are stressed to prove one's superiority and suppress or exploit the rest. The Nation-soul, as an example of true subjectivism, attempts to capture one's traditional heritage and values in its pristine form, not as a reaction to hurts and angers or as compensation for real or imagined injuries or indignities of the past.

World-state (false subjectivism) and World-union (true subjectivism): Similarly, a World-state founded upon the principle of centralisation and uniformity, a mechanical and formal unity, is an example of false subjectivism, while a World-union founded upon the principle of liberty and variation in a free and intelligent unity is an example of true subjectivism.

Human actualisation: Even if two human beings are similar, in so far as they are human beings, there is so much diversity between them. Part of the movement towards human self-actualisation lies in the fact that this diversity should not be forcibly curbed, as also the realisation that beneath all that appears disparate there is an essential unity. Also, man is not the end product of evolution but an intermediate stage between the animal and the divine. Moreover, he is endowed with consciousness that enables him to cooperate with the forces of evolution and speed up and telescope the next stage of evolution.

Introduction I.1. To say that Sri Aurobindo is not easy to comprehend would be a huge understatement, if nothing else. While that can dissuade a number of people from going any further, it can motivate a number of others to study him that much more closely. Let us hope that some of us fall in the latter category.

I.2. Moreover, Sri Aurobindo has written prolifically and has expressed himself on a vast array of topics. This makes it all the more important to study his teachings, while also making him more liable to the barbs of critics itching to point out loopholes; and there are quite a few of these around: we mean critics with this attitude, not loopholes. Let us also hope that at least some of us do not belong to that category.

I.3. Humanity today is indeed passing through numerous crises, and yet surviving. While we all, no doubt, wish to continue to evolve through all this survival (hopefully even reaching the supramental state promised by the great seer of Pondicherry), our concerns here are a little more pedestrian. We propose to look into some of the problems of contemporary man as an individual, a member of society, a citizen of his country, as a component of this world and of nature itself. Come to think of it, these concerns are not all that pedestrian after all.

I.4. Some concepts like Science, Nature, Matter, Mental Being, *Mana-purusa*, *Prana-purusa* and *Citta-purusa*, Nation-ego and Nation-soul, True and False Subjectivism, World-state and World-union, and the Religion of Humanism will be the focus of this paper. Why not the rest, you may ask. Well, not that the others are not important, but we believe these particular concepts deserve our focus here. Especially so today, as

humanity finds itself at the crossroads, and searches, rather gingerly, for some tentative answers, which may hopefully translate into permanent solutions.

II. Science, Matter, And Nature

II.1. While science is engaged, with ample justification, in highlighting the distinguishing characters, the “discontinuities and discreteness of the elements of Nature, ..there is a level of reality which is continuous and yet to be grasped by the physical senses and science.”^[1]

What is this level of reality which is continuous? It is to understand that Nature has immense potentialities; it is like a sleeping God. If awakened, it can raise all the elements that constitute it, including man, through the different levels of existence— material, vital, mental, and beyond, i.e., the supramental. This is possible only if we first of all realise that beneath the diversity and uniqueness of the different elements in Nature, there is an essential unity that not only allows for this diversity, but even supports it. Which means if the diversity of elements in nature is fundamental, equally fundamental is the unity that runs through these diverse elements.

One of the important assignments for the scientific man of today would be to engage in tracing out this unity, while he is justifiably busy engaged in his methods of categorising, classifying, differentiating, etc. Otherwise, it is in danger of remaining just a mass of formulae, ignorant of the foundation of being, and a poor instrument to perfect our nature or our life:

.....our science itself is a construction, a mass, of formulas and devices; masterful in the knowledge of processes and in the creation of apt machinery, but ignorant of the foundations of the being and of World-being, it cannot perfect our nature and therefore cannot perfect our life.^[2]

Of course the larger problem remains: whether science will arrive at *the* ultimate truth, or *any* ultimate truth. To this too, Sri Aurobindo makes a rather insightful remark:

...one might ask whether science has arrived at any ultimate truth; on the contrary, ultimate truth even on the physical plane seems to recede as science advances.^[3]

Which makes us remember the astute remark of George Bernard Shaw: “Every true scientist is a metaphysician,” and that of Albert Einstein: “Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind”.^[4] By religion, may we add, Einstein most probably meant spirituality, compassion, morality, and the ennobling aspects of religion (not its dogmatic and fanatical manifestations). How best to make science collaborate (if not combine) with philosophy and with spirituality and the other ennobling aspects of religion (especially compassion and brotherhood) is an important task before the votaries of science today.

At the same time, let us realise that Science, with its methods and approach, is the favourite whipping boy of most philosophers.^[5] So much so, we suspect it is in danger of becoming immune to even philosophy's legitimate pleas. However, a happy meeting

ground would be a realisation of each other's limitations and, more important, working together in an atmosphere of intellectual integration, wherein the insights of philosophy could become heuristic and algorithmic models for scientific experimentation. For, let's face it, if science cannot lay claim to being the sole guardian of humanity, neither can philosophy.

This challenge and realisation has to be accepted by both sides for the sake of the welfare of society and at times for, if nothing else, its very survival.

II.2. The forces of Nature have exercised a fascinating influence on human beings. While we know that many of these forces are promotive to existence, we also know that a number of them are far from being so. Earthquakes, cyclones, floods, and natural calamities in various forms have a devastating effect on the constituents of Nature. In what sense, then, can the following statement have meaning: "the forces of Nature expressed through laws are not destructive, rather it is expressive and promotive of the human mind, its thought and action, and their freedom."^[6]

The forces of Nature which cause natural calamities, such as the recent tsunami, the multiple earthquakes, cyclones, and famines, which have ravaged this country, and a number of others all over the world—how can such forces of Nature not be destructive but, rather, be expressive and promotive? Of course, we can find a convenient escape route by saying that what the author quoted above referred to were not the forces of Nature as such, but (the forces) as expressed through the fundamental laws. In that case, however, we are not concentrating on certain events but on the laws which govern them, and we can very well say that such laws are expressive and promotive at a deeper level, in ways which may not be comprehensible to our superficial and distressed awareness. Maybe it is so. A justification for natural disaster: that it is a means for bringing about population control or to reduce the evil in society, has been advanced by a number of thinkers even earlier, Gandhi being not the least of them when he talked of the justification for the Bihar earthquake of 1934. To the mind acutely aware of the tragedy involved in such natural calamities, such reasoning defies comprehension. It may be convenient to believe that behind every action manifest in Nature is the Supreme, trying to arouse and guide us to perfection; but at the same time, let us fervently hope that none of those on that path to perfection were a part of the disaster and that they continue to remain so "protected."

Strange and incomprehensible are the ways of Nature. Equally strange and incomprehensible can be the ways by which man justifies the vagaries of Nature. Having said that, however, even expression of the destructive forces of Nature can be "expressive and promotive of the human mind, its thought and action, and their freedom"^[7] in at least one way: It has made a number of people express their solidarity towards the disaster-affected victims, and it has helped promote the feeling of care and compassion for the disadvantaged in the more privileged and fortunate sections of the world. Well, every cloud has a silver lining. It is just that here the cloud seems to be enormous and the silver lining appears to be far too thin.

II.3. Let us come to another interesting aspect of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, which may possibly help resolve the issue, and that is his acceptance of the reality of matter

while highlighting its inadequacies. "Sri Aurobindo is naturalist in a special sense. He affirms the reality of matter and at the same time highlights its imperfection. He affirms the reality of life-world and points out its imperfection and even distortion. He analyses the rich complexity of the human mind and also shows its inadequacy to grasp the integrality of reality as a whole."^[8]

Do we now have an answer? That matter exists but is imperfect. The world exists but is imperfect, even distorted. Hence it is subject to calamities and disasters. That the human mind is rich and complex is all right, but it may not be able "to grasp the integrality of reality as a whole".⁹ Which means even when things go drastically wrong in Nature or in man, we should be able to understand that there is integrality even in such a reality; a reality that only a holistic approach will make obvious.

This is because the human mind, however rich and complex it may be in its ability, is still inadequate in its grasp of the integral nature of phenomena as they express themselves in Nature outside, and in nature within as well.

Of course, to understand the mysteries of events and happenings around us, we must, besides helping correct the situation outside, examine the tsunamis and earthquakes and cyclones and floods and droughts that afflict us within. The tsunamis of our desires devastate our rationalities, the floods of greed rampage our morality, the droughts of compassion dwarf our sense of fraternity, and the earthquakes of our personal tragedies break down the edifices of our beliefs. To that extent, all such tragedies and events in Nature ostensibly have a destructive, but fundamentally an expressive and promotive effect, on human nature.

All the law of Nature is a thing precise in its necessities of process, but is yet in the cause of that necessity and of its constancy of rule, measure, combination, adaptation, result a thing inexplicable, meeting us at every step with a mystery and a miracle, and this must be either because it is irrational and accidental even in its regularities or because it is suprarational, because the truth of it belongs to a principle greater than that of our intelligence.

That principle is the supramental; that is to say, the hidden secret of Nature in the organisation of something out of the infinite potentialities of the self-existent truth of the spirit, the nature of which is wholly evident only to an original knowledge born of, and proceeding by, a fundamental identity, the spirit's constant self-perception. All these processes are actually spiritual and supramental in their secret government, but mental, vital, and physical in their overt process.^[10]

While every disaster is heartrending, it is also an occasion and an invitation to human growth. This of course is not in any way to reduce the impact that such tragedies have on our brethren or to trivialise the issue by offering smart intellectual justification for events. But in some special sense, the ill-understood and inexorable ways of Nature, and the forces that move it, are guiding man's destiny and, hopefully, his actions in the direction of not just survival but of an integral evolution. We pray that this hope becomes a conviction, furthering man's self-actualisation and also strengthening his resolve to live in harmony with Nature and his brethren, rather than remain only an excuse to quieten internal disturbances arising out of bafflement with the

inscrutable vagaries of Nature. An example of one such integral evolution is the following thought that we place for your consideration:

If mankind can quieten the tsunamis and cyclones and droughts and earthquakes that rage within, and behave with care and compassion towards Nature, not exploiting or denuding or denigrating it, there is a strong possibility that Nature too will behave with equal care and compassion towards man and spare him the natural calamities than rend him asunder. This is the lesson of the tsunami tragedy that engulfed us recently, and of all such tragedies that have ravaged mankind from time immemorial.

This realisation may be considered one manifestation of how human consciousness, which is in the “twilight zone of reality...is being increasingly brightened by the light beyond the supermind”.^[11] Only the descent of the supramental consciousness on the earth can rid humanity of the “poverty of the powers of consciousness besieged by maladies of various kinds.”^[12]

II.4. Let us now consider Man and his relation with Nature:

In Man, two ends of Nature, the growing animal sector and the arc of the Above, meet and interact, supplementing and complementing each other.^[13]

What is the essence of being a Man? Firstly, that he is an animal, and secondly, that he is capable of evolving because of “the arc of the Above,” which finds a resonating chord in his inner being. If the chord is well tuned, it will vibrate in harmony with the symphony from above. It makes sense to say that the major part of our energies must be directed to such self-tuning.

This is one important task before mankind today. But it must be supplemented by the knowledge that the two forces of Nature working on man interact in him, not to contradict each other or to disturb his fundamental equilibrium (although it may disturb his superficial equilibrium to an extent), but in a manner which supplements, that is adds on to, and complements, that is completes, the work of these two forces in their attempt to bring about man’s evolution. To that extent, Nature is both a benefactor and a force: a benefactor, because it acts to carry out the evolution of mankind; a force, because it also supplies the necessary energy and momentum to achieve it. In this way, it is both the visionary and the executor; both the propagator and the creator. (And having seen the destructive role of Nature earlier, we see the trinity of Creation-Perpetuation-Destruction, the Brahma-Vishnu-Mahesh, being manifest in Nature too.) Moreover, as it is guided by and acted upon by “the arc of the Above,” it fulfils its role in mankind’s evolution that much more integrally.

The task before the thinking mind of today is to realise this happening, to be receptive to the changes and modifications it brings about in him, to tune in to the integral rhythms this arouses within and with the living-nonliving environment around, and to allow for the actions that spontaneously and inevitably spring therefrom.

III. Purusa, Nation-Soul, And World-Unity

III.1. Let us come to the concepts of *mana-purusa*, *prana-purusa*, and *citta-purusa*:^[14]

The mental being (*mana-purusa*) has a frontal formation (*prana-purusa*) and transcendental psychic formation (*citta-purusa*).^[15]

We must also understand these concepts in the light of what Sri Aurobindo considers false subjectivism and true subjectivism.^[16]

The *mana-purusa*, which is the mental being, is acted upon by the *prana-purusa*, which is the vital being, and the *citta-purusa*, which is the psychic formation. (The *mana-purusa* can be roughly compared to the mind, the *prana-purusa* to the living body, and the *citta-purusa* to the soul.) The *prana-purusa* can give rise to obsessive vital cravings, which can be a drag on the *mana-purusa*; while the *citta-purusa*, which is subliminal and transcendental, uplifts him to function at a higher plane. The *mana-purusa*, while it cannot avoid the legitimate needs of his *prana-purusa*, must not get obsessively preoccupied with it, because that would lead to man becoming unduly pragmatic and making “our political interests also perniciously narrow.”^[17]

This is exactly what happens in the man of today who is obsessively preoccupied with satisfying his physical needs and emotional desires at the cost of his spiritual development and, hence, is perpetually dissatisfied. The consequent disease, deviance, psychopathology, and social strife that we see around us are manifestations of the frustration that results due to such dissatisfaction.

The obsessive craving for foods, fads, fashions, fame, fortune, and for possessions, human and material, involve a pathological linking of the *mana-purusa* with the *prana-purusa* and a delinking with his *citta-purusa*. The ills of hyper-consumerism and drug and other dependences are also a manifestation of this obsessive need to satisfy the *prana-purusa* delinked from the *citta-purusa*. The attempts to rewrite history, to avenge historical wrongs, to seek communal retribution, to use fear and terror to achieve ideological and “religious” goals, all these involve a pathological linking of the *mana-purusa* with a *prana-purusa* masquerading as a *citta-purusa*, for the *citta-purusa* has both a real and a false form-and the inevitable dissatisfaction that results therefrom, which further fuels such action.

However, if the *mana-purusa* were to *log on* to the genuine *citta-purusa*, without necessarily *logging off* from the *prana-purusa*, it may help quieten the turbulences within, which may be a prelude to the quietening of the disturbances without, whether it be physical maladies, cravings (for food, fame, fortune etc), destructive competitiveness, wars, terrorism, ethnic conflicts, communal riots, or other such social maladies that afflict mankind today.

To *log on* to the genuine *citta-purusa* means to *log on* to the unity that underlies the diversity within human beings. Somewhere down the line it also means to *log on* to the integrality that underlies all existence. This would amount to being the true subjectivism of Sri Aurobindo and would help get rid of the false subjectivism that binds contemporary man’s *mana-purusa* unhealthily and obsessively with his *prana-purusa* or with a false *citta-purusa* that negates the essential unity that underlies the diversity amongst beings and all existence itself. In other words, the first halting but resolute steps on the journey to true subjectivism must be taken in this manner by the man of today.

III.2. A related concept for us in these times is that of Nation-ego and Nation-soul as described by Sri Aurobindo. He considers Nation-ego an example of false subjectivism,

in which national identity and pride are stressed upon to prove one's superiority and to suppress or exploit the rest. The example he quotes frequently is that of Nazism in Germany, obviously because he lived during that period:

She (Nazi Germany) had mistaken her vital ego for herself; she had sought for her soul and found only her force. For she had said, like the Asura, "I am my body, my life, my mind, my temperament," and became attached with a titanic force to these; especially she had said, "I am my life and body," and that there can be no greater mistake for man and nation. The soul of a man or nation is something more and diviner than that; it is greater than its instruments and cannot be shut up in a physical, a vital, a mental, or a temperamental formula... It is evident that there is a false as well as a true subjectivism and the errors to which the subjective trend may be liable are as great as its possibilities and may well lead to capital disasters. This distinction must be clearly grasped if the road of this stage of social evolution is to be made safe for the human race .^[18]

For us today, it is necessary to analyse and place in perspective such fascist and fundamentalist ideologies and forces, which not only raise their ugly heads once in a while but also attempt to capture the social consciousness of communities. The implications of this statement for India should be obvious. But if some people feel like implicating the extreme Right here, let us not forget that the extreme Left can be equally guilty; for dogmatism and fanaticism have the curious ability to cut across ideological boundaries.

Distinct from the Nation-ego is the concept of Nation-soul. The Nation-soul is an attempt to capture one's traditional heritage and values in its pristine form, not as a reaction to hurts and angers or due to real or imagined injuries or indignities of the past. Anger, hurt, and indignity can be a spur, but never the driving force, of any constructive movement. This is because an ideology or organisation, or even a movement, which is based wholly or even mainly on anger or the desire for retribution, or for the resurrection of past glories that involved subjugation of people, can only breed discord, further strife, clashes, and enmity between groups and peoples. This has been at the source of the various ethnic conflicts since time immemorial and continues to plague mankind even today.

More germane to the issue for us in India today is whether concepts like *hindutva* are a manifestation of Nation-ego or Nation-soul. While the protagonists would immediately jump up and claim that it is a manifestation of the Nation-soul, the opponents would be equally insistent it is a perfect manifestation of the Nation-ego: and a puerile manifestation, if ever there was one.

Our purpose here is not to take sides, to act the arbiter, or to incite passions, which is easy even for philosophers. The *prana-purusa*, whether we like it or not, continues to exercise a great hold even here. Be that as it may, if the votaries of *hindutva* propagate their ideal, not only as an affirmation of the cultural and civilisational underpinnings of this nation's great heritage, but to use it as a convenient handle to intimidate and suppress minorities, then it would be akin to the Nazi's attitude towards the Jews.

However, if it is not exclusivist and is a careful and compassionate assertion of the tradition, the heritage bequeathed, and the values eternally followed and universally applicable, and a careful extract of that in the tradition which stresses the unity that underlies all beings and of existence itself, such a *hindutva* need have no difficulty becoming a true subjectivism and ideology fit for the Nation-soul. In this there is a challenge and an opportunity, as much for the votaries of this concept as its opponents: for the votaries to reaffirm that it is a concept of Nation-soul and never to allow it to become a concept to justify Nation-ego; for the opponents of today to be vigilant that it does not so happen, and at the same time not to cry wolf, or get unduly alarmed at a genuine affirmation of all that was noble and sublime in the Indian tradition, which needs a careful sifting, reappraisal, and rejuvenation as much by the votaries as by the adversaries of today. For:

This is what a true subjectivism teaches us: firstly, that we are a higher self than our ego or our members; secondly, that we are in our life and being not only ourselves but all others; for there is a secret solidarity which our egoism may kick at and strive against, but from which we cannot escape .^[19]

In this connection, the larger context should not be forgotten. For, with our narrow preoccupations we may forget that India may indeed have a larger role to play in the world:

Another point very important to remember is that Sri Aurobindo always placed India's freedom in the larger context of the destiny of the human race. This fact is most remarkable because revolutionaries talk only about their own country. However, Sri Aurobindo always had a deeper vision of what India should do for humanity. In fact, he said that India has to be free in order that it can play its role in the emancipation of the human race .^[20]

III.3. Let us now come to another important distinction made by Sri Aurobindo which is equally important today: the distinction between World-state and World-union:

To that reason two alternative possibilities and therefore two ideals present themselves, a World-State founded upon the principle of centralisation and uniformity, a mechanical and formal unity, or a World-union founded upon the principle of liberty and variation in a free and intelligent unity .^[21]

This is a logical extension of his distinction between Nation-ego and Nation-soul.

Just like his spiritualism does not negate matter, his idea of global unity does not negate the idea of national freedom. Nations bring their own civilisational diversities and they need to preserve their cultural autonomy even whilst coming together and thinking in terms of global issues:

A free world-union must in its very nature be a complex unity based on diversity and that diversity must be based on free self-determination .^[22]

The concept of a World-state, on the other hand, is a false subjectivism according to him, because it would result in bringing about forced and imposed uniformity:

The ideal of uniformity, like the cult of state, is tainted by anti-libertarianism. It amounts to the denial of the basic principle of human unity amidst civilisational diversity and cultural autonomy. He (Sri Aurobindo) thinks that our experiments with the 'Ideal of One World' must be free from misplaced commitment to barren uniformism and hegemonism .^[23]

The very movement towards uniformism is fundamentally flawed. It is a misplaced extension of the scientific attitude of finding out only commonalities in peoples and phenomena. Even if two human beings are similar, in so far as they are human beings, there is so much diversity in them. Part of the movement towards human self-actualisation lies in the fact that this diversity should not be forcibly curbed, as also the realisation that beneath all that appears disparate, there is an essential unity. We should stress on such disparateness as it leads to the growth of human and national potential, while at the same time not forgetting to accent the essential unity of all mankind. This is a true and genuine affirmation of the ideal of World-union, as distinct from a narrow, mechanistic, and constricting ideal that the concept of a World-state represents. In other words, all such movements toward Internationalism, which stifle the genuine cultural, civilisational, and patriotic aspirations of its member states, will always be a failure. Those that accept and respect their cultural and ideological diversity, and yet help them to come together on broad consensual issues, motivated by respect and compassion for such diversity of cultural and ideological expression, and embraced by the deepest undercurrent of the integrality that underlies all human beings everywhere, these alone will succeed in forging true Internationalism and world unity. What is applicable to the member nations of the world is equally applicable to the member states of the Indian union, if we wish to forge a vibrant and evolving Indian nation. At a more fundamental level, this is applicable to the union of all living and non-living beings everywhere.

IV. Religion of Man, Religion of Humanity, Divination of Matter, Evolution To Divinity

IV.1. What can be the religion of the Man of today, besieged as he is by the numerous pulls and pressures of creeds, dogmas, and religious ideologies, which have been ritualised and fossilised beyond recognition by dogmatic followers who are adept at offering glib rationalisations for the sufferings of mankind?

...the orthodox religions looked with eyes of pious sorrow and gloom on the earthly life of man and were ready to bid him bear peacefully and contentedly, even to welcome its crudities, cruelties, oppressions, and tribulations as a means for learning to appreciate and for earning the better life which will be given us hereafter .^[24]

Sri Aurobindo is quite categorical in emphasising that neither an "idol, nor the nation, the State, the family, or anything else ought to take the place of..." the fundamental idea that mankind is the godhead to be worshipped and served by man.^[25] For that alone will ensure that the body of man, the life of man, the heart of man, and the mind of man develop in their quest for divinity. For this, the fundamental concept has to be:

Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, colour, nationality, status, or political or social advancement. The body of man is to be respected, made immune from violence and outrage, and fortified by science against disease and preventable death. The life of man is to be held sacred, preserved, strengthened, ennobled, and uplifted. The heart of man is to be held sacred also, given scope, protected from violation, from suppression, from mechanisation, freed from belittling influences. The mind of man is to be released from all bonds, allowed freedom and range and opportunity, given all its means of self-training and self-development and organised in the play of its powers for the service of humanity .^[26]

IV.2. The challenge that Sri Aurobindo throws to orthodox or organised religion is but appropriate: That man must be sacred to man, regardless of all distinctions. A religion that uplifts man on the spiritual plane, that helps acknowledge and bind the essential humanity across ideological/cultural/geographical boundaries, without spreading hatred or superiority/exclusivity amongst its followers, that alone can be a true religion. Moreover, in sustaining and perpetuating the outer symbols and structures of religion, man may forget to resurrect the inner spiritual symbols and structures, which alone can sustain true religiosity. Such symbols, when honestly searched for, will only lead to respect for all humans and even all living forms. It will also forge mutual respect and understanding of the diverse religions of the world and help generate a quest to underscore the essential spiritual unity which underlies these diverse religious strands.

Also, any religion which neglects the advancement of man's spiritual quest so as to sustain its dogmas and rituals and to command blind obedience will, in the final analysis, turn out to be promoting a false God. Sri Aurobindo's accent on the religion of humanity is to make organised religion beware of the dangers of fossilisation and make us aware once again of the fundamental tenet of humanism that:

Man is the measure of all things .^[27]

This reminds us of another great contemporary of Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi, and what he said about the practical aspect of religion:

Religion which takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion .^[28]

IV.3. Coming back to Sri Aurobindo, we cannot but be impressed with the breadth and expanse of his thoughts and the invitation he offers us to change and evolve in his

vision of change is involved both the divination of matter and the active involvement of human beings in reaching the next stage of evolution. The insightful comments of a keen Aurobindo researcher on both these issues is worth a close look:

...his goal was not individual salvation. His goal was not even a collective salvation; it was nothing short of a divination of matter, a transmutation of terrestrial consciousness...He was not satisfied with this matter and felt it had got to change, and the only way to change the texture of the matter, molecular or otherwise, is to bring down the light and the power of supramental to bear upon terrestrial consciousness. That was the key .^[29]

According to Sri Aurobindo, man is not the end product of evolution. Man is simply an intermediate creature, between the animal and the divine...with the advent of man, for the first time, there is a creature on planet earth that can cooperate consciously with the force of evolution. This is the great difference. Evolution need no longer be blind and instinctive. Human beings are endowed with consciousness that enables them to cooperate with the evolutionary thrust. And thereby perhaps, speed up and telescope, what otherwise would have taken another billion years, into a much shorter time span. The concept that has evolved is that man is an intermediate creature between the animal and the divine, and is endowed with consciousness that enables him to cooperate with the forces of evolution^[30]

The seer of Pondicherry invites man to be an active participant and collaborator in a transformation that unchains him from his dogmas and inspires him to attain the highest, not only for himself but also for all mankind. The insightful comments of another keen Aurobindo researcher are appropriate here:

If we make a serious study of Sri Aurobindo, we shall find ourselves to be a participant of that adventure of consciousness which invites us to collaborate with that wide-ranging Yoga that can liberate us from the fetters of dogmas and preconceptions and inspire us to realise the highest and the best, not only for ourselves but for the entire humanity .^[31]

V. Disaster, Despair, Hope, And Integrating Quietude

V.1. Together, we have taken a rather brisk but eventful walk through the fascinating lanes and bye-lanes of Sri Aurobindo's thoughts.

As humanity stands at the crossroads today, we find one road which leads to disaster, a road paved by the misadventures of science coupled with the ulterior motives of man. Another leads to despair, because of the pessimism and cynicism that comes from viewing the ugliness of modern life. The third is lit by hope, based on the wonderful advancements of science and technology. The last pathway is lit brilliantly, by an all-embracing integrating quietude, and that is by a mankind rooted in matter but soaring towards the spirit.

Humanity, thou art afoot. Take what course thou wilt.

Concluding Remarks

Beneath the diversity and uniqueness of the different elements in Nature, there is an essential unity, that not only allows for this diversity but even supports it.

Science has mastered knowledge of processes and helped in the creation of machinery but is ignorant of the foundations of being, and therefore cannot perfect our nature or our life.

If the *mana-purusa* (mental being) were to *log on* to the genuine *citta-purusa* (psychic formation), without necessarily *logging off* from the *prana-purusa* (frontal formation), it may help quieten the turbulences within, which may be a prelude to the quietening of the disturbances without, whether it be wars, terrorism, ethnic conflicts, communal riots, and other such social maladies that afflict mankind today. To *log on* to the genuine *citta-purusa* means to *log on* to the unity that underlies the diversity within human beings. And, somewhere down the line, it also means to *log on* to the integrality that underlies all existence.

Nation-ego is an example of false subjectivism, in which national identity and pride are stressed to prove one's superiority and suppress or exploit others. The Nation-soul as an example of true subjectivism attempts to capture one's traditional heritage and values in its pristine form. *Hindutva*, if it has to be legitimate, must attempt to be an expression of Nation-soul and not Nation-ego.

A World-state founded upon the principle of centralisation and uniformity, a mechanical and formal unity, is an example of false subjectivism, while a World-union founded upon the principle of liberty and variation in a free and intelligent unity is an example of true subjectivism

The movement towards human self-actualisation lies in the fact that human diversity should not be forcibly curbed, as also the realisation that beneath all that appears disparate, there is an essential unity.

Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, colour, nationality, status, and political or social advancement. Man is not the end product of evolution but an intermediate stage between the animal and the divine. He is endowed with consciousness that enables him to cooperate with the forces of evolution.

The ultimate goal is the divination of matter itself.

Take Home Message

The diversity of Nature, as also of man, is based on an essential unity, which needs to be grasped.

Science has mastered processes and machinery but is ignorant of the foundations of being.

Nation-ego, in the form of national pride and identity to prove one's superiority and for exploiting others, is false subjectivism, which must be distinguished from Nation-soul that attempts to capture one's traditional heritage and values in its pristine form, which is true subjectivism.

A World-state based on centralisation and uniformity is false subjectivism, while a

World-union founded upon liberty and variation in a free and intelligent unity is true subjectivism.

Man can evolve towards divinity, as can matter.

Questions That This Paper Raises

1. Do the teachings of Sri Aurobindo have any relevance for today's times?
2. How can science, while supplying processes and machinery, also help in understanding the essence of being?
3. Is Nation-ego and Nation-soul a viable distinction? Or for that matter, World-state and World-union? What are their practical ramifications?
4. How does one capture one's traditional heritage and values in their pristine form (Nation-soul) without trying to prove one's superiority, or for exploiting others (Nation-ego)?
5. How does one ensure liberty and variation in a free and intelligent unity (World-union) while avoiding centralisation and uniformity (World-state)?
6. Is divination of man and matter possible? How?

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consciousness. He also talks of *cittakasa*, *cittapramatha*, *cittasakti*, *cittashuddhi*, *cittavrtti*, *cittavrttinirodha*, *citti*, *citti acitti*, *cittim acittim cinavan vi vidvan etc.* However, that need not detract us from the burden of the argument Prof. Chattopadhyaya forwards.

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(This paper was first published in the Mens Sana Monographs, 2009, vol.7, Issue 1, pp.110-127, available at <http://www.msmonographs.org/article.asp?973-1229>. Reproduced with permission (c) MSM).

The Foundations Of Social Sustainability

M. S. Srinivasan

The concept of sustainability has now been accepted by all progressive thinkers in environment and development studies. However, if we may redefine sustainable development as the path which leads to the safe evolution of humanity towards its highest destiny, then sustainability cannot be confined to the ecology of physical Nature or green issues. There is something like social, psychological and spiritual sustainability. This article examines the ideal of social sustainability in the light of an integral spiritual vision of human development.

Towards a New Social Synthesis:

Is there a standard of principles, like the gold standard in economics, which can help us in choosing or shaping the values which can steer the sustainable evolution of the human society or a community towards its highest destiny? There are certain principles discovered by the higher mind or the collective wisdom of humanity in its progressive evolution. It is a quaternary: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Progress. These values are neither Eastern nor Western, modern or ancient. They are in their essence, as Sri Aurobindo points out “the eternal attributes of the Spirit” in man.⁽¹⁾ which means intrinsic qualities of the human soul. However they have an inner as well as an outer dimension. The modern secular mind of the west has understood these principles in its outer economic, social and political significance. On the other hand the spiritual mind of the East laid a much greater emphasis on their inner significance. For a sustainable evolution of the community, we need a social synthesis which embraces both the inner and outer dimensions of this quaternary of value, but with an emphasis on the inner awakening of these values in the consciousness of people.

However we should not get trapped in the either-or syndrome of the human mind. The inner awakening and outer actualisation of these quaternary of values are not mutually exclusive. The path towards inner awakening requires education and inner discipline based on the principles of Yoga. The external actualisation requires proper organisation of the outer life. Both can be pursued simultaneously in a synergic manner through a triune process. The first and the most important task is to understand the deeper and inner significance of these values and create an inner awakening in the minds and hearts of people. The second, as this inner realisation proceeds, allows it to express itself freely in the outer life from within outwards. The third is to create an outer organisation and environment which facilitates this inner awakening and its outer expression.

Development as Liberation

The French Revolution had given us the ideal of individual Liberty. The ancient social thought laid a predominant emphasis on collectivity or communal liberty. The individual is considered mainly as a social man with a social function with a strong stress on duties rather than on rights. The main advantage of this conception is that it restrains the selfishness and greed of the human ego and forces it to look upon itself as a part of the community. But the disadvantage of this ancient idea is that the development and potentialities of the individual in the society are confined to the social type and function. But the individual is not merely the social animal. Society and social function are only a framework and means for the free and full development of the total potentialities of the human being at all the levels – physical, psychological and spiritual. This requires individual freedom, inner and outer, freedom of thought, speech, action and expression and to experiment, innovate, initiate and learn by making mistakes and by trial and error.

But this is the freedom to do, or in other words the process of liberty. We must also know freedom for what and to what ends. If it is exclusively for the self-aggrandisement and expansion or happiness of the individual and communal ego at the expense of the well-being and happiness of other individuals or collectivities, it will not lead to any sustainable development. In an ecological perspective the only freedom which leads to sustainable growth is that which comes from obedience to the higher laws of Nature, which govern the higher evolution of humanity and earth towards their integral spiritual destiny. This obedience to the higher laws of Nature may bring certain masteries permitted by Nature or in other words Nature may delegate some of her own knowledge, powers and masteries to man. If these delegated powers are used in the way which Nature wants us to use it, within the laws and limits set by her, then it is beneficial to our higher evolution. Thus we can see obedience to Nature and mastery over the forces of Nature are not incompatible attitudes, if our masteries are within the laws and limits of Nature.

What are these highest laws? In our integral perspective, they are the laws of integral Unity of Man and Nature in all the dimension of human existence: Physical, Psychological and Spiritual. An indivisible Oneness of timeless and spaceless being expressing itself in Time and Space through an interdependent, interlinked and interacting Unity of Energies of Nature—physical, vital, mental and spiritual—is the highest and integral truth and law of life. The terrestrial life, human and non-human, is an inseparable part of this Web of Unity of Nature and Spirit.

Both the ancient spiritual traditions and the modern science of ecology agree that our human and terrestrial life is an interconnected and interdependent diversity held together by an underlying unity. As Sri Aurobindo describes

All by spiritual links were joined to all
And bound indissolubly to the One”:⁽²⁾

This is the spiritual basis of the third value of the French trinity, Fraternity, which holds the key to the synthesis of the triple values of French Revolution. If this is accepted as

the highest law of our being and life, then we have to keep this supreme law engraved in our mind while exercising our individual freedom and also in organising this freedom in our collective life. This means all activities which lead to the conscious awakening and actualisation of this highest law have to be given the highest freedom, opportunities, incentives for flowering and growth. On the other hand, activities which are hostile or opposed to this higher awakening should not be given any freedom to act and have to be firmly dealt with by the dictates of law and the power of enforcement. Other movements or activities which hamper or obstruct this higher awakening out of ignorance, inertia or self-interest have to be educated, enlightened, persuaded, cajoled, disciplined and oriented towards this higher awakening and discouraged through appropriate disincentives from pursuing their obstructive or stagnant attitude.

So the highest form or use of Liberty is the liberty to grow inwardly and outwardly towards the inner and outer fraternity of all creation. We can use our liberty safely and beneficially only when we become more and more conscious of our fraternity with all creation. The amount of liberty which we deserve is in direct proportion to the extent to which we are conscious of this all-embracing fraternity of Nature or Spirit.

The other aspect of liberty is the freedom to grow towards our highest potential at all the levels of our being – physical, vital, mental, ethical, aesthetic and spiritual and express them in the outer life for the well-being, enrichment and transformation of the larger environment of which we are part. This is the task of Education. However this integral education through free progress should not be confined to the school or the university but has to extend itself into the family, work-life, and the community so that the whole of our life becomes a free growth towards our highest and integral potential and their progressive self-expression in life.

Among some of the latest trends in development thought, the Nobel Laureate in economics, Amartya Sen's concept of development as freedom provides a useful conceptual framework for thinking further. Sen highlights seven basic freedoms which are essential for sustainable human development: freedom from discrimination, freedom from want, freedom to develop and realise one's human potential, freedom from fear, freedom from injustice, freedom of thought and speech and the freedom to get decent work. We may add one more freedom, freedom from greed, violence – against people or Nature in the form of inflicting injury, exploitation, or war – and excessive selfishness. Most of the eastern spiritual traditions and teachings consider ego and desire as the source of all evil and misery in the world, and freedom from ego and desire as the ultimate solution to all problems and the path to highest freedom. But for most of us who belong to the average humanity this is a far-off spiritual ideal which cannot be realised in the near future. However, freedom from greed, violence and excessive selfishness is a more realisable ideal. We must note here that these negative psychological factors which are part of the lower nature in man, are some of the major inner causes behind injustice and inequality in human society. So freedom from injustice which Sen lists as one of the seven freedoms cannot be realised fully without a minimum of psychological freedom from the negative and grosser impulse of the lower nature in man like greed and violence and overwhelming self-interest.

When we have attained this minimum level of psychological freedom, then we can progress towards the next higher level of freedom, which is freedom from attachment. This emotional and mental attachment to things, people and fixed ideas, dogmas and feelings, is a form of psychological bondage which locks up much of our creative energies and prevents us from progressing towards deeper, higher, finer and broader or more inclusive concepts, ideals and emotions. This attachment can also cause much harm and create social toxins like terrorism. One of the major causes of the spectre of religious terrorism haunting our life today is the attachment to fixed and narrow religious ideologies.

The Fundamentals of Equity

The second limb of the triune values of French Revolution is Equality. Perfect and absolute equality exists perhaps only at the highest spiritual levels of existence. In this spiritual perspective equality means perception of the equal presence of the inner spiritual essence in all creation, irrespective of the nature, status or conditions or capacity of the outer forms. At the psychological level there is no equality because people differ in their nature, temperament, capacities, motives, aims and evolutionary status. And since our outer life is the expression of our inner psychological condition, this psychological inequality will be reflected in the outer life. However, a fundamental equity or distributive justice which doesn't lead to conflict, violence and instability is a realisable ideal.

This fundamental equity has three aspects. First, every individual should have equal access to power, wealth, knowledge, health, resources, gainful employment, culture and opportunities for growth; second, each individual should get the reward he deserves according to his capacities and his contribution to the well-being and progress of the community; third equitable distribution of the fruits of development of all. Every community, nation or civilisation, if it has to achieve sustainable growth has to constantly and consciously strive for this ideal of equity or distributive justice. One of the crucial tasks of equity is to prevent excessive and prolonged concentration of power and wealth in a few, which is a major source of disturbance, conflict and instability in society.

Creating Equity: The Historical Experience

However, we are never able to achieve even a reasonable equity so far in our history. Inequality is one of the major defects of human societies from the dawn of human civilisation.

In ancient civilisations, even the most cultured like India or Greece, power, wealth and culture were concentrated in a few among the ruling class. These ancient civilisations made no conscious attempt towards equity because inequality was legitimised on the grounds of birth or religious dogma. In our modern age we are awakened to the need of equality as an ideal but the actual realisation of even a decent and reasonable equity remains still a dream. International institutions which study and do research on the present condition of the world like UN and World Bank have highlighted poverty and

inequality as some of the major problems facing mankind today. A World Bank report (1998), notes:

“—destitution persists even though human conditions have improved more in the poor countries than in the rest of history—Global wealth, global connections and technological capabilities, have never been greater. But the distribution of these gains has been extraordinarily unequal. The average income in the richest 20 countries is 37 times the average in the poorest countries—a gap that has doubled in the past 40 years” (The Hindu, 2006, Sep.14). We must note here that a temporary concentration of wealth, power or knowledge is not evil because it is one of the methods of Nature for creation or incubation. Whenever a new system of wealth or government or a knowledge or an idea, ideal or a value has to be created or implemented, Nature concentrates her creative energies in a few who are capable of it. But when the work of creation is accomplished, Nature pushes the creators or custodians of power, knowledge or wealth to distribute their gains to the rest of humanity. In the past this was done mainly by two methods. By higher thought, idealism and education, through the idealistic thinker or teacher, social reformer or the competent and benevolent leader who is awakened to the ideal of equity. But when the ruling class or custodians of power and wealth resist or unwilling to let go their privileges and hold on to it tightly, then Nature uses ruder methods like violent mass revolutions or foreign invasions.

In our modern age, Nature’s method seemed to be to awaken the pragmatic mind of humanity to the moral and practical imperatives of equity. We can see this in some of the emerging values in the corporate world like business ethics and corporate social responsibility. The pragmatic mind in business is getting awakened to the ethical, social and ecological concerns through a combination of mental, cultural, moral and pragmatic imperatives like for example the pressure of external circumstance, government regulation, green thinking, long-term pragmatic consideration, and more holistic perspectives in management thought and some genuine social and moral considerations.

For evolving a future strategy for equity, we have to take into consideration all these historical and evolutionary factors. The permanent and long-term solution to the problem requires a mental, moral and spiritual development of humanity, especially among the rich, powerful, ruling and decision-making sections of the society which control large chunks of wealth, power knowledge and resources, what is called as power-elite in sociology. As long as this power-elite remains greedy, selfish and exploitative, the ideal of equity will always remain a dream, and no amount of external remedies will lead to any radical improvement.

The ancient civilisations and cultures were aware of this fact and imposed a rigorous mental and moral education and discipline on the ruling classes. For example in ancient India, the life of the king was put under the yoke of the high moral and social ideals of Dharma and the crown prince was given a comprehensive mental and moral education under the guidance of able preceptors. Similarly, most of the Indian social edicts insisted on giving or charity as a virtue for all upper classes. The Brahmin, who

was the custodian of knowledge, culture and the religious and spiritual lore was asked to give his knowledge free to society. The kings and merchant gave generously for charitable public works and for religious and spiritual causes. The householders, especially the wealthy ones, were counselled to be an umbrella of support and help to the needy and poorer relatives and other members of the community. But in spite of all these desirable moral factors, ancient Indian civilisation was never able to achieve equity because the working class, shudra and women, who formed the majority of population were kept in a low economic and social condition with some specious religious justification, and no serious and sincere attempt was made for the economic, social or mental upliftment of the Shudra and Women. And the net result is whatever economic, social and cultural progress made was confined to the few upper class elite and did not percolate into the masses except perhaps in the realm of religion. In religion, ancient Indian culture created some innovative institutions, movement and instruments like the devotional cult, epical and mythical literature, the wandering religious storyteller and preacher, which led to a certain amount of diffused religious awakening among the masses.

In our modern age there is a much greater awakening to the need and ideal of equity. It is now recognised that progress means not merely the progress of a few classes but the development of every individual in the mass. Upliftment of backward classes and groups and the empowerment of women are now recognised as an indispensable part of community and national development strategies. But in spite of all these laudable democratic ideals, the actual performance of modern society in terms of equity is dismal. As a report by the World Watch Institute states that though world economy pumped out nearly \$41 trillion worth of goods and services in 1999, 45 percent of the income went to 12 percent of people. There are two main causes behind the modern failure in the equity front. First is a considerable qualitative dilution in the moral fibre of the society — especially after the world wars and industrial revolution — leading to more or less amoral or a morally neutral scientific, secular and utilitarian culture. The second factor is that capitalistic system of economics followed by most of the democratic nations based on the principles of self-interest, competition, free market and private property, legitimised greed, selfishness and inequality with the theoretical justification that wealth in the few will ultimately “trickle down” into the many. But in actual fact, the trickle-down is too little to have any substantial impact on equity. The Federal Reserve Board of US reporting on US income levels in 1995, states that the richest 1% of household owned about a third of all networth, the next richest 10% owned approximately another third and the remaining owned the rest. However, modern age has made significant progress in two areas which remained neglected in the ancient world. First is in the education and empowerment of women and second, to a lesser extent, in empowerment of the working class in the lower levels of the social or corporate hierarchy.

Towards Integral Equity: The Task Ahead

We are now in a better position in evolving a future strategy for creating an equitable society. We have to retain, combine and extend further the positive elements, contributions and achievement of the past and present approaches to equity, eliminate, neutralise or minimise the causes of failure and fill in the gaps. In the inner level of

consciousness, we have to create a system of education which leads to smooth and spontaneous redistribution or diffusion of power, wealth, knowledge and culture from those who have them in abundance to those who lack them, out of an active compassion in the heart and an enlightened understanding of the long-term imperatives of equity in the mind, based on an inner awakening to the law of unity and interdependence of life. The ancient Indian Culture tried to create equity by institutionalising virtues like sharing and giving in the form of moral and religious edicts accepted on faith. But the future progress towards equity has to be based on compassion and enlightened understanding of the laws of life, proceeding from an inner awakening in the consciousness of people. This awakening has to be created by a mental, moral and spiritual education, especially among the present and potential leaders and decision-makers of the society, in government, politics, business, science and technology, centres of learning and media.

Interestingly, in an international workshop on poverty, two Indians Ghotge and Vidyarthi who work with rural poor presented a view which echoes the traditional Indian wisdom on development. Both discussed “how personal values, preferences and life-styles of those engaged cannot be separated from one’s perception of development” and “you can know what development is only if you are yourself selfless, compassionate and care for human dignity.” Development is possible, they argued, “only internally by a leadership that leads a dharmic life.” In the Indian thought Dharma means the universal Laws of life or Nature and dharmic values mean values derived from Dharma.

The other aspect of the inner dimension of equity is an equitable distribution of capacities and psychological energies of the community. As we have said earlier, inequality in the psychological realms cannot be eliminated. Nevertheless there can be a certain equitable balance in the distribution of psychological capacities and energies of a community. For example those who have a certain capacity, skill or expertise in a particular line can share this capacity with others who don’t have it by creating the capacity in them through education and training. For instance, Business has the managerial and technological capacity to create wealth and it can share this capacity with the poor. Another factor which can lead to a greater psychological equity is the matching of inner temperament and capacity with the outer occupation. A system of education and counselling which can help individuals to become aware of their unique inner aptitudes, temperament and capacities and find an outer occupation which is in harmony with their inner nature can go a long way in creating a balanced distribution of the psychological energies of the community. However our emphasis on the inner dimension does not mean external factors to be ignored. The inner work by education has to be matched by creating an outer environment which is favourable to the progress of equity. The main factors which has to be present or nurtured in the outer life to create an enduring equity are:

- ❖ A strong and firm governmental support or intervention, wherever and whenever necessary, in favour of the poor and the weak.
- ❖ Active encouragement and support for all new ideas, values or innovations

which can lead to economic, social, political or cultural upliftment of the poor like for example, the concept of corporate social responsibility.

- ❖ An honest, vigorous and courageous social activism made of NGOs, mass movements, media which can highlight injustice, corruption and inequality in society; awaken the masses to their rights and privileges; organise the poor and the weak against the rich, powerful and unjust exploiter; plod the lethargic and slow moving government machinery to action.
- ❖ Increasing empowerment of women and workers in the lower levels of the social and organisational hierarchy.
- ❖ Greater focus and attention in research, planning and implementation on how to maximise distributive justice, like for example, employment opportunities.

Gender Equity:

One of the key result areas which can bring about a substantial impact on the inner and outer dimensions of equity is education and empowerment of Women. When we look at the history of humanity until now, the predominant psychological disposition of the pragmatic and governing mind of man is skewed towards the male psyche and its temperament and values, like for example, power, domination, aggression, authority, rationality, individualism and the patriarchal or sexist bias towards the Father in Heaven (or Earth) and the male leader. No real or genuine equity is possible without correcting and balancing this slant by an increasing manifestation of the feminine psyche and its values like intuition, empathy, compassion, graceful balance and adaptation, family, community spiritual and earthly motherhood. These softer feminine values will manifest more and more with the increasing participation of women in the outer life of the community, especially in management, administration and leadership, provided women follow their natural instincts and are not led away from their intrinsic nature by imitating male prototypes.

However we would like to mention here we are not making the distinction between feminine and masculine nature in a rigid, dogmatic sense. Every individual has a feminine and masculine side and the more inwardly advanced he or she is, the more these two sides are well-balanced. But even such a well-balanced person shall have his or her own unique and special inclinations, intuitions or capacities in certain areas or activities or for manifesting some specific values. So when we talk about feminine or masculine values we are referring to some of the predominant psychological and historical patterns or natural instincts. In the past history of the race, the male psyche has displayed certain predominant psychological patterns. Similarly female psyche has shown certain natural instincts. What we are trying to emphasise here is that these feminine instincts and values have a special relevance or significance for bringing inner and outer balance and equity to the future society.

The Bond of Fraternity

The third limb of the French trinity, Fraternity, holds the key to an enduring and sustainable social synthesis. Some kind of fraternity can be forged at the material, economic, social or political domains or in the vital or mental levels of our surface being.

But all these fraternities cannot create an enduring and stable bond of unity. They can be destroyed by the sudden rush of opposing forces of division, darkness or violence surging from within us from our lower nature or from without in the external environment. Only when we are able to realise an inner fraternity at the deeper psychological and spiritual levels of our consciousness and allow it to organise itself spontaneously from within outwards in the external life, we can have an enduring fraternity which can survive all the shocks of outer life.

This may appear as a far-off ideal remote from the present condition of humanity. But we can consciously and progressively move towards the ideal by deepening, widening and strengthening the existing trends and forces of unity and conversely by weakening, neutralising and eliminating the forces of division. Let us briefly examine how this can be done.

There is a vague sense of fraternity among those who belong to a geographical region like a community, state or a nation or who live and work together. For the material life of man is not merely raw matter. It is shot through with psychological forces and energies. So when people come together for material or vital reasons it creates a vague sense of subconscious psychological fraternity. This subconscious sense of unity is perhaps much more consciously felt among those who live and work together. This physical or vital sense of fraternity can be made strong and vivid by emotional identification with the group like for example patriotism or religious devotion or loyalty. Similarly there is a mental fraternity which is felt when people are drawn together under some common mental, moral or spiritual ideals or shared values. This creates a more conscious sense of fraternity than that of the material or vital kind. All these forms of fraternities can be strengthened by collective disciplines like social or cultural get-togethers, group-meditations or study circles or by other methods which lead to a passionate emotional involvement with the group or idea.

But until now, in the history of humanity, most of these fraternities created only collective egos—economic, social, political, cultural or religious—or sectarian fraternities or “brotherhoods” which are most of the time in conflict with other fraternities which are differently constituted or based on different ideals. Moreover there is no real inner or outer harmony even within these fraternities. There is always a constant conflict, open or hidden, inner or outer among the individual members of a community. On the more positive side, there was a progressively expansive identification with larger collectivities from the family, clan, community and the nation. The present push towards globalisation and transnationalism may lead to further extension in identification towards a supranational aggregate. There was also a substantial progress in the capacity for collective organisation and the ability to materialise an idea in the collective life. There is a certain amount of preparative inner and outer growth in this collective experiences or experiments of humanity.

To arrive at an enduring fraternity in the future, we have to deepen, enlarge and universalise the positive experiences of fraternity in the past and neutralise or eliminate the negative factors. The first stage of deepening and widening comes from inner purification of the mind and heart by rejecting all thoughts and feelings which narrow,

divide, darken or grossify our consciousness and conversely, cultivating those thoughts and feelings which widen, purify, enlighten the consciousness, and unite us with others and the whole of terrestrial creation. The ethical and religious method is to provide a list of negative thought and feelings which have to be rejected like for example anger, violence, lust and conversely, a list of virtues to be cultivated like kindness, generosity. The psychological method is to observe ourselves with a vigilant inner sensitivity and scientific detachment our thoughts and feelings and their inner consequences and act accordingly. In widening our consciousness, a very helpful idea is the systemic and ecological perception which can see or feel each individuality or collectivity as the integral part of a larger whole and linked with others and the whole. For example, Sri Aurobindo, while writing on the subject of village development in India, states:

“If we are to organise Swaraj we must base it on the village. But we must at the same time take care to avoid the mistake which did much in the past to retard our national growth. The village must not in our new national life be isolated as well as self-sufficient, but must feel itself bound up with the life of its neighbouring units, living with them in a common group for common purposes. Each group again must feel itself a part of the life of the district living in the district unity, so each district must not be engrossed in its own separate existence but feel itself a subordinate part of the single life of the province, and the province in its turn of the single life of the country”.⁽³⁾

Extending this ecological logic further we can say that the life of a Nation should feel itself as part of the single life of Humanity, the life of humanity as part of the ecological unity of the terrestrial life, and finally the human and terrestrial creation as part of the spiritual unity of a transcendent and universal Reality, which we may call as God or whatever name we like to give. Each religion has to enquire and discover its unique and special genius and mission for realising this spiritual unity of all creation and its unique contribution for the spiritual progress and well-being of humanity and earth. It is this type of broad ecological thinking which has to be awakened in people, especially in young minds, through right education in order to prepare human consciousness for an enduring fraternity.

But, ideas, ideals and sentiments in the surface mind, through very helpful as a preparatory education, are not sufficient to create a sustainable fraternity. We may have to begin with ideas in the mind. We must progress further and find a way to make the idea emotional, experiential and concrete to our consciousness. This requires a system of education based on the principles of Yoga. We will come to this subject a little later in our concluding section on Sustainable Education.

As with the ideal of equity, so also with Fraternity, the inner realisations of fraternity through education have to proceed in parallel with preparing the outer environment through thought and actions which are favourable to the progress of fraternity in society like for example uniting and synthesising ideas; creating harmonious, symbiotic and mutually complementing links and relationship between individuals and collectivities; international and inter organisational cooperation; cross-cultural interaction and understanding.

The Engine of Progress

We are part of an evolutionary world. Change, Evolution and Progress are some of the eternal laws of life. That which doesn't evolve and progress either disintegrates or becomes extinct or has to remain subordinate to those who surge ahead. So to progress constantly and continually at all the levels of our being and life is indispensable for sustainable development. However, there are limits, laws and conditions of progress. An exclusive and reckless progress in a single domain or dimension of life ignoring the laws or limits of that domain or other related dimensions is unsustainable. Similarly, unlimited progress in the outer life without a corresponding progress in the inner dimensions of consciousness is also unsustainable. So our ideal of progress has to be balanced development in all the dimensions of life—material, mental, moral, aesthetic and spiritual; ecological, economic, social, political and cultural.

The ideal approach will be to strive for a parallel and simultaneous progress in all the dimensions with a priority focus on a particular domain of life in each stage of evolution depending on the present needs and aims of that stage. All the individual members of a community have to be educated and made aware of the highest ideals and aims of human development in the individual and collectivity. However, for practical purposes the predominant focus has to be on the immediate and present needs of each stage of evolution.

In the initial stage, of development a solid foundation has to be laid for the physical, vital and mental development of the individual and the material, economic, social and political development of the community but without ignoring or neglecting the moral, aesthetic and spiritual aims of development. At this stage a social framework has to be created for the fulfilment of the basic material needs of the people for food, clothing and shelter, health, nutrition and gainful employment and the vital and emotional need for wealth, power, enjoyment, harmonious relationship in the family and community, achievement, success, expansion, adventure. But at the same time people have to be educated and motivated to seek for knowledge, control their physical and vital impulses and desires by the mental and moral will and subordinate self-interest to some higher mental, moral social or aesthetic ideals like for example charity, social responsibility, service to the community. And the collectivity as a whole has to strive for efficiency, productivity, prosperity, innovative diversity and richness, ecological sustainability, distributive justice, individual liberty, initiative and empowerment, social cohesion, vital vigour, strength and energy of life, pragmatic mastery over the forces of life, ability to convert ideas into material reality and a certain amount of moral sanity and balance.

In the second stage, focus of attention should shift more and more from the development of the outer life to inner progress in the mental, moral, aesthetic, psychological and spiritual realms of life; from the physical, vital and pragmatic mind to the fuller development of the potentialities of the thinking, ethical, aesthetic, subliminal and spiritual mind. At the mental level, there must be a quest for a deeper, wider and a more inclusive, ecological and holistic understanding or vision of life. In the moral domain the next step requires a search for a more inward and broader vision of ethics in the light of an integral spiritual vision of life. In the aesthetic realm, we have to break the bounda-

ries which confine aesthetic to art and music and poetry and strive for the aesthetic refinement of life as a whole and for a beautiful and harmonious organisation of the inner and outer life of man.

In the integral perspective, the concept of Beauty and Harmony has to be universalised by including three other ideals. The first one, harmonious linking together of individual and collective members of the human fraternity in a mutually complementing and symbiotic relationship, the second is a harmonious integration of the physical, vital, mental and spiritual dimensions of the individual and collective being and life of man with all the faculties, powers and potentialities of the fourfold being of man fully integrated actualised and expressed in the outer life of man in a rich and harmonious diversity and with the spiritual self governing the body, life and mind of man. The third is the harmonious attunement of human life with the laws of universal Nature, not only at the material level, but also at the psychological and spiritual levels of our being. When all these three ideals are fully actualised then it transforms the whole of life into a music and an art. This is the ideal of universal Beauty towards which we have to strive for in our future evolution.

On the social and ecological plane, we have to make the attempt to understand the psychological and spiritual dimensions of social organisms like the family, community, organisation, nation and the inner significances of social values like liberty, equality and fraternity. We have to apply this understanding for the inner psychological and spiritual evolution of the collectivity.

But the most important task of progress in this second stage, which will determine its fate or success, will have to be in the psychological and spiritual realms. In the psychological sphere, what is needed is a psychological pragmatism which can bring about a concrete experiential realisation of the social, ecological, moral, aesthetic values and ideals in our consciousness and the capacity for organising, implementing and materialising these values in the outer life. For example, this new psychology has to discover the inner sources of our psychological energies and the methods for enhancing the inner efficiency, productivity, or creativity of our faculties of knowledge, feeling and action. Here the main task is twofold: first is to minimise waste and maximise the efficiency of our psychological energies; second is to enter into the deeper subliminal realms of our consciousness in which our inner faculties acquire a much greater power and range than at the surface levels of our being. Similarly we have to find a path for the inner realisation of liberty, equality and fraternity in the consciousness of the community. These inner realisations require a great progress in the field of psychology, especially in applied psychology and in understanding the laws and process of our collective psychology.

In the spiritual domain, the task ahead is to evolve a system of education which can lead to the awakening of the spiritual self in man and the harmonious integration of the entire being of the individual around this spiritual core of our being. This spiritual and psychological awakening has to proceed simultaneously. Otherwise without moral and spiritual awakening, the growth of psychological and occult powers will be misused and misapplied in the same way material powers of modern science and technology are

now being misused for war and other selfish purposes of the individual and corporate ego.

The third stage of progress commences when the psychological and spiritual awakening which begins in the second stage gets diffused, generalised and established in the human consciousness and the humanity as a whole begins to live more and more from within outwards and in conscious communion with the innermost spiritual source of creation.

However, what we have sketched here is an ideal pattern of progress under ideal conditions when humanity is fully aware of its destiny and the path towards it. But the actual path of progress in the present and for a long time in the future will be a more difficult and less ideal journey because we, homosapiens, are still an ignorant, immature, egocentric and arrogant race of beings who are not yet fully aware of the total truth, laws or aims of life or Nature. So we progress like the half-blind man who gropes in the dark, sees a small strip of light which illumines a tiny corner of life and mistakes it for the whole of life. We walk slowly and cautiously or else rush forward in this narrow strip of light until we bump into some obstacle, get hurt and learn, and again move forward a little wiser, until we bump again into another obstacle.

We are at present somewhere in a transitional sphere in between the first and the second stage. It is in a crucial stage at which we have to progress less blindly and more consciously with a fuller understanding of the aims and intention of Nature. Nature has given us this understanding through her prophets, seers and sages like Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin. If we refuse to listen out of some intellectual, scientific, secular or religious ego, we will be heading dangerously to the precipice and the fatal possibility of a civilisational disaster looms large in the horizon. The global warming is also a global warning of our inner inadequacy and imbalance. If we can correct this inner balance through psychological and spiritual education, then there will be a corresponding positive response from material Nature, which will have its beneficial effect on the material environment.

Sustainable Education

As we have repeatedly emphasised in our earlier discussions, the path of integral sustainability requires as its central strategic core, a system of education which can lead to a concrete and experiential inner and outer realisation of ideas and ideals like the integral unity of Man and Nature, psychological ecology, systemic view of society, liberty, equality and fraternity, especially the last one, Fraternity, which holds the key to an enduring and sustainable synthesis of all other ideals. Let us now briefly examine the rationale and principles of this sustainable education.

When we examine the history of humanity, we find that higher aspirations and ideals of the human mind were never able to prevail or conquer entirely the instincts, feelings and desires of our physical and vital ego. This is because, an ideal is a weak and abstract thought or sentiment in the mind but emotions, desires and passion are a force which comes with a rush of vital energy. When there is a strong rush of vital passions all the shining ideals in the intellect are swept off. So for an enduring realisa-

tion of ideals and ideals like fraternity or equity they have to be felt concretely in the very substance and energy of our consciousness with the same or a greater force and concreteness with which we feel our emotions, passion or our body.

This can be done to a certain extent by infusing the idea with emotions through symbols, images or stories. The ideas and ideals acquire a certain concreteness in our deeper subliminal consciousness which is behind the surface being. But the highest and the most concrete realisation of ideals happens only in the deepest and innermost spiritual core of our being or in other words in the spiritual consciousness of our soul. For, values like Freedom, Equality and Fraternity are not merely social ideals. They are, as Sri Aurobindo points out, “the nature of the soul”⁴, which means they are the intrinsic qualities of the soul, and therefore, only in the soul, they can be felt concretely in the same way as we feel our body. So the first major task of sustainable education will be to learn the art of interiorisation or introversion of consciousness by which we can enter into the inner subliminal and spiritual realms of our being where abstract mental ideals becomes concrete realities of our consciousness.

There are two stages in this path of interiorisation. The first step is a mental, moral, aesthetic and psychological purification and refinement of the mind and heart. The aim of this stage is to eliminate all the grosser forms of ego and the desire or attachment to outer objects which keep the consciousness forcefully externalised, so that the surface being is made ready and receptive to the inner movement. We have already indicated the nature of this purificatory discipline. It is a twofold process of cultivation and rejection. The first process is a constant and systematic cultivation in thought, feeling and action of all that is in harmony with or helpful to the realisation of the ideal and the other process is a constant rejection of all that refuses to change or hostile to the ideal and persuasion or transmutation of all that is willing to change in the image of the ideal. The second stage is an inner concentration of all the energies of our consciousness on the ideal held inward or visualised in the form of a concrete symbol or image pleasing or attractive to the feelings and emotions of the heart.

There are three major disciplines for achieving this inner concentration. First is the path of meditation or knowledge which uses the cognitive faculties. Second is the path of the heart which uses the feeling and imaginative faculties. Third is the path of work which gives an inward turn to the faculties of action. In Indian Yoga they are called the Yoga of Knowledge, Devotion and Works. However, these specific and special paths are only for initial entry points into the inner domain. Ultimately a harmonised concentration of the whole being on the inner ideal has to be achieved.

But, in the integral path the inner realisations achieved through interiorisation should not remain self-content within. It has to manifest and materialise itself in the outer life. For this to happen we have to perfect the instruments of consciousness through which the inner realisation has to express itself in the outer life. This means all the powers, qualities and faculties of our body, vital force, thought, feeling, action, execution, ethical, aesthetic and intuitive being have to be developed to the utmost limits, so that the inner realisation finds a rich and varied expression in the outer life.

In the organisation of the ideal in the outer life also we have to maintain this balance between the inner and outer, which has to be achieved by a triune process: first a

progressive inner realisation of the ideal through a process of psychological and spiritual education; second, as this inner realisation progresses, allow it to express itself freely in the outer life; and third create an external environment favourable to this inner realisation and its outer expression.

The other important aspect of sustainable education is the development of Intuition, not merely a vital gut instinct, but a direct suprarational insight into the wholeness of life and its practical consequences. For sustainable development requires not only an intuitive understanding of the wholeness of life at the conceptive level but insight into the practical consequences of our decisions and actions to each part and the whole of life. Without this intuition, we take wrong decisions and do harmful actions with all the goodwill or noble intentions. It would be beyond the scope of our theme to go into the details of the method for developing intuition. However we would like to indicate the main principle, which is to silence the surface mind and heart and turn the attention inward and towards the subliminal and spiritual consciousness in a receptive and relaxed passivity.

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Emerging Concerns And Procedures Related To Education Of Values The Vision Of Sri Aurobindo

Neeltje Huppes

Introduction

India is passing through a significant time. We see experimentation with old and new values, redefinition of belief systems, a massive upsurge of progressive and conservative forces. Each of these movements seems based on an attempt to redefine and align to a truth, a search for an identity. Apart from a slow but steady progress, this often leads to rather unpleasant, if not heartbreaking clashes, with all the suffering inherent in such conflicts.

Yet, after ages of colonial oppression, it seems a necessary process for arriving at an individual and national identity forged in the crucible of present day life. In a country with a composite culture like India, this search in itself is already a very complicated endeavour, but the difficulty of this process is augmented by the forces of globalisation that cannot be ignored in the 21st century, and have to be addressed by each country in its own way. It is in this complex world that students have to grow up and find each their own way of life.

It is well known and accepted that education plays a significant role in the building of the individual and the nation. While the idea is gaining ground that schooling in India has to undergo a change, because education is still too much under influence of the Macaulayan model, efforts in innovation are stifled for various reasons. Among these are heavy and tardy administrative procedures impeding progress; various new forces vying for hegemony while seeking to establish their identity; and established forces not yet wanting to let go of their position and thus resisting change.

Especially during the last few years we have seen extensive debates that have once more revealed India's composite culture. To abstain from endeavouring to change education because of these ongoing debates is to miss an opportunity in serving the nation. Pluriformity, but also tolerance have been the hallmark of the Indian psyche. We must ask ourselves if it is not possible to look for an educational methodology that goes beyond the domination and hegemony of one section of society over the other.

To improve its credibility and strength, Indian education must try to give expression to the essence of the Indian psyche, and base itself on the foundations of the Indian society that originate from a depth beyond religious dogma and hegemony. The composite culture of India could emerge and flourish because of an all-pervasive tolerance that sprang forth from a magnificent philosophy founded on a profound knowledge of underlying oneness. India's philosophical foundation is based on the deep inner knowledge that a single underlying Truth manifests itself in various ways and in different forms on multiple levels, each level having its own truth. The belief at the roots of the Indian culture is that each human being can experience this Truth, totally or partly, and that each individual has the ability as well as the freedom to express this in a great variety of forms, according to his disposition, capacities and qualities.

This implies that for each individual there are various points of reference in his or her experience of the universe. The deepest, inmost quality of a human being is a part and an expression of the Supreme consciousness; the inner and outer qualities and capacities of the human personality are some of the myriad forms in which this supreme consciousness expresses itself here on earth. The different religions emphasise each an important aspect of that Oneness. In India the richness of this individual and collective tapestry was seen as one more testimony of the greatness of the omnipresent Supreme. This provided for a high tolerance towards a pluralistic society, and it generated a culture known and lauded for its opulence by each and every foreign traveller and dignitary who visited this vast land during its long history.¹ [i]

Sri Aurobindo and the Evolution of Consciousness

Sri Aurobindo has given us a magnificent vision of the future. He said that man is an evolutionary being and that our human life is part of an ongoing evolution of consciousness, which will ultimately lead humankind to a consciousness that is completely aligned with the Supreme. In proportion to the degree of our alignment, the inherent perfection and harmony of this Supreme consciousness will express itself, partly or completely, in and through our nature. For this reason he called man 'a transitional being'. We humans tend to forget that it is possible to grow into another consciousness because we still live mainly in what he calls our 'surface nature', but it is given to humankind to make a conscious effort to co-operate with the ongoing process of this evolution of consciousness. In one of his essays that is part of a series devoted to *A Defence of Indian Culture*, he describes our present predicament as follows:

Our life moves between two worlds, the depth upon depth of our inward being and the surface field of our outward nature.

(Sri Aurobindo, 1997, p.196)

According to Sri Aurobindo one of the reasons that we live mostly an outward existence and forget to concentrate on our innermost being, is that for thousands

of years it was necessary for the evolution of humankind to concentrate on sharpening, subtilising and increasing the complexity of our human capacities. Thus have we witnessed a manifold development of our physical and mental capacities and great achievements in many spheres of life. Yet, when we watch the news on television or read the newspaper, we get the impression that real happiness seems to elude humanity. It appears that we do not have the consciousness to handle harmoniously the enormous powers we have unleashed with our mind. We could ask ourselves if we really make enough effort to find the right way to solve the small-scale and large-scale clashes humanity is going through. We could say that we are in the midst of an evolutionary crisis. Something has gone out of balance, but not yet out of control. Are we able to restore the balance at a higher level?

In the last chapter of his magnum opus *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo writes:

At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way.... Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage...(Sri Aurobindo, 1988, p.1053)

According to Sri Aurobindo, the evolution of Mind working upon Life has developed an organisation of the activity of Mind and use of Matter which can no longer be supported by human capacity **without an inner change**. The truths we have found and lived so far are not enough to handle the tremendous powers we have unleashed. The question arises if education can help in bringing about the needed inner change. If we listen to Sri Aurobindo, one of the ways to utilise the present impasse is to develop our 'limited spiritual and moral capacity' considerably and strive for greater fulfilment through growth in consciousness. To say it in Sri Aurobindo's own words:

The difficulties or disorders engendered by the growth of the individual mind and life cannot be healthily removed by the suppression of the individual; the true cure can only be achieved by his progression to a greater consciousness in which he is fulfilled and perfected.

Sri Aurobindo's answer for a more harmonious world is not through a stricter control, which would diminish and stifle human progress, but through discovery and development of more or less dormant powers of harmony inherent in each human being.² [ii]

He, and his spiritual collaborator The Mother, are convinced that education can play an important role in the development of the individual and the blossoming of

the nation. For a better insight into the direction in which education could move, it may be helpful to have some understanding of the marvellous complexity of a human being, as seen by Sri Aurobindo. Here is a ‘map’ based on his perception of the human personality.

A horizontal map of our being

nature	nature	Self	Self
outer or surface being	inner being	true being	inmost being or central being
physical	inner physical	physical purusha	soul/psychic being
vital	inner vital	vital purusha	atman
mental	inner mental	mental purusha	
Instrument for interacting with world	Under influence from true being as well as outer being.	Directly open to knowledge from above.	Psychic being goes through birth and death;
within one life;			evolves from spark to full being.
undergoes atavistic influence.			Atman is eternal, presides without getting involved

(In this map the vital comes closest to the affective domain, the mental correlates with the cognitive domain)

Each human being is endowed with these different levels and forms of consciousness. Many people leave parts of this map unexplored and do not live their full potential. During the day we shift our centre of identification very often, from our surface nature to the inner nature and back, over and over again. For example, when we see a small child running after a butterfly we are in contact with our inner or perhaps our innermost being; the next moment we remember that yesterday our boss rebuked us for a lapse in our work and before we are aware of it, we have shifted to our surface vital with the mind worrying or defending our behaviour. According to Sri Aurobindo it is the task of education to help students to become aware of as broad a range as possible in each of the domains (see map) and to help them to develop their potential based on their ‘swadharma’. In this way they become self-aware and self-reliant young people.

At present our educational system is mainly concerned with the development of a small part of the mind. Actually, it is hardly concerned with *development* of mental powers, like developing the power of concentration, thought-control, thinking at will, openness to intuition, etc. When one asks teachers what they really see as their task, the common answer is ‘to transfer subject information and examination skills

in such a way that a maximum number of students obtains maximum marks’. In our present educational system understanding of the subject is subordinate to the chase for high marks. *Development* of the human instrument, i.e. mental, vital and physical and spiritual capacities and qualities, is hardly in question and made subordinate to examination content and high percentages. This race for marks harms and narrows the human motivation. Ideally a student should decide his aim in life on the basis of a broad combination of materialistic, moral, ethical, religious and/or spiritual values, and the qualities and capacities he has discovered in himself. It is the task of education to encourage each student to find his or her own *progressive balance* in the development and expression of his innermost, inner and outer nature, and to become aware of the various forces that act upon him, and help a student to make conscious choices.

One of the factors explaining the lack of motivation in students, of which teachers so often complain, may be that in our present educational system students can construe a self-image only with reference to their success in the material and external world. Education has to a large extent been turned into a race for the highest marks leading to the highest salary in the job market. This system inherently gives importance and satisfaction only to a few students, and does not allow other precious aspects of human nature to be developed inside the classroom. Yet many children know from within that they have other qualities that matter, and that the quality of life is not just dependent on the amount of money one can spend. Unfortunately, our educational system hardly pays attention to questions that arise from the inner world of the students. In the present system a student can derive a positive identity mainly from the height of the marks obtained, and that too mainly through a process of rote learning. This situation is for many students threatening and not life affirming. It results in an inconceivable ruin of the cognitive, affective, conative and spiritual potential of our youth, which is a serious loss for the nation. Needless to say that for want of a real solution, many students push the feeling of hollowness to the background by seeking outer gratification in increasing consumerism or give vent to their disquiet through belligerent behaviour.

How wonderful it would be if education could help most, if not all, students to find meaning in life based on a deep inner truth. At the same time education should provide students with classroom situations that foster unfolding and optimum development of their capacities and skills in service of their inner and innermost self. An integration of both these requirements will prepare students well for entry into the society. The next step in the educational process for each student would be to find out, as a future contributing member of the society, through what kind of job his or her capacities and qualities, combined with self-discovered values, would be expressed best. Such an educational approach would encourage young adults to strive for an ideal from an inner motivation and strength, looking upon their job as a means for self-expression. What a difference it would make to the fabric of the society, to the richness of human life, if students would give their best to life through

a self-found inner motivation and continue to work progressively on their further development throughout life!

Implicit and explicit values

During the last decennia there have been repeated calls for more value-oriented education. Educators, psychologists and sociologists agree that there is a great need for this. Unfortunately, the debates and innovative efforts often have stranded on the fear of indoctrination of one group by another. Surely, values are not the same for everyone. But a major question is if in schools values *have* to be inculcated and, related to this, if value education always *has* to result in indoctrination. There is no doubt that education has often been used for indoctrination. Macaulay in his Minute on Education (1835) did not mince words that he wanted to do so. [iii] It may be good to realise that any educational model, even a so-called liberal model, does have an influence on the students because of the implicit values that are inherently present in any system.³ [iv]

And yet, with this fear for indoctrination, are we not still too much under the influence of the Macaulayan system? Is there another approach possible? An approach to values not based on indoctrination? An approach that would give India renewed strength and make it again into a nation with a vibrant composite culture? Indian education may become truly universal when it will be rooted again in the foundations of her own culture. One of the greatneses of ancient India was to believe in the inner strength and uniqueness of the individual, combined with the awareness that there are various levels of human development, each with its own values and practices. For the educational process this means that through an inner effort real self-knowledge and essential world-knowledge can be obtained and that a human being can climb to greater levels of self-awareness and self-perfection. Through this dynamic interpretation of the meaning of life, action in the world was given a profound meaning and significance: life was seen as the means for a continuous process of learning and of growth towards greater perfection.

From the beginning the Indian culture realised and respected that there are graded ideals for graded levels of consciousness, each level having its own legitimacy and truthfulness. The level of self-perfection a human being wants to realise cannot be enforced, for it is acknowledged that each human being is unique and must make this choice from within. It has been unfortunate for India that later this knowledge fossilised in fixed social structures, which took away part of her strength, but it may be a hopeful sign that at present some of these old moulds are breaking.

Sri Aurobindo recognised the deep all-containing truth of the Indian civilisation and he remarked that her culture had from the beginning an unparalleled purpose:

It gave itself no name, because it set itself no sectarian limits; it claimed no universal adhesion, asserted no sole infallible dogma, set up no single narrow path or gate to salvation; it was...a continuously enlarging tradition of the Godward endeavour of the human spirit.

...a true and living education helps to bring out to full advantage, makes ready for the full purpose and scope of human life all that is in the individual man, and at the same time helps him to enter into his right relation with the life, mind and soul of the people to which he belongs and with the great total life, mind and soul of humanity of which he himself is a unit. (Sri Aurobindo, 1990, pp. 13-14)

The present model of education is still based on the European model that became popular during the Industrial Revolution. Its mechanical teaching-learning process was imposed on India by Macaulay. According to Sri Aurobindo the present model of teaching, founded on imposition and rote learning, is inconsistent with the aim of human existence. He says that the human being is still evolving to higher and more perfect states of consciousness, and asserts that the impulse towards self-exceeding is an innate law of the human being.⁴ [v] He calls man 'a transitional being' and proposes a system of learning that affirms this vision. He says that education must be based on respect for the total human being, and that it is meant to help each student individually to develop and strengthen the instruments of knowledge in the physical, affective, mental and spiritual domain. According to him teaching values is not a separate subject but entirely integrated in the educational process. The role of the teacher is to help to evoke in each child the ability to develop and perfect him/herself through self-directed learning. A young student starts with (self)-observation. This helps him to discover his capacities, qualities and weaknesses, and these become gradually transparent to him. This leads to self-awareness and, increasingly, to self-initiated learning, in which, guided by the innate urge for progress, a student augments and perfects his abilities in as many domains as he is capable of. Simultaneously, through a process of inner discipline, weaknesses are corrected or overcome. In this way education is a process of constant learning and self-perfection in which the content of the subject serves as a means through which students develop themselves.

Every one has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The **chief aim of education** should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.

Sri Aurobindo, 1990, p. 21

The goal of the teaching-learning process is to provide a learning environment with a broad range of levels and values, so that students can make optimum progress throughout life, deepening, widening and heightening their existence.⁵ [vi] Sri Aurobindo cherished the development of earthly life and was well aware of the enormous progress in the field of science and technology. For him this was one more reason to affirm that students must develop their mental powers to meet the new

demands of a society in which technological progress asks continuously for new scientific discoveries. But he realised that that was not enough:

...the major question is not merely what science we learn, but what we shall do with our science and how too, acquiring the scientific mind and recovering the habit of scientific discovery...we shall relate it to other powers of the human mind, and [relate] scientific knowledge to other knowledge more intimate to other not less light-giving and power-giving parts of our intelligence and nature.

Sri Aurobindo, 1990, p.10

Developing inner qualities will help to utilise our scientific discoveries in an ethical way. At present our one-sided scientific progress has led us close to the destruction of the ecological balance of the earth. The craving for power and wealth is apparently so strong that repeated calls for constraint by eminent and knowledgeable scientists have hardly been heeded. It may be time to realise that the Western model of education has allowed humankind to make enormous technological progress but that it has ignored the humane and spiritual aspects of education. Should the balance not be restored so that we can prevent worldwide disasters set off by indiscriminate human craving? A light on the horizon is the fact that the UNESCO realised the danger and appointed a commission to bring out a report on the educational model of the 21st century. Significantly, the title of this report is *Learning: The Treasure Within*. Would it be possible that India takes the lead in value-oriented education and becomes a role model for other nations?

The process of teaching

Sri Aurobindo's process of teaching is based on trust in the innate will for progress present in each human being. We can observe this stupendous will for self-development in small children; they are exploring their environment, discovering and training their mind, their emotions and their body all the time. Each day is a learning adventure. If we understand this, and base our educational process on the psychology of the complete human being, the continuous self-directed learning of a small child need not stop when he/she goes to school. On this basis Sri Aurobindo formulated the essence of the teaching-learning process as follows:

The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface. This

distinction that reserves this principle for the teaching of adolescent and adult minds and denies its application to the child, is a conservative and unintelligent doctrine. Sri Aurobindo, 1990, p.206 [vii]

Implementation, can it be done?

The truth is in us, we have only to become aware of it.

Universal education is a high priority for India, but at the same time innovations for raising the quality of Indian education must be undertaken on a small scale. Such pilot projects need not be limited to the happy few, but they do need the intensity of a small-scale start in order to allow in-depth quality work. It would be ideal if they could be undertaken in a rural area, in a town and in one of the metros, in order to develop structures fit for nationwide dissemination. A significant feature of the projects pertaining to this innovation would be that the process of change would not be imposed and put on as an outer construction. Such an approach is not in harmony with the underlying philosophy and would defeat its very aim. This kind of innovation must start from and be built up by the people involved, and participation should be on the basis of an inner motivation, an inner urge for implementation of value-oriented education. Though the educational philosophy is based on universal principles that can be applied anywhere, it is important that the new-found procedures in the teaching-learning process are prepared and owned by the participants, and emerge out of a combination of the specific environment in which the school is located and the people involved. In this way the procedures themselves function as a support in the process of change. This requires also a change in attitude of the policy makers who usually direct implementation of a 'readymade' system. Imposition would introduce a dissonant note right from the start. Fortunately, there seems already to be a change in the air in the right direction. When we read recent policy papers we find phrases like 'empowering teachers for curriculum development', 'need for a coordinated decentralisation of the process of curriculum development'; 'capacity building of teachers', etc.

The ideal competency of a teacher is to be able to plan for personalised inputs for individual children, related to their academic proficiency as well as the development of their consciousness. At the same time the teacher must be able to provide a joyful, open and dynamic learning environment in the classroom, in which the students feel encouraged to participate fully, sometimes on their own, sometimes in a group. Group dynamics in the classroom provide many opportunities for growing into a more beautiful person. Knowing that imposition does not have lasting effects, she refrains from passing judgments to the students about their behaviour; instead she encourages them to find their answers from within.

We come to the conclusion that at present ecological, economical, social, psychological and religious issues all point to the fact that a major value oriented change is needed in the educational process. A broad description for the direction of the change would be: to help each individual with the discovery of his inmost, inner and outer qualities and capacities, and to guide each student to the maximum unfolding

and expression of these in daily life. A student should reach as all sided a perfection as possible, going from one level of perfection to another, in the idea that what is perfect today may not be perfect tomorrow. This learning process would be based on self-observation and self-awareness on the part of the student on as many levels as possible, leading increasingly to self-directed learning. To bring this about, the classroom environment has to change and provide an open, positive atmosphere based on trust. Learning should not only be related to the powers of the mind, but should extend itself to observation of interactions with fellow students and teachers for harmonious social development. This educational structure is life-affirming and non-sectarian, because the process of learning is based on self-awareness. It aims at an education that guides each student to lead a fulfilled life in an uncertain world by building up an identity based on a physical, affective, cognitive and spiritual development arising from the student's own potential. Each student is to find his or her *own progressive balance* between the development of his or her innermost, inner and outer nature; a personal balance between the development and expression of one's Self and one's nature in one's journey through life.

Innovation in teacher education

A very positive turn of events regarding implementation of value-oriented education would be to make changes in the teaching-learning process of teacher training and in-service training of teachers. At present B.Ed. and other teacher education courses are striving to make teachers function as instructors and taskmasters, whereas in value-oriented education the role of a teacher is to be a helper and a guide. This requires quite a radical change in the attitude of the teacher, and consequently teacher education institutes would have to make changes in the content of their courses, their teaching-learning process and their evaluation procedures so as to provide a role model for the teachers-to-be. The teacher educators themselves would have to be encouraged to re-orient themselves through a series of seminars and workshops on principles and application of value-oriented education.

One of the new components in the courses of the teacher training institutes would be extensive self-observation and self-reflection for student-teachers, so that they become familiar with their own inner worlds, their qualities, capacities and weaknesses. To the extent that a student-teacher tries to probe her own depth, she will, when later in her classroom, be able to be a role model for the students and help her students to make inner discoveries.

Another issue that would have to be focused on, is the content of the teacher training courses (or should we call them teacher development courses). They need to go through a substantial revision; the emphasis will have to be on development, motivation, the process of learning and its stages, multiple intelligence, etc. New skills will have to be acquired: the challenge of individualised learning in a class with 40 students. Here we do not just mean to learn how to give students individual attention, but to learn to foster truly individualised learning, through a minimum common syllabus, which is so small that during school hours a (student) teacher will

make his or her own choice about the content that she/he wants to study and decides how deep or how wide she/he wants to delve into the chosen topic. Teachers need to be empowered for planning, etc. Regarding the process of teaching, the shift will be from teaching to learning. Individual differences in students will have to be accommodated to ensure optimum development. The degree of self-directed learning may differ from one student to the other, but is to be encouraged constantly. Similarly the process of assessment has to undergo changes so that it becomes diagnostic, fosters self-insight, gives positive feedback for self-improvement, is non-judgmental, etc.

Research and Monitoring

To ensure the quality asked for, the pilot projects of this innovation (in schools and teacher training institutes) need the continuous support of a dedicated team of researchers. It is self-evident that the philosophical background has also to be reflected in the research procedures. The guidance of the researchers should be inspiring and supportive. The aim is not to control, but to encourage; to develop together new structures and give space for experiments; to give positive feed back; to research the outcome and give recommendations and guidance for implementation on a larger scale.

Development is through purposeful activity, writes Dr. Abdul Kalam in his book *Ignited Minds*. In the same book he suggests that projects that go across more than one organisation and require 'multi-institutional' planning may be taken up in what he calls 'a mission mode', so that they do not strand in compartmentalised thinking. It would be wonderful if the authorities concerned would give a group of dedicated people from several departments, institutes and schools an opportunity to research, monitor and implement a pilot project in value-oriented education.

Summing up

The world urgently needs value-oriented education. The foundations of Indian culture and the Indian psyche are such that India could take the lead in developing this new educational model. Sri Aurobindo has given us a developmental model of education with basic principles that can be universally applied. He proposes a new approach to education, based on self-awareness and self-development of students and teachers.

The core of a new Indian education would be to foster the excellence that is needed to cope with life in all its vicissitudes based on the excellence that is deep within each human being, strengthened by a well developed mental, vital, and physical instrument that can apply itself in any new situation.

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Realising Sri Aurobindo's Ideal Law Of Social Development : Possibilities And Challenges For Psychology As a Discipline Of Study

Monica Gupta

The need for integrality is implicitly one of the deepest needs of humanity. Often we yearn for joy and a sense of harmony and oneness with ourselves and in the collective, in a world that is full of perplexities and mental contradictions. The need for something that is permanent and survives all that is ephemeral and fleeting marks the inner experience of many individuals who attempt to consciously integrate themselves and attempt to shape their own destinies.

The need for unity and harmony within one's own self as each individual traverses the realm life experiences in one's own unique manner and the spiritual need for oneness with others and the entire creation is succinctly put forth by Sri Aurobindo (1997, p.63) as the 'Ideal Law of Social Development' in his book '*The Human Cycle*.'

"That law is that all things are one in their being and origin, one in their general law of existence, one in their interdependence and the universal pattern of their relations; but each realises this unity of purpose and being on its own lines and has its own law of variation by which it enriches the universal existence."

How would the discipline of Psychology respond to this vision and the inherent need of humanity for progress? What is the scope of the paradigms and meta-psychological frameworks through which it examines the human nature and its evolutionary potentialities within the contemporary discipline? What is the relation that it envisages for the Individual and the collective?

The key difference between the meta-psychological position implicitly subscribed to by the majority of contemporary psychological theories and Sri Aurobindo's integral perspective is based on the role of *divine guidance* in the development and perfection of the individual or the collective.

The Meta-psychological Views: If we examine the broad meta-psychological positions traditionally adopted implicitly by the majority of the popular psychological theories from Sri Aurobindo's perspective (2005), we find that they subscribe to the

terrestrial aim of existence, rejecting all reference to the supra-cosmic realms as mere metaphysical ruminations. The human life, in this view, begins with conception and ends with death and there is no higher Divine reality that impinges on life, guides it or survives it. It is left to the human individual to cope with vicissitudes of existence, by at the best focusing on fulfilling his observable human potential for oneself and society or at the worst, fall into despair at the utter meaninglessness of life in the final analysis which ends in incapacity of old age, separation and death.

The Integral view of psychological nature of humanity and its developmental possibilities on the contrary expresses the meta-psychological view that it is the *Divine* that is alpha and omega of all human existence and it is this divine presence that drives the workings of the cosmos and is present within all human individuals as a guiding light. There is a divine plan in existence whereby the Divine is involved in the deepest structure of the universe and all evolution is the struggle of the divine consciousness to express itself on earth. The aim of life thus is to express within oneself and in the collective — Unity, Power, Love, Joy, Knowledge and Harmony that marks the highest Divine consciousness. Self-perfection and not self-annulment is the ultimate aim of human existence.

How does one move towards achieving this goal and this psychological poise? As a person or a collective attempt to look forward to their unfolding spiritual destiny in the cycle of ages, it is the Ideal Law of Social Development that may act as a beacon of Light. The Law clearly states that while all of us may be One in our origin, each individual realises this Oneness in accordance with his own lines of development for each person carries within himself the unique potential of the divine individuality.

Understanding Variation in Human Subjectivity: The Psychic Being as the Key

With reference to variation Sri Aurobindo (1997) states any human being is a representation not only of general humanity but also his race-type, his class-type, his mental, physical or vital type where he partially resembles and partially differs from others to some extent. However beyond all the external and typical factors, there is a deeper individual law of development wherein the source of his true uniqueness lies. It is the psychic being or the divine presence within that gives the individual the essential freedom not to be passively subject to any of these influences but to transmute in keeping with his divine and true subjectivity.

How does psychology as a discipline of study look at the possibility of the divine presence within which can become the centre for integration within and can step forward to divinise human nature? A review of the popular meta-theoretical perspectives reveals that psychologists even today restrict scope of their searchlights to fathom human nature to the human surface personality i.e., the body, emotions and the mind. The soul and the spirit escape easily from the scope of the traditional psychological methodologies that pin human experience down to the physiological processes or emphasise the existence of the observable through the agency of the separative action of the human mind.

There has been a recent concerted attempt by many contemporary psychologists to move away from the constraints of the methodologies that limit the scope of the obser-

vation of human nature to the external objective verification and make a foray into the study of human subjectivity through the use of qualitative methodologies. The question is how successful are they in understanding the complex and layered realm of human subjectivity? According to Sri Aurobindo (1997, p.44)

‘A psychic self-knowledge tells us that there are in our being many formal, frontal, apparent or representative selves and only one that is entirely secret and real; to rest in the apparent and to mistake it for the real is the one general error, root of all others and cause of all our stumbling and suffering, to which man is exposed by the nature of his mentality.’

The gaze of the psychologist today, even through the use of qualitative methodologies is restricted to the ‘formal, frontal, apparent or representative selves’ for the psychological reality of the soul or the psychic being does not fall within their purview of inquiry. For instance, for of the contemporary theoretical frameworks that look at the *self as personally or socially constructed* or as *mental narratives* (e.g., Kelley, Bruner) by the action of the human Mind do not admit any presence of a deeper psychological centre that not only helps in integrating the multiple and disparate selves within us but also has the capacity to dynamically change and divinise human nature.

The possibility of uniqueness of each individual is admitted by these frameworks — a uniqueness of relativity which is dependent on the *interpretative* action of Mind that creates it. It is the action of *dialectical mind* with its emphasis on analysis that is used here to unfurl the layers of self.

According to Sri Aurobindo (2005), while the dialectical intellect may be used to arrange ideas or justify our expression of the vision and the knowledge, it is not the source of vision or the knowledge. The true knowledge of self requires a true perception which “cannot be satisfactorily pursued and reached on the basis of an examination of words and ideas or a dialectical discussion; it must be the result of a total observation and penetration of the relevant facts of consciousness—both those of the surface and those below or above our surface level or behind our frontal surface — and a successful fathoming of their significance. For the dialectical intellect is not a sufficient judge of essential or spiritual truths; moreover, very often, by its propensity to deal with words and abstract ideas as if they were binding realities, it wears them as chains and does not look freely beyond them to the essential and total facts of our existence.” (p. 510)

The dialectical reason thus cannot be allowed to exclude the truth that does not fall within its rigid frame of logic. It is precisely the mistake committed by theorists who scan but the superficial layers of our Self and reject the psychic and spiritual kernel within. In the cycle of ages, we need to move beyond the age of rationalism and a surface individualism to the subjective age which can lead us to open the possibility of tapping higher and deeper faculties of knowledge through the yogic methodologies and affirm us in the true individuality. (Sri Aurobindo, 1997)

The study of human subjectivity however poses many challenges to us — and the evolutionary step forward for humanity according to Sri Aurobindo depends on the

way in which we negotiate the subjective domains. He distinguishes between the false and the true subjectivity and emphasises the crucial importance of the latter as a force that can help humankind to move towards unification, integration and harmony.

False and True Subjectivity: According to Sri Aurobindo (1997) the realisation of the true subjectivity is dependent on *two great psychological truths*. First, that we are a higher self than our ego and second that we are in our life and being not only ourselves but all others. The false subjectivity on the other hand is based on the ego consciousness. When this false subjectivity is expressed by the individual or the collective, the essential freedom of the individual to think for herself may be constrained and her individualism mutilated and repressed. In such a case, there is a real danger that the individual may start perceiving himself as dependent on an external authority – a state or an ideology and may comply with unquestioningly to assure its survival.

The way forward in such a society may even be based on the dangerous maxim that it is the survival of the best that is the highest good of the mankind and the survival of the best is secured by the elimination of the unfit in society. This is conceived to be the way to the perfectibility of society. The colossal error made by Nazi Germany in attempting to eliminate the Jewish race is the apt exemplar of this kind of false subjectivity according to Sri Aurobindo (1997).

For the growing disciplines of Psychology and Human development these very events of the 20th century have posed the most crucial questions about the nature of the human being and the extent to which we can create suffering for our own self and the others. The contemporary problem of terrorism across the world today, it seems to me, is also emanating from the false consciousness that celebrates collective ego of a community or a religion and is based on the separative consciousness that divides and hates.

It is interesting to note that the self-limitation of surface individualism based on rational thinking is in fact a protection against false subjectivism for human being in the process of gradual evolution. The full development of the capacities of the human mind is then an essential middle step to the next stage of evolution for even the achievement of the surface individuality is a conquest for man in evolution. The rational mind however does not have the capacity either to fathom or to unify the myriad forces, that secretly influence our subjective lives. It thus becomes important to call forth a deeper presence from within, the inner guru, the inner Veda that can help organise and integrate the multiple roles and selves around a higher presence, overcome the shadows within us with its light, consciously accepting only the influences that harmonise with inner development and rejecting others, and give life a purpose according to one's own unique law of being— *the true individuality*.

The discipline of Psychology needs to move beyond merely enumerating the surface factors that influence human person and are the cause of psychological variation, e.g., heredity, family, culture and tap the true source of individuality and psychological variation that lies within. The scope of psychology as a discipline needs to be widened and the psychologists need to plumb deeper in order to affirm the presence of the psychic being which can act as the transformative force as we attempt to shape our personality and our destiny through a *conscious collaboration with the Divine*.

There are *two true movements of the being* that together help in the emergence of true subjectivity. The first as we have discussed is that we are a higher self than our ego i.e., the psychic being and the second that *our being is in secret solidarity with all the others in the collective and this oneness and unity is the deeper spiritual truth of our existence*.

Recovering Spiritual Oneness: The assertion that we are essentially One in our being with all in the collective is a strange idea for the ego-based consciousness for whom the meaning of self-assertion is worked out in the separative self-other relations. In our aspiration to grow and widen, we do attempt to work towards human unity as a mental ideal. However, if this mental ideal is to become a reality, the sense of Oneness needs to become dynamic within one's own self. As we become One with the spiritual centre of our own being, we can also perceive all the other beings as essentially One with our own self.

Psychology as a disciple of study has largely confined itself to the study of human development processes as they unfold in Time and Space. However, according to Sri Aurobindo (2005) we as human beings are not just in the perpetual process of *becoming* in terms of relative existence. There is the presence of Divine as pure existence which is Absolute in nature, that is beyond both Time and Space and expresses itself as both the Being and Becoming, stability and movement, unity and multiplicity. This sense of *Being*, which is a stable self-concentration of the Divine within us as *jivatman* or the *spiritual self* needs to be recovered by Psychology if it aims to comprehensively understand the human potential for inner growth and its capacity of creating a perfect society based on spiritual oneness with not just entire humanity *but with all beings*.

The Individual and Collective: The relationship: According to Sri Aurobindo (1997) *freedom and harmony* are two major psychological forces that give an impetus to human evolution. The individual in evolution requires an *essential freedom*, first to affirm his surface individuality and when the limits of this individuality are reached, to break the bounds of surface nature and attempt the second conquest of the true individuality. However, an individual does not undertake this adventure alone for he/she is at once the member of a grouping or a collective which facilitates the development of the individual by aid or strife and opposition. The underlying need for *harmony* marks this relation between the individual and the collective and its success depends on ensuring the maximum freedom for the individual while retaining the essential harmony. The perfection of the individual and the collective has to be attempted together, if humanity has to take a decisive step forward and this is a challenging and a key area of study for psychology as discipline. I quote from The Mother (2002, p.40)

‘there have always been two tendencies, which seem to be contrary but which ought to complement each other so that progress may be achieved. The first advocates a collective reorganisation, something which could lead to the effective unity of mankind. The other declares that all progress is made first by the individual and insists that the individual should be given the conditions in which he can progress freely. Both are equally true and necessary, and our effort should be directed along both these lines at once. For collective progress and individual progress are interdependent. Before the

individual can take a leap forward, at least a little of the preceding progress must have been realised in the collectivity. A way must therefore be found so that these two types of progress may proceed side by side.”

The entire creation is for Sri Aurobindo (1998, p.204) the occasion for Divine Play where “the infinite All is the composer and audience. We know only the preliminary discords which are as fierce as the harmony shall be great...”

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Spirituality And Prison Life Sri Aurobindo And Barindra Kumar Ghose

Sachidananda Mohanty

I shall begin this essay by raising some basic questions: What role did prison life play in the spiritual evolution of Sri Aurobindo? How did it influence the life and career of his youngest brother Barindra Kumar Ghose? Is it appropriate to bring Sri Aurobindo and Barindra together? After all, the devout believe that the Guru has an iconic status that none can rival. He must be seen in isolation and his actions judged accordingly by intrinsic spiritual standards.

Let me take up the last question first. It is part of the recorded history that of all his family members such as Benoy Bhushan, Manmohan, Sarojini and Barindra, over the years, Sri Aurobindo had the closest contact with Barindra. With his life companion, Mrinalini (Bose), he had sporadic contact and correspondence through letters, thanks to his participation in political life and later, exile to Pondicherry. Circumstances in the children's family life, the unfortunate mental illness of the mother and the untimely passing of the father K.D. Ghose, must have been particularly hard on the youngest child. The latter's travels to Baroda, Dhaka, Patna and other places were symptomatic of his desire for a steady occupation which eluded him till he joined the movement for militant nationalism.

The catalytic factor that played a role in the lives of the two brothers was clearly the Alipore Bomb case. Sri Aurobindo was providentially acquitted thanks to a spirited defence by Barrister C.R. Das: Barindra was, however, sentenced to death. Upon appeal in the higher court, the sentence was commuted to transportation for life in the dreaded cellular jail of the Andamans.

Sri Aurobindo's prison life at the Alipore Jail began on 5 May 1908. It ended on 6 May 1909, exactly after a year. Barindra set sail for Port Blair in December 1909 on board the *S.S. Maharaja*. He would languish in the penal colony till 1920. After release, he sought the company of Sri Aurobindo who stayed in Pondicherry and later pursued a career in the outside world.

The accounts at the Alipore and at the Cellular Jail that the brothers have given are, in their own ways, extremely heart rending and poignant. They are a commentary on the extreme cruelty of the British legal and prison system. *Kara Kahini* or *Tales of Prison Life* (TPL) written by Sri Aurobindo gives a graphic account of the solitary imprisonment undergone by The Master. Similarly, Barin's autobiography, *The Tale of My Exile*, (TME) 1922 offers an equally heart-touching account of the trials and tribulations undergone by him in the cellular jail at Port Blair.

My purpose here is not to offer a historical account of the incarceration undergone by the two brothers though that would be an important task in itself. Rather, I intend to draw attention to the role the prison played in the spiritual evolution of the two figures. And finally, I should like to explore the impact the incarceration had upon the spiritual ties the two brothers intimately shared.

Upon release from the Alipore Jail in May 1909, Sri Aurobindo wrote a series of articles in Bengali in the journal *Suprabhat*, chronicling his life in the prison and in the court room. It was originally published as *Kara Kahini* between 1909 and 1910. The first English edition came out during 1921-22. It has enjoyed many print runs till today. On the other hand, Barin's *The Tale of My Exile* is not available in the public domain. The head note to *Kara Kahini*, a small but significant volume, draws attention to the radical transformation that took place in Sri Aurobindo. From being an undertrial political prisoner who was fired by the spirit of nationalism, Sri Aurobindo was changed into a spiritual personality ready, to begin the path of integral yoga and the life divine. The epigraph to *Tales of Prison Life* has the following words from *Thoughts and Aphorisms*:

When I was asleep in ignorance, I came to a place of meditation full of holy men and I found their company wearisome and the place prison; when I awoke, God took me to a prison and turned it into a place of meditation and His trysting ground. (TPL:unpaged)

Kara Kahini or *Tales of Prison Life* adopts a style that is lucid and straightforward. It is an incredibly moving psycho-physical account that underlines essentially the spiritual nature of the experience through the act of physical incarceration. Sri Aurobindo was accused as 'the chief killer, the instigator and secret leader of the young terrorists and revolutionaries'. While others may refer to the imprisonment, he himself prefers to speak of it as a 'year's living in a forest, an Ashram or hermitage.' The description of his cell is factual and meticulously given:

My solitary cell was nine feet long and five or six feet in width; it had no windows, in front stood strong iron bars; this cage was my appointed abode. Outside was a small courtyard, with stony grounds, a high brick wall with a small wooden door. On top of that door, at eye level there was a small hole or opening. After the door had been bolted, the sentry, from time to time, peeped through it to find out what the convict was doing... (TPL: 14-15)

There were other telling details. 'Tepid water' in 'a small tin container', 'two prison blankets for bed', 'small scale flood' inside the room completed the picture. He calls it 'The Alipore government hotel'.

In the jail he undergoes many changes. His attitude towards illness, for instance, began to undergo a change. He says: 'My views on illness and cure had undergone change and I did not have much faith in medicines. Unless the disease was severe, nature would cure it in her own way. Such was my belief'. (TPL :38)

Sri Aurobindo records his attempt at longer meditations and mentions the difficulties he had encountered at the initial stages:

I tried to meditate, for a longer period.... But the mind pulled in a thousand directions. Somehow, I was able to concentrate for an hour and half or two, later the mind rebelled while the body too was fatigued... There was a condition when it seemed a thousand indistinct ideas were hovering round the doors of the mind but with the gates closed; one or two that were able to get through were frightened by the silence of these mental states and quietly running away. (TPL: 38-39)

Thus it would be seen that for Sri Aurobindo, the prison turned out to be the unexpected site for carrying out spiritual experiments. He expresses himself with a remarkable sense of honesty and records the extraordinary 'mental agony' suffered. Neither the 'solitary sky', nor a 'sliced sky' can offer him consolation. Gazing at the 'white surface of the mind' causes a sense of utter 'helplessness'.

One is reminded here of the two memorable poems of Sri Aurobindo — 'Invitation' and 'God's Labour.' The latter shows us the manner in which the Avatar has to take up the human form and undergo the suffering of ordinary mortals. The Alipore experience draws attention to this cardinal fact. Nothing comes easy, not even meditation. Sri Aurobindo writes:

... The brain was restless. I again sat down to meditate. It was impossible. The intense baffled attempt made the mind only more tired, useless, made it burn and boil. I looked around, at last I found some large black ants moving about a hole in the ground, and I spent some time watching their efforts and movements. Later I noticed some tiny red ants. Soon there was a big battle between the black and the red, the black ants began to bite and kill the red ants. I felt an intense charity and sympathy for these unjustly treated red ants and tried to save them from the black killers. (TPL: 39).

Every small event and incident such as the above, seemingly trivial in character, punctuates a life of great monotony. The battle within goes on. What could be the difference between voluntary and involuntary solitude? How to face this 'unbearable torture'? Sri Aurobindo says, 'it was like being throttled by an enemy in a dream and yet without the strength to move one's limbs.' (p. 40) He realises the meaning of extreme solitude when one is deprived of the 'shelter of book knowledge and its stylistic elegance, in the dear voice of friends, the noise on the roadside'. Such thoughts crowd the mind and he writes:

...here, bound to the wheels of iron law, subservient to the whim of others, one had to live deprived of every other contact. According to the proverb, one who can stand solitude is either a God or a brute, it is a discipline quite beyond the power of men. Previously, I was unable to believe in what the proverb said, now I could feel that even for one accustomed to the yogic life this discipline is not easy to acquire. (TPL: 40)

This, however, becomes a passing phase. 'Now it seems that the mental poise would not be disturbed even by twenty years of solitude.' He realises that 'yoga practice would not be done by personal effort' but in the 'spirit of reverence' (sraddha). He discovers the infinite goodness of the Supreme Lord.

Sri Aurobindo is able to take a walk thanks to the intervention of Dr. Daly. Travelling from the industrial section to the cowshed and back, he recited the Mantras from the Upanishads and tried to 'realise the basic truths of the imminent Godhead.' It is at this point that he had the experience of the Brahman:

The high wall, those iron bars, the white wall, the green leaved tree shining in sunlight, it seemed as if these commonplace objects were not unconscious at all, but that they were vibrating with a universal consciousness, they love me and wish to embrace me, or so I felt. Men, cows, ants, birds are moving, flying, singing, speaking, yet all is Nature's play; behind all this is a great pure detached spirit rapt in a serene delight... The manifestation of these emotions overpowered my whole body and mind, a pure and wide peace reigned everywhere. (TPL :47)

As the prison experience comes to a close, Sri Aurobindo writes that his *Sadhana* was 'proceeding at a rapid pace'. However, 'Equality, Non-attachment and Peace' had not been 'fully stabilised'. Solitude must give way to outward activity. For, he says, 'for the fullness of the spiritual experience, it was necessary to evoke opposite emotions.' (TPL: 76) Questions had crowded his mind at the commencement of prison life. By the time he was released, he was filled with a profound sense of acceptance of the Divine Will and Divine dispensation. He was no longer the Master of his decisions.

The Alipore jail thus proves to be a watershed experience for Sri Aurobindo. He begins to compose poetry that takes a more pronounced spiritual turn. In the *Uttarpara Speech* that he gave soon after, he spoke of a 'year of seclusion and training'. (TPL: 109) For he says:

The year of detention was meant only for a year of seclusion and of training. How could anyone hold me in jail longer than was necessary for God's purpose? He had given me a word to speak and a work to do, and until that word was spoken I knew that no human power could hush me, until that work was done, no human power could stop God's instrument, however weak that instrument might be or however small. Now that I have come out, even in these few minutes, a word has been suggested to me which I had no wish to speak. The thing I had in mind He has thrown from it and what I speak is under an impulse and a compulsion. (TPL: 109)

The turn-around is clear: to give up self-will and to become an instrument in God's hands'. He narrates his experience with Vasudeva, Sri Krishna, the 'arms of my Friend and Lover'.

While earlier he hardly had a living faith in God, for 'the agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me,' he is now drawn to the realisation that there are mighty truths in the Vedas, Vedanta and Yoga. He must carry out the message of Sanatan Dharma, the external Religion before the nation. For it is the Religion that embraces all and is not confined to all peninsulas alone. '*Uttarpara Speech*' is an immediate result of the Alipore experience and would determine all future actions of Sri Aurobindo. The two journals he founds and edits soon after, namely *Dharma* and *Karmayogin* take up more of cultural and spiritual issues rather than the earlier political ones seen in the *Bande Mataram* days. The new approach is also manifest in the Chandernagore Manuscript that forms part of *Early Cultural Writings* of the new Collected Works Vol. I, 2003. Soon after his stay at the French enclave, Sri Aurobindo would reach Pondicherry on board the *SS Dupleix* on 4 April 1904 to begin a new life in 'the cave of his *Tapasya*'.

II

Barindra Kumar Ghose, (5 January 1880 to 18 April 1959) popularly known as Barin Ghose, became a legend in his life time as a great revolutionary. He also became a character in contemporary fiction, notably in Sunil Gangopadhyaya's historical novel *Sei Din*. Some regard Barin as a maverick hero, recklessness and somewhat unstable. Sri Aurobindo was his mentor. He was aware of Barin's strength as well as his weakness.

In his *Atma Katha* in Bengali, published by Arjit Kumar, 2, Ganendra Mitra Lane, Calcutta, Barin is introduced in the following words: 'Raj Narayan Basu's grandson and younger brother of Manmohan and Sri Aurobindo, Barindra Kumar is a strange phenomenon in Indian freedom movement. From armed struggle to spiritual *Sadhana*, from tea shop to the editor of a magazine, he has never been perturbed by adversities, idealism or failure.' (Translation mine).

Born on 5 January 1880 at Crydon near London, Barin returned to India at the age of one with his mother, Swarnalata and sister Sarojini. In 1901, he passed the Pre-University Examination from the Deogarh School. He studied in the Patna College for six months for the FA Course and then joined the Dhaka College.

After six years, Barin experimented with business. He opened a tea shop near the Patna College and named it as *Ghose's Tea Stall*.

In contact with Sri Aurobindo at Baroda, Barin was drawn to the national freedom struggle. He took initiation from Swami Sakharia on the banks of the river Narmada. He was sent to Calcutta by Sri Aurobindo to organise the revolutionary movement, but Barin developed differences with Jyotindranath Banerjee, later known as Neeralamba Swami, who was also an emissary of Sri Aurobindo, sent for the same purpose.

In 1902 and 1903, Barin tried to import revolvers through the French Chandernagore. Travelling extensively to Orissa and Assam, he opened many units of the Jugantar party. He was closely involved with the plot to assassinate Kingsford of Muzzafarpur.

The plan was unsuccessfully carried out by Khudiram and Prafulla Chaki., He was the main brain behind the *Murari Pukur Bomb Case* and was arrested from the garden on 2 June 1908. Tried in the Alipore Bomb Case, he was condemned to death. Upon appeal, the order was commuted to transportation for life. He was consequently imprisoned in the Cellular Jail from 1909 to 1920.

After his release in January 1920 thanks to a royal amnesty, Barin met Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry the same year, as well as in January of 1921. In 1922, he founded a Yoga Centre at Bhwanipore, Calcutta. The Centre functioned for quite some time, but was closed in September 1925 at the suggestion of Sri Aurobindo. Barin started the publication of *Bijoli* with Upendranath Banerjee and Nolini Kanta Sarkar and himself as the main writers. (Sarkar: 48) until differences cropped with Upendranath.

Barin returned to Pondicherry from Calcutta in August 1923 and became the Secretary of the Ashram. He lived in the Ashram until 25 December 1929 and returned to Bengal. At Pondicherry, he stayed in the room which now houses the publication department of Ashram. (Nahar 2011) For a while, he stayed at the Arya Publishing House at College Street, Calcutta (Sarkar: 191). In 1933, he started the English weekly, *The Dawn of India*. He was associated with the newspaper *The Statesman*. In 1950, he became the editor of *Dainik Basumat*.

In 1936, Barin was subjected to criticism when he wrote in *Bharat kaun Pathe* that it was essential to make 'Britan our Mantra Guru'. Later he became a disciple of Thakur Anukul Chandra of Deoghar.

He edited the journal, *Narayana* started by C.R.Das. He was an important link between Pondicherry and Calcutta.. He married Shailabala Devi, a widow who taught in the Corporation School. As the *Ramananda Lecturer* at Calcutta University; he delivered lectures on humanity and its evolution. (*Bangali Charitabidhan*:336). He passed away on 18 April 1959 at Calcutta.

Most Aurobindoneans know of Barin based on the spectacular role he played in the Jugantar movement and Alipore Bomb case. His imprisonment in the dreaded Andaman jail has also become part of the folklore of militant nationalism. The spiritual minded devotees also would recall the correspondence Sri Aurobindo had with him on various spiritual and temporal matters. Very few, however, know that Barin had around twenty (if not more) books to his credit. Most of them unfortunately have not had more than one print run. A number of them were self published. But nearly all of them were written after Barin came out of the cellular jail. These volumes are: *Deepantarar Katha*, *Deepantarar Prabas Kal*, *Barinder Alma Kahini*, *Amar Atma Katha*, *Manush Godha*, *Nutan Samajer Ingit*, *Shonar Sidhi*, *Pather Ingit*, *Deepali* (short story collection), *Mayer Katha* (About the Mother), *Milaner Pathe* (Novella), *Deepantarar Basi* (Poetry), *Muktir Disha* (short stories), *Pathaler Dak*, *Rishi Raj Narayan* (for children), *Sri Aurobindo* (for children), *Tale of My Exile* (autobiography in English), *Truth of Life* (English), *Wounded Humanity* (English), *Atma Katha*. Most of the above titles, unless otherwise stated, are in English.

The traditional view is that there were only two writers in K.D.Ghose's family. Manmohan and Sri Aurobindo. However, a closer study would reveal that Barin himself was a writer of no inconsiderable merit. How did this happen? What prompted him to

write so many volumes dealing with religion, spirituality, ethics and nationalism? Why was Sri Aurobindo so close to him? Why did he and the Mother shower so much of love and care? Evidence also shows that towards the end The Mother supported him financially for many years.

The answer to all these largely lies in the fact that Barin had followed the footsteps of Sri Aurobindo. More importantly, the experience he had in the cellular jail transformed him substantially. He could no longer be the same again. This has been the effect of all holocaust experience, that for many survivors the effect is profoundly spiritual. In Barin's case, the experience found a channel thanks to the guidance by Sri Aurobindo. Many letters Sri Aurobindo wrote to Barin showed the close bond they shared, a great many of them were explanatory in character. Since prison life played a transforming role, we would do well to take a close look at Barin's autobiography, *The Tale of My Exile* which was published by Arya Office, Pondicherry in 1922.

III

Written in a style, evocative, lucid and deeply moving, *The Tale of My Exile* (TME) would easily rank as one of the most outstanding prison narratives to emerge from the subcontinent. One is, therefore, surprised that this book has not had many reprints. Part of the reason for this glaring omission could be traced to the lacklustre manner in which the Nation has treated its freedom fighters, especially those who fought an armed freedom struggle. The legacy connected with Sri Aurobindo has not fared well either. A change in the historiography from the nationalist to the Marxist is perhaps another factor for the eclipsing of such narratives as that of Barin. Further, the history of the cellular jail, it must be remembered, came to lime light only during the late eighties and early nineties of the last century. Be that as it may, the absence of this narrative from the public domain is a great misfortune that must be remembered.

There are thirteen chapters in this book structured sequentially in a largely chronological fashion. They are the following: 'The Voyage into the Unknown', 'A Survey of the Unknown', 'A Survey of the Settlement', 'The Beginnings of the Cellular Life', 'The Reign of Khoyedad Khan', 'The Strike', 'The Outcome of the Strike', 'Strike Again', 'Causes of Degeneration among Convicts', 'Some Snapshots from Prison Life', 'A Summary of Sorrows' and finally 'A Personal Word'.

It is not my objective here to evaluate the historicity of Barin's account. Readers would do well to read other accounts such as a book rich in theoretical insights such as *Discipline and Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* by Satadru Sen, OUP, 2000, *Hunger Strike in Andaman* by Pramod Kumar, *Veer Savarkar* by Dhanjay Kheer, Popular Prakasham, Bombay, *Penal Settlements in Andamans* by R C Majumdar, Government of India Publications, 1973, *Mukti Tirtha Andamans* by Ex-Andaman Political Prisoners Fraternity Circle, Calcutta, 1982, *Political Prisoners in India* by Ujwal Kumar Singh, OUP, 1998.

As Barin looks back after 12 years of exile, he thinks that the 'past events have become shadowy and uncanny images as it were, parading in a drunken brain.' He is helped in the task of remembering by Upen Banerjee, a fellow prisoner. Barin gives a

graphic account of the Travel of the seven condemned prisoners as they set sail for Port Blair. The convicts were: Datta, Hem Chandra Das, Hrishikesh Kanjilal, Indu Bhushan Roy, Bishuti Bhushan Sarkar and Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya. Chuda, Chilli and Salt were the staple fare on board the SS Maharaja that travels to Calcutta from Port Blair every forty days. There is an amazingly accurate description of the Andamans, its topography, flora and fauna. A visitor to Port Blair would admire Barin's detailed description of the region, the districts, the barracks and the prison system, managed by the Jamadar and the Munshi. The Ross Island, the Aberdeen Jetty and Mount Harriet create an idyllic spectacle concealing the horrors of the cellular jail with its central tower and the dungeon like rooms unfit even for animals. Barin however amusingly compares the banishment of Ram Chandra with his fate, governed by the most fearful Mr. Barry, with the look of 'a blood thirsty tiger.' His remarks to the prisoners will forever remain etched in the memory of the Indian nation:

You see, the wall around, do you know why it is so low? Because it is impossible to escape from this place. The sea surrounds it for a distance of 1000 miles. In the forest you do not find any other animals than pigs and wild cats..., but there are savages who are called Jangles or Jarawas.... My name is D Barry. I am a most obedient servant to the simple and straightforward but to the crooked, I am four times crooked. (TME 52)

From the prison records we learn that Barin was Convict No. 31549. There were 78 cells or rooms in the three storeys. Captain Murray was the Superintendent of the Jail that was built by convict labour and opened in 1905. Labour was most dreaded and draconian and had to be performed regardless of one's state of health. Coir pounding, rope making and oil extraction were the main tasks. Work outside the prison was more back breaking than ones carried out inside. The smallest deviation was met with severe whip lash, cross bar fetters, chain fetters, flogging, punishment dress in the form of gunny bags were common. The medical section often became active partner in prison torture. Several inmates like Indu Bhushan Roy tragically ended their lives unable to bear the inhuman torture. Some like Ullaskar Dutt became completely deranged. As Datta remembers in *Twelve Years of Prison Life*, (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta, 1924) later in life: 'The currents of electricity that passed through my body, seemed to cut asunder all nerves and sinews, most mercilessly.' (p. 70) In this hell-hole, prisoners learnt to survive through trickery, guile, ingenuity or chicanery. The prison brought out the best and the worst in men. There was heroism and cowardice side by side. Meagre ration, malaria and epidemic fever made the place a veritable inferno.

Ullaskar wrote:

In our ordinary bullock driven indigenous oil mills, the quantity of mustard oil that a bullock cart could give, going round and round the whole day, does not amount to any thing more than eight seers or sixteen pounds at most whereas, the quantity we had to give, was fixed at one maunder eighty pounds per diem; of course allowing for all the difference that makes between mustard and coconut oil from that big oil mill. (TYPL:28)

The smallest news of atrocity reported in the Calcutta Press brought forth severe reprisals by the prison authorities. The prolonged strike led to some concessions and prisoners began to receive some of the rights and privileges of ordinary convicts. (p.113) Barin offers a few reflective chapters, one of which is called 'Causes of Degeneration'. He divides the prisoners into a few types and identifies the main causes for the dismal condition inside the prison. They include the company of hardened criminals; incapacity to do hard labour, punitive regulations, demands of want, forced celibacy, want of religious life, absence of incentives, no limits to terms of punishment, rampant and widespread disease.

Years later, on 2 August 1937 Rabindranath Tagore wrote::

The pitiless method of punishment that still persists in many parts of the world in their penal system is enough to condemn human civilisation, but of late an aggravated spirit of vindictiveness has suddenly grown in virulence in some Western countries in their dealings with political victims. India has not altogether escaped in her Government from manifesting some degree of such fascistic infection which has scant respect for legitimate claim of human freedom. And a gloom of despair has spread from hundreds of stricken home over this unfortunate province where men and women of tender age are made to suffer for an indefinite period of detention without trial undergoing various modes of penalty, physical and psychological. ...

....One the continent of Europe they have their Devil's Islands, their Lipari, their Concentration Camps and other specially built hells for punitive exhibition of humanity, but in England they have no such unhallowed places for intensification of suffering by wrenching away the prisoners from their own soil. When to our dismay we find that the infringement of their own rule has been possible exclusively for the subject races, the insult of their distinction humiliates all of us and I offer my protest in the name of my country. (TS:203)

While the weak capitulated, the truly heroic shone: Faced with extreme brutality Ullaskar Datta exclaimed:

'You talk of thirty lashes', I told him, 'you can try and cut me to pieces and see if you can get a job of work out of me, as long as I consider it wrong to do that'. (TYPL: 63)

While the fought and defied and lesser mortals learnt to cope with their ordeals in their own ways, Barin bravely faced his tryst and turned inwards. This we see in many parts of the narrative. In the final chapter entitled 'A Personal Word', he gathers his thoughts about prison life. He recalls the time of his imminent death in Alipore. Death then was welcome. For, he says, 'behind that dark veil there is the most radiant and soul-entrancing beauty' (p. TME 155) At the same time, there was great willingness to accept death: 'O God of Love and Beauty! I yearn for the touch and smell and sight of thy infinite playthings of the World.'

In the cellular jail, he says, there was both suffering and smile. The Dal and Kachu leaves added to the misery. Like the bullocks of India, they ate little but produced much.

The want of freedom created a 'fiery ordeal'. In all this, the only companions cherished were the books.

The final mood is a spiritual one. As Barin observes:

And yet our delight was not small even in the midst of such sorrow. For it is a thing that belongs to one's own self. One may gather it as much as one likes from the inexhaustible fund that is within and drink of it to one's heart's content. Not that, however, the lashes of sorrow were an illusion to us. Even the Maya of Vedanta did not always explain them away, so often had they a solemn ring of reality about them. But a tree requires for its growth not only the touch of the gentle spring, but the rude shock of storms and rain and the scalding of the summer heat. Man remains frail and weak and ill developed if he has an easy and even life. The hammer of God that builds up a soul in divine strength and might is one of the Supreme realities. (TME: 168)

IV

Barin's *Tale of My Exile* opens with thoughts of release from the Alipore jail and the voyage to the dark waters, but ends on a spiritual note affirming the reality of happiness and pain as the will of God. It is clear that he, too, is transformed by the prison experience although this change in him is less radical than the one his brother underwent in Alipore jail. Barin records much of the changes in his memoir written after his return from the Andamans. He informs us that he sees life with a new vision after his return to Calcutta. A new birth that has led him to a new truth. As he observes in Chapter 23 'This Sadhana has no end, has no particular means, it has only a quietness, infinite faith and a waiting with a sense of assurance'. The goal, he says, is to divinise man. Further, those who have felt the light and warmth of the glow, will not respond to the varied calls of the material world because they are bound by one drive, that is to become missionaries of Truth.

Barin has many other realisations: 'I realised that God is Truth. I have not seen Him but I have felt His presence in different forms. I understood that the world outside was not all'.

Barin's spiritual quest soon brings him into close contact with Sri Aurobindo. The letters that Sri Aurobindo wrote to him on issues like yoga and many other spiritual, political and cultural matters testify to their close relationship.

In later life, Barin failed to get the recognition he deserved. He chose to serve in the outside world. By late twenties of the last Century, the political tides had turned. Many of the erstwhile revolutionaries had joined the Communist Party of India (CPI). This movement gained momentum after the *Chittagong Armoury Raid* (1930-1933) when Kalpana Datta, the follower of the legendary Surjya Sen joined the CPI. Others found company in the Congress Party under Gandhiji. Those, like Barin, who remained independent suffered from isolation. Those who chose to practise Yoga at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram had their own share of recognition. But Barin seems to have been too independent minded to be part of any organisation for long. Nevertheless, the transforma-

tion that had been brought about in him, as a result of the cellular jail experience, would remain with him for the rest of his life.

Thus it would be seen that in different measures, the prison played a pivotal role in the shaping of the spiritual life of Sri Aurobindo and Barindra Kumar Ghose. Each in his own way responded to the call and each grew to his own stature in accordance with his own destiny. Their lives intersected in many interesting ways, and have profound lessons for all of us. They are a commentary upon systems of tyranny, and the creative manner in which individuals can see the Truth of the Divine in the darkest abyss.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this essay was delivered at the *Sri Aurobindo Bhavan*, Kolkata on 7 February 2011. I thank the *Bhavan*, and in particular, Biswajit Ganguli, for valuable inputs. Also thanks to Biswanath Ray, Supriyo Bhattacharjee and Arup Basu for suggestions, I also thank the library of the Cellular Jail at Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and the Sri Aurobindo Library at Pondicherry for the use of research material, and Anurag Banerjee of the *Overman Foundation* Kolkata for rare details.

2. In the last few decades, there has been an impressive body of cultural studies research on penal colonies in South and South East Asia, (Penang in Malaysia is a good instance) and other parts of the world such as South Africa and French Guyana ('The Dry Guillotine' in the Devil's Island). The colony at Port Blair shares many parallels with these although there are bound to be differences.

3. Another emerging disciplinary area that can help us locate and explain the incarceration narratives better, is Holocaust Studies.

4. The extent of physical and psychological damage suffered by prisoners at the Cellular jail has not been assessed. There have been no systematic medical examinations and reports before and after the release of the political prisoners. Nor are such reports, if carried out, available in the public domains. In most instances, the authorities at Port Blair and in the mainlands did every thing possible to see that the extreme cruelties were never reported. Several prisoners committed suicide and many lost their sanity. Those like Ullaskar Datta, who recovered partially after treatment in the asylum, suffered from memory loss intermittently. See, for instance, Ullaskar's *Twelve Years of Prison Life*, cited below. The narrative is quite incoherent in many places.

5. Barin's accounts of his life after the release make interesting reading, but the books, rich in atmospheric details, are short of concrete historical details such as dates and places.

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Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata In Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

(Continued from the previous issue)

Prema NandaKumar

9. Satyavan, Dyumathsena, Saibhya

Among Vyasan characters who have been drawn into the retelling of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, Satyavan needs to be studied with special attention.. In the original Upakhyana, Satyavan is a very passive character. He hardly has any words to say. The first time we hear him is when the young couple leave for the wood on the date he is to die. Seeing him prepare to go out, Savitri requests him to take her with him. Satyavan's words convey his immense love and care for his young wife:

“O sweet and beautiful, never have you been to the forest earlier, and the paths there are rough and wounding; besides, when you have become so feeble with your vow and fast, how can you then walk?”

When she persists, he asks her to take the permission of his parents, lest he be blamed (*na maam doshah sprusedayam*) for taking her out in the luring forests. She does so. Permission obtained, they both go out. As they trudge through the woods full of trees, birds and animals, he keeps talking: “Showing the sacred streams carrying waters, and the tall mountains, and trees laden with flowers, Satyavan would speak to Savitri in words that were honey-sweet.” What exactly did he say was the question posed by latter day writers to themselves and some have tried to give expression to his speech. One such is the author of the *Matsya Purana*.

The Purana watches Satyavan blithely showing the sights of the forest to Savitri as they take their first walk together into the woods:

“O large-eyed Savitri! Look at the mango trees in this green-grass covered forest that increase love in spring! They bring pleasure to the eyes and the breath. Watching these red Asoka trees rich with blossoms it looks as though Vasantha is making fun of me. Look at the flaming colours of kimsuka flowers in the southern direction!”

Satyavan then proceeds to point out the pairs of birds and animals together and how happy they appear to be. It is dramatic irony that moves the entire canto of thirty-five verses in the Purana. No such romantic speech is found in Vyasa. As always, he is severely practical. His Satyavan says that he has a splitting headache “as though sharp spikes are being driven through my head”. He lies down with his head on Savitri’s lap and presently passes away into the realm of death.

After the crisis is over and he regains consciousness, Satyavan looks about him with wonder. He feels refreshed and happy “like a person after sound sleep”. He says:

“In this way soothed by the touch of your body as I slept, I lost all my awareness; then I saw a frightful darkness and, soon, a Person possessed of great splendour appeared there.

About it, O fair and beautiful-bodied, if you know anything, tell me; tell whether it was a dream that I was seeing, or was it something real?”

Savitri promises to relate everything to him later but right now he needs plentiful rest. They should better get going and return home as the forest is full of wild beasts and it is very dark. Satyavan tells her that he is frightened of the night-prowlers and in any case she would not be able to make out the path to return home. Savitri understands his thoughts and says she will get a couple of firebrands from the forest fire and would light the pathway. He need not be worried.

“But if you have no energy, or inclination to walk, or if you are not sure of the path in the forest filled with darkness,
Then, if you so desire, we shall return in the morning when we shall be able to see everything in the wood; if it is agreeable to you, O sinless and unblamable, we shall spend the night here.”

But Satyavan would not stay back. He makes a long speech now about the great love his parents have for him and how he has never missed getting back to the hermitage in time. This speech reveals the deep bond between the parents and the son, and one must needs visualise how Sri Aurobindo has meditated upon this passage in Vyasa: “Alarmed and troubled my father, whose intelligence is but his sight (*prajñā chakshuh*), must certainly be going around, from one ashram-dweller to another, enquiring about me.”

Vyasa underlines the depth of the emotions of Satyavan in portraying his anguish at Dyumathsena’s sightless existence by making him weep loudly (*susvaram prarurodha ha*). Savitri, of course, never sheds tears, and here she wipes the tears from his eyes and assures him that his parents would be safe as she has faith in her own tapasya. Satyavan requests her to take him back to his parents and she agrees. I am very fond of coming back to this passage in Vyasa as often as I can. An intense tapasvin, an achiever in the realms of spirituality, Savitri is yet strictly practical in matters of everyday life. She knots her hair, hangs the fruit basket to the low branch of a nearby tree but takes the axe with her for self-protection.

“Taking her husband’s left hand around her left shoulder, her own right hand encircling his waist, well-bosomed as she was and with the slow elegance of an elephant’s gait, she started walking.”

Satyavan tells her he is now feeling much better and can easily guide her by the stars and so they return and are met by the parents and the sages of the ashram who have come in search of the missing twain. The sages prepare a bonfire and everyone is seated around it and the sages ask Satyavan to tell them what had happened when Satyavan and Savitri were alone in the forest. Satyavan says simply that he had a splitting headache and fell into a deep sleep. Oh yes, he had never slept so soundly ever in the past! Gautama persists and turns to Savitri for an answer and then she relates all that had happened ever since Rishi Narad had foretold Satyavan’s end a year earlier. The return of vision to Dyumathsena, and the coming of the Shalwa citizens to take back their king to the restored throne get explained by her words. And all is well.

In Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* there is no deviation from this portrayal of Vyasa’s Satyavan. Just as Rishi Narad describes Satyavan to Aswapati in Vyasa, Sri Aurobindo’s language acquires vibgyor colours of eloquent poesy in bringing the Shalwan prince to our sight:

“A marvel of the meeting earth and heavens
Is he whom Savitri has chosen mid men,
His figure is the front of Nature’s march,
His single being excels the works of Time.
A sapphire cutting from the sleep of heaven,
Delightful is the soul of Satyavan,
A ray out of the rapturous Infinite,
A silence waking to a hymn of joy.
A divinity and kingliness gird his brow;
His eyes keep a memory from a world of bliss.
As brilliant as a lonely moon in heaven,
Gentle like the sweet bud that spring desires,
Pure like a stream that kisses silent banks,
He takes with bright surprise spirit and sense.
A living knot of golden Paradise,
A blue Immense he leans to the longing world,
Time’s joy borrowed out of eternity,
A star of splendour or a rose of bliss.
In him soul and Nature, equal Presences,
Balance and fuse in a wide harmony.
The Happy in their bright ether have not hearts
More sweet and true than this of mortal make
That takes all joy as the world’s native gift
And to all gives joy as the world’s natural right.

His speech carries a light of inner truth,
 And a large-eyed communion with the Power
 In common things has made veiless his mind,
 A seer in earth-shapes of garbless deity.
 A tranquil breadth of sky windless and still
 Watching the world like a mind of unplumbed thought,
 A silent space musing and luminous
 Uncovered by the morning to delight,
 A green tangle of trees upon a happy hill
 Made into a murmuring nest by southern winds,
 These are his images and parallels,
 His kin in beauty and in depth his peers.
 A will to climb lifts a delight to live,
 Heaven's height companion of earth-beauty's charm,
 An aspiration to the immortals' air
 His single being excels the works of Time.”¹

And more in this style. Whereas Vyasa mentions great and comparable personalities like Vivasvan, Indra, Brihaspati, Rantideva, Shibi, Yayati and the Ashvini gods to describe the many-faceted brilliance of Satyavan, Sri Aurobindo mentions no mythological names. But the idea comes through that all that was considered the very best for a hero's mould in ancient India was there in Satyavan.

As mentioned earlier, Sri Aurobindo has filled the spaces in Vyasa left almost blank on what happened between Satyavan and Savitri before and after their marriage. Hence, Vyasa's silent Satyavan becomes an eloquent hero in the third canto of *The Book of Love*. It is not as though they are meeting for the first time on the earth. Savitri and Satyavan are chosen souls who meet and proceed to work for the progress of evolution from birth to birth. Here they have met as Aswapati's daughter and Dyumathsena's son. Perhaps there is a vague remembrance of lives past, but there is no parapsychological probing into it in the epic. There is just an indication, no more. So utter the recognition in the deeps: “The remembrance lost, the oneness felt and missed.” And it is Satyavan who speaks first. Indeed, he launches into a long, autobiographical narrative, as if he were speaking to a long-lost companion. So much has happened since we met last!

Sri Aurobindo has not lost sight of the phrase used by Savitri to describe Satyavan to her father and Rishi Narad: *pure jaatah samvridhascha tapovane* (born in the city, brought up in the forest hermitage). So we get to know how exactly Satyavan learnt his philosophy of life. Nature has been his teacher, bringing to him lessons of moral evil and of moral good. The sun, the moon, the stars! Are they mere mechanical givers of light for the physical? They can illumine the spaces within as well:

“Earth could not hide from me the powers she veils:
 Even though moving mid an earthly scene

And the common surfaces of terrestrial things,
 My vision saw unblinded by her forms;
 The Godhead looked at me from familiar scenes.
 I witnessed the virgin bridals of the dawn
 Behind the glowing curtains of the sky
 Or vying in joy with the bright morning's steps
 I paced along the slumbrous coasts of noon,
 Or the gold desert of the sunlight crossed
 Traversing great wastes of splendour and of fire,
 Or met the moon gliding amazed through heaven
 In the uncertain wideness of the night,
 Or the stars marched on their long sentinel routes
 Pointing their spears through the infinitudes:
 The day and dusk revealed to me hidden shapes;
 Figures have come to me from secret shores
 And happy faces looked from ray and flame.”²

Such is the subtle but amazing and natural transformation that Sri Aurobindo manages to achieve when dealing with Vyasa's Upakhyaana. Again, like Savitri, despite the spiritual longings expressed in his speech, Satyavan remains very practical. Here is this noble princess who has been travelling and has happened to stray into his territory. *Atithi devo bhava!* He must show her the hospitality that a poor forest hut can offer. Nor does he think of his humble abode with any sense of inferiority complex though she seems a princess travelling in a well-appointed chariot. Nor is there any ‘I-ness’ in Satyavan. It is not to ‘my’ cottage that he invites her. It is Dyumathsena's abode!

“Close is my father's creepered hermitage
 Screened by the tall ranks of these silent kings,
 Sung to by voices of the hue-robed choirs
 Whose chants repeat transcribed in music's notes
 The passionate coloured lettering of the boughs
 And fill the hours with their melodious cry.
 Amid the welcome-hum of many bees
 Invade our honied kingdom of the woods;
 There let me lead thee into an opulent life.
 Bare, simple is the sylvan hermit-life;
 Yet is it clad with the jewelry of earth.”

The Satyavan we see in Vyasa is found here with the same disarming frankness about him. Also, his first thought is always for his father who is suffering from a loss of vision and has to do with his intelligence as his eyes (*prajñā chakshuh*). Living amidst so much beauty, all the riches of creation and yet Dyumathsena cannot see any of this! Even as he is describing his hermitage to Savitri, Satyavan is unable not to refer to the

visionless tragedy of his father. To Savitri's pointed question about his parentage he says:

"In days when yet his sight looked clear on life,
King Dyumatsena once, the Shalwa, reigned
Through all the tract which from behind these tops
Passing its days of emerald delight
In trusting converse with the traveller winds
Turns, looking back towards the southern heavens,
And leans its flank upon the musing hills.
But equal Fate removed her covering hand.
A living night enclosed the strong man's paths,
Heaven's brilliant gods recalled their careless gifts,
Took from blank eyes their glad and helping ray
And led the uncertain goddess from his side.
Outcast from empire of the outer light,
Lost to the comradeship of seeing men,
He sojourns in two solitudes, within
And in the solemn rustle of the woods."

After the ordeal is over, when the rishis of the forest had asked Satyavan what had happened in the night, he could give no explanation for the miraculous changes. It was the sage Gautama who had realised that Savitri held the clue.

"O Savitri, I am eager to hear of it from you; you know, O Savitri, all that is far and near, that belongs to the past and to the future; you understand it, one like Goddess Savitri herself as you are, with her effulgence. Surely, you have the knowledge of its cause and its purpose, and therefore speak the truth of it, if there is nothing in it to hide from us, tell us all of it."

In Sri Aurobindo's epic Satyavan is not shown as taking for granted what has happened. He realises that his escape from a great danger has been due to Savitri. Moreover, she is no more the young bride with whom he had lived for these twelve months.

"What high change is in thee, O Savitri? Bright
Ever thou wast, a goddess still and pure,
Yet dearer to me by thy sweet human parts
Earth gave thee making thee yet more divine ...
But now thou seemst almost too high and great
For mortal worship; Time lies below thy feet
And the whole world seems only a part of thee,
Thy presence the hushed heaven I inhabit,

And thou lookst on me in the gaze of the stars,
Yet art the earthly keeper of my soul,
My life a whisper of thy dreaming thoughts,
My morns a gleaming of thy spirit's wings,
And day and night are of thy beauty part."³

When Dyumatsena in his anxiety pulls up Satyavan for the delay in return, he says simply: "Lay all on her; she is the cause of all." This gives an insight into the happenings for Gautama (Sri Aurobindo does not mention the name, though).

Then one spoke there who seemed a priest and sage:
"O woman soul, what light, what power revealed,
Working the rapid marvels of this day,
Opens for us by thee a happier age?"

In Vyasa's tale, Savitri recounts the coming of Yama, the conversation and the boons. Here there is no mention of the terrible struggle with Death. She speaks in tones of a higher knowledge which can be easily understood by the tapasvins of the forest:

"Awakened to the meaning of my heart
That to feel love and oneness is to live
And this the magic of our golden change,
Is all the truth I know or seek, O sage."

So Satyavan is not a passive hero. His highly evolved consciousness is able to detect a spiritual change with great ease. But unlike Karaikkal Ammaiyar's husband who was frightened of her divine capabilities, Satyavan takes it all in his stride.⁴ She had been a golden bride and now she is a golden goddess too. Withal she is his beloved Savitri. She also assures him that it is indeed so:

"All now is changed, yet all is still the same.
Lo, we have looked upon the face of God,
Our life has opened with divinity.
We have borne identity with the Supreme
And known his meaning in our mortal lives.
Our love has grown greater by that mighty touch
And learned its heavenly significance,
Yet nothing is lost of mortal love's delight.
Heaven's touch fulfils but cancels not our earth."

It is the perfect Purusha-Prakriti image that we have of Satyavan and Savitri walking hand in hand through the dark forest. Perhaps more than two thousand years separate Vyasa's Upakhyaana and Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. But she remains the same perfect Savitri and he is the Satyavan who has been extolled by Rishi Narad to Aswapati.

One could say almost the same thing for Satyavan's Dyumathsena and Saibhya. There are no references to a 'sorrowing' Saibhya in Vyasa. Her lot was, of course, unenviable but there is almost nothing about her except that she, Satyavan and Savitri sit together a little away from the bonfire when Dyumathsena and the sages question Satyavan, *saibhya cha satyavanschaiva savitri chaikathah sthithaah*. The other time we notice her is at the end of the tale when the royal family leaves for the Shalwa capital:

"Saibya along with Savitri sat in a well-decorated beautiful carriage drawn by several men and, with the army for protection, left the place."

In Sri Aurobindo's epic we see Saibhya through Savitri's eyes and realise what the old lady was going through in the forest. This is one of the reasons which makes Savitri reject the easy option of committing suttee.

"Although with a vain imaginary bliss
Of fiery union through death's door of escape
She dreamed of her body robed in funeral flame,
She knew she must not clutch that happiness
To die with him and follow, seizing his robe
Across our other countries, travellers glad
Into the sweet or terrible Beyond.
For those sad parents still would need her here
To help the empty remnant of their day."⁵

Sri Aurobindo's sorrow for his own mother may have had something to do with the portrayal of Saibhya. The image is already there in the Mother of Sorrows. When Satyavan and Savitri had not returned to the hermitage, Dyumathsena and the sages had fanned out into the forest searching for them. This was possible for the king as his eyesight had been miraculously restored. This was no doubt a great comfort for Saibhya but she is not able to enjoy the wondrous change in life. A mother's heart is now full of anxiety. What happened to her beloved son and dutiful daughter-in-law? Saibhya had suffered long years of poverty and hard work. Her face reflected the burden of pain and struggle that she had borne all these years when she now follows Dyumathsena. A brief, but unforgettable portrayal of a mother's heart is etched in the epic:

"By him that queen and mother's anxious face
Came changed from its habitual burdened look
Which in its drooping strength of tired toil
Had borne the fallen life of those she loved.
Her patient paleness wore a pensive glow
Like evening's subdued gaze of gathered light
Departing, which foresees sunrise her child.
Sinking in quiet splendours of her sky,

She lives awhile to muse upon that hope,
The brilliance of her rich receding gleam
A thoughtful prophecy of lyric dawn.
Her eyes were first to find her children's forms."⁶

Perfect! Sri Aurobindo fondly records thus a mother's keenness of perception about her child. Indeed, his epic *Savitri* may be said to be a paean to the *matri hridayam* which is a woman's birthright. We have Malavi, the Queen of Madra fiercely arguing with the divine sage Narada regarding the fate that has been laid upon her dear daughter. She is the Intellectual Questioner while Saibhya is the Mother of Sorrows, one who accepts passively what fate has proposed and yet would clutch to the love within to guard her child without. Along with them we have the heroine Savitri who is motherhood personified, whether she is the darling daughter of Aswapati and Malavi, the beloved wife of Satyavan or the affectionate daughter-in-law of Dyumathsena and Saibhya. And the mother of humanity as well, a purposive fighter who rejects the glorious rest in the heavens. She comes back and assures Satyavan that they had come together to earth to chase away its ills and transform it to a life divine:

"Lo, all these beings in this wonderful world!
Let us give joy to all, for joy is ours.
For not for ourselves alone our spirits came
Out of the veil of the Unmanifest,
Out of the deep immense Unknowable
Upon the ignorant breast of dubious earth,
Into the ways of labouring, seeking men,
Two fires that burn towards that parent Sun,
Two rays that travel to the original Light.
To lead man's soul towards truth and God we are born,
To draw the chequered scheme of mortal life
Into some semblance of the Immortal's plan,
To shape it closer to an image of God,
A little nearer to the Idea divine."

Thus do Vyasa and Sri Aurobindo overwhelm us with a noble vision of the life divine.

(To be continued)

References

- 1 Book VI, canto I
- 2 Book V, canto III
- 3 Book XII, 'The Return to Earth'
- 4 Punithavati, a housewife was deeply devoted to Shiva. She lived in Karaikal, near Pondicherry. When her husband realised that she had divine powers, he grew afraid to be the husband of such an exalted person. He left her. The Lady of Karaikkal spent her life hymning the glories of Shiva in mellifluous Tamil. She is worshipped as one of the Sixty-Three Nayanmars or Chosen devotees of Shiva.
- 5 Book VII, canto I
- 6 Book XII, 'The Return to Earth'

The Development Of Sri Aurobindo's Thought

Georges van Vrekhem

Now that most of the writings and recorded sayings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have been published, and with the hindsight we have of their lives, it is sometimes thought that their Work on Earth was completely preordained. After all, they were “special,” being divine incarnations, and, in the life of such beings, is not all settled beforehand, from beginning to end and with everything in between? Supposing this to be a given, some disciples even wrote to Sri Aurobindo that for him the yoga must be easy, little more than “a sham.” To contradict such suppositions, Sri Aurobindo repeatedly affirmed the constant efforts he had to make, the battles he had to fight, and the wounds he had to endure. “My wounds are a thousand and one, / And the Titan kings assail ...”

“Our yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure,” he wrote. “As for the Mother and myself, we have had to try all ways, follow all methods, to surmount mountains of difficulties, a far heavier burden to bear than you or anybody else in the Ashram or outside, ... wounds to endure, ways to cleave through impenetrable morass and desert and forest, hostile masses to conquer— work such as, I am certain, none else had to do before us.”¹ And the Mother said in 1958: “It is a question of a new creation, entirely new, with all the unforeseen events, the risks, the hazards it entails — a real adventure whose goal is certain victory, but the road to which is unknown and must be traced out step by step in the unexplored.”

From A.A. Ghose to Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo's outward life is now fairly well known and can be found in every standard biography. The time he wrote jokingly that he would have to write a book about what he did *not* do in his life, to contradict the many false rumours, is long past. We know of his fame as a classical Cambridge scholar and a master of the English language; we know of his years in Baroda and his study of the Indian culture and its classical literature; and we know of his crucial role as an Indian politician and freedom fighter. In all these years Aravinda Akroyd Ghose, who would revolutionise the spiritual destiny of the world, was an “agnostic,” to use his own term.

1908 was an axis year in his life. In the beginning of this year he met the yogi Vishnu Bhaskar Lele and had with him his first great spiritual experience, the realisation of the silent Brahman. Later he was imprisoned in Alipore Jail under accusation of revolt against the Crown, which could cost him his life. But the jail, where his cell is now a

shrine, turned into his “cave of tapasya,” and when, after one year, he came out of it he was no longer the agnostic. His political work for Bharat Mata had turned into a spiritual Work for humanity. As he said in his *Uttarpara Speech* soon after his release: “There is a word to speak and a work to do,” but nobody understood him at the time.

From the time of his imprisonment in Alipore Jail, Sri Aurobindo was constantly in the company of and guided by Sri Krishna, and it was in obedience to Sri Krishna's *adesh* (command) that he left Calcutta for Chandernagore, and soon afterwards for Pondicherry. In this French enclave in South India he took up his study of the Vedas and discovered the secret of their esoteric contents. He now lived exclusively for his spiritual mission, as we know from his notebooks, published under the title of *Record of Yoga*. (There are some striking correspondences or resonances in the lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. For instance, both began their yoga in the same year; as the Mother said: “I had begun my conscious yoga in 1908.” And both began to note down their practice of yoga in 1912, he in his *Record of Yoga*, she in her *Prières et Méditations*.)

Soon, in 1912-13, Sri Aurobindo started formulating his *Thoughts and Aphorisms* in a student's notebook that was deciphered and published almost half a century afterwards. The relevance of these concise formulations, and of the *Thoughts and Glimpses*, is that they provide an insight into the gigantic metamorphosis that was taking place in him. They illustrate the confrontation between his overwhelming spiritual experiences and the worldview which had been his background before 1908. The dominant values and tenets of science, politics, history, sociology, psychology, religion and traditional spirituality were checked against his day-by-day exploration into the new realms of experience opening up before him. This thin booklet contains 572 thoughts and aphorisms which are glimpses of the greatest spiritual revolution in history ongoing in a single being.

As a politician, Aravinda Ghose had been a revolutionary extremist. It was at his instigation that the Congress Party had broken up into a moderate and an extremist wing. And from the moment of his very entrance on the political scene — when writing the series of articles *New Lamps for Old* in 1893 — he had stood for the unconditional independence of his motherland, at that time still a “chimaera.” Compromise had not been his way, and neither was it in the spiritual adventure of discovery to which he had now irrevocably and totally dedicated himself.

“We must look existence in the face in whatever aspect it confronts us and be strong to find within as well as behind it the Divine. ... To grow into the fullness of the divine is the true law of human life and to shape his earthly existence into its image is the meaning of his evolution. This is the fundamental tenet of the philosophy of the ‘Arya’.” These statements were found in his notes, now published as *Essays on Philosophy and Yoga*² and other volumes of his complete works. During the year of his imprisonment he had taken the Upanishads and the *Gita* as practical guidance in his yoga. “The supreme and final word of the Gita for the Yogin is that he should leave all conventional formulas of belief and action, all fixed and external rules of conduct, all constructions of the outward surface Nature, Dharmas, and take refuge in the Divine alone,” he will write in *The Synthesis of Yoga*.³ “A partial realisation, something mixed and inconclusive,

does not meet the demand I make on life and yoga,” he declared, but also: “It is true that I want the supramental not for myself but for the earth and souls born on the earth.”²⁴

When in 1914 Paul Richard proposed the publication of a monthly review to make their new worldview known, Sri Aurobindo had his material ready. The main concepts in which his vision was formulated filled the notebooks whose contents are only now becoming accessible to the general public. This is how, in the first issue of the *Arya*, he was able to start several of his major work without further ado. Although one should also consider that his writings were inspired “directly into the pen.”

“Men are becoming more psychic ...”

In 1925 the First World War — “the war to end all wars” — had been over, the *Arya* had been written and successfully published, and the Mother had been residing with Sri Aurobindo already for a few years. At that time he still met regularly with some privileged disciples and answered their questions. On the 15th of August of that year — his birthday — the following question was put to him: “How are the universal conditions more ready for the coming down of the Supermind than they were before?”

Sri Aurobindo answered: “Firstly, the knowledge of the physical world has increased so much that it is on the verge of breaking its own bounds.... Also, the world is becoming more united on account of the discoveries of modern science, — the aeroplane, the railways, the wireless telegraph etc. Such a union is the condition for the highest Truth coming down and it is also our difficulty.

“Secondly, there is an attempt all over the world towards breaking the veil between the outer and the inner mental, the outer and the inner vital and even the outer and the inner physical. Men are becoming more ‘psychic.’

“Thirdly, the vital is trying to lay its hold on the physical as it never did before. It is always the sign that whenever the higher Truth is coming down, it throws up the hostile vital world on the surface, and you see all sorts of abnormal vital manifestations, such as increase in the number of persons who go mad, earthquakes, etc.

“Fourthly, the rise of persons who wield a tremendous vital influence over large numbers of men.

“These are some of the signs to show that the universal condition may be more ready now.”²⁵

Science and technology were not only integrating humanity into one world, they were also changing the living conditions to a degree which has created our post-modern surroundings, but which was hardly predictable a century ago. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have said that the world war had caused a massive descent of the vital forces on our planet, an observation supported by what was named “the roaring Twenties.” As to “the rise of persons who wield a tremendous vital influence over large numbers of men”: Benito Mussolini had marched on Rome in 1922 and Adolf Hitler become the hero of a sedition trial in 1924; fascism raised its head everywhere, also in Great Britain and the United States, and violence was seen as becoming of manhood, as the expression of the reality of life.

Had the knowledge of the physical world increased so much that it was, in 1925, on the verge of breaking its own bounds? In the century to come, scientific materialism

would dominate as never before. In fact scientism, “the belief that science is or can be the complete and only explanation,” has occupied all the grounds which religion had to vacate, and is now a worldwide pseudo-religion to be accepted by every student in any academic institution. Religion and spirituality have not (yet) found the arguments to counter the physical arguments of science, and scientists like Stephen Hawking, Richard Dawkins and Steven Weinberg launch their pronouncements from the peaks of their popular fame. “A few years ago, Stephen Hawking summed up the scientists’ prevailing attitude to the status of life in the universe. ‘The human race is just a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet,’ is how he put it. Most physicists and cosmologists would echo Hawking, and regard life as a trivial, accidental embellishment to the physical world, of no particular significance in the overall cosmic scheme of things.” (Paul Davies)

Were men becoming more psychic, and have they actually become so? Sri Aurobindo’s reasons for saying this are now very little remembered, and some statements of his are therefore skipped over out of respect or convenience. It is not possible to understand his and the Mother’s sayings and writings without putting them in their historical context. Although their souls belonged to Eternity, they had chosen, once again, a particular time and place in history to incarnate. Moreover, it may be said that, because of their love for humanity and because of their avataric Work, they took all facets of humanity more intimately into themselves than ordinary human beings would be capable of or even could imagine.

Some of the facts determining their historical background as the following. Spiritism, the belief that the soul survives death and can enter into contact with the living, was still at its height. In France, for instance, Allan Kardec and his *Livre des esprits* (1857) had created a real spiritist mass movement. Theosophy had been founded in 1875 and spread almost instantaneously around the globe. Its influence, teaching the belief in the soul and reincarnation, and drawing attention to the oriental spiritualities, cannot be overestimated.

Friedrich Nietzsche, with his philosophy of the *Umwertung aller Werte* (revaluation of all values) and the *Übermensch* (literally “overman”) was the philosopher en vogue, next to Henri Bergson and his vitalism, and Sigmund Freud and his theory of the subconscious. Impressionism and the post-impressionist schools in painting destroyed the classical norms in the arts, as did the symbolist poets Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé in literature. All this, and much more, really looked like “an attempt all over the world towards breaking the veil” between the outer and the inner realities, necessary for a rediscovery of the psychic — here understood as the “psychic being” or soul.

Science itself seemed to advance in the same direction. The sensational discoveries around 1900 are now part of the standard theories in physics, but at the time they were mysterious and spellbinding. “The detection of the interactions between matter and radiation — Crookes’ discovery of the cathode rays, radioactivity, X-rays and the electron — unveils a world of possibilities which expanded the domain of physics to the limits of what matter was deemed to be and, still further, to the frontiers of reality.” The magic, the transgression of the supposedly untransgressable limits, happened in the laboratories. Besides, “because one is accustomed to all this, it is difficult to evalu-

ate today the effect on the imagination of the transmission at a distance of power, light or music by telephone, or of messages by telegraphy.”⁶

Because of all this, Sri Aurobindo could write in *The Human Cycle*: “...the Age of Reason is visibly drawing to an end; novel ideas are sweeping over the world and are being accepted with significant rapidity;” and he could point to the “dynamic ideas such as Nietzsche’s Will-to-live, Bergson’s exaltation of Intuition above intellect or the latest German philosophical tendency [German idealism] to acknowledge a supramental faculty and a suprarational order of truths.”⁷ In *The Life Divine* he wrote: “Now that we are outgrowing the superstition of the sole truth of Matter ... the outposts of scientific knowledge come more and more to be set on the borders that divide the material from the immaterial, ... In the present time itself, after an age of triumphant intellectuality and materialism, we can see evidence of this natural process, — a return towards inner self-discovery, an inner seeking and thinking, a new attempt at mystic experience, a groping after the inner self, a reawakening to some sense of the truth and power of the spirit ...”⁸

All the signs were there, but the resistance — the vicious swoop of the Black Dragon’s tail — was more resilient than apparently presumed. Ahead lay the continuation of the twentieth century with a series of cataclysms and wars on a global scale, and with an acceleration of change in which humanity would become one in spite of all innate resistances caused by its evolutionary formation. This was the battle to be fought out in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The Word of Creation

In the later months of 1926, Sri Aurobindo spoke several times to the evening circle of disciples about the gods, their world, and the way in which human beings potentially incarnate a portion (*amsha*) of a particular god. On the 6th of November he warned that his words should be understood without inflating their ego. And he continued: “I spoke about the world of the gods because not to speak of it would [now] be dangerous. I spoke of it so that the mind may understand the thing if it comes down. I am trying to bring it down into the physical, as it can no longer be delayed, and then [unusual] things may happen. Formerly, to speak of it would have been undesirable, but now not to speak might be dangerous.”⁹

All this sounds quite intriguing. What was going on? Why was Sri Aurobindo trying to bring down the overmental world of the gods into the physical? In the reminiscences of disciples present around Sri Aurobindo in those days, we read about an increasing spiritual pressure, almost unbearable, and in some of them resulting in bizarre behaviour. “In 1926,” said the Mother many years later, “I had begun a sort of ‘overmental creation’ [the overmind is the world of the gods],... that is, I had brought the Overmind down into matter, here on earth (miracles and all kinds of things were beginning to happen). I asked all those gods to incarnate, to identify themselves with a body [on earth]... (some of them absolutely refused)... with my very own eyes I saw Krishna, who had always been in rapport with Sri Aurobindo, consent to come down into his body. It was on 24th November ...”¹⁰

In the Sri Aurobindo Ashram 24 November 1926 is known as “Siddhi Day” and as the foundation date of the Ashram. It was the day that Sri Aurobindo put the Mother in

charge, to withdraw soon afterwards into seclusion for the rest of his life. On this extraordinary day Sri Krishna took up an earthly body, consenting to descend into the *adhara* of Sri Aurobindo, making his withdrawal “indispensable”. We have already mentioned the close connection between Sri Krishna and Sri Aurobindo’s yoga. Some hints by the Mother even suggested that Sri Aurobindo had been Sri Krishna in “a formation of the past.” The fact that the aura of both of them is the same, whitish blue, seems to confirm this. It may come as a surprise to many that Sri Krishna was bodily on the earth from 24 November 1926 till 5 December 1950.

The extraordinary situation went still much further. The Mother continued her overmental creation “for some months” after 24 November. Put in the simplest of terms, this creation would have brought down upon earth a set of circumstances enabling a direct reciprocal action between the humans and the incarnated gods, leading up to a world perhaps resembling Sri Krishna’s *goloka*, in other words a heaven on earth. Later the Mother said to K.D. Sethna that she had got “the Word of Creation.” “When I looked a little puzzled,” tells Sethna, “she added: ‘You know that Brahma is said to create by his Word. In the same way whatever I would express could take place. I had willed to express a whole new world of superhuman reality. Everything was prepared in the subtle dimension and was waiting to be precipitated upon earth.’”¹¹

In 1958, the last year of her talks at the Ashram Playground, the Mother narrated that immediately after Sri Aurobindo’s withdrawal “things took a certain shape: a very brilliant creation was worked out in extraordinary detail, with marvellous experiences, contacts with divine beings, and all kinds of manifestations which are considered miraculous. Experiences followed one upon another, and, well, things were unfolding altogether brilliantly and... I must say, in an extremely interesting way.” When she went to report to Sri Aurobindo, “he looked at me... and said: ‘Yes, this is an Overmind creation. It is very interesting, very well done. You will perform miracles which will make you famous throughout the world, you will be able to turn all events on earth topsy-turvy, indeed,... and then he smiled and said: ‘It will be a great success. But it is an Overmind creation. And it is not success that we want: we want to establish the Supermind on earth. One must know how to renounce immediate success in order to create the new world, the supramental world in its integrality.’ With my inner consciousness I understood immediately:” said the Mother. “A few hours later the creation was gone....and from that moment we started anew on other bases.”¹²

Had the Mother continued this new creation with the direct participation of the gods, some of them incarnated in terrestrial bodies, a new religion would have been founded with a force and a lustre beyond our imagination. Now nobody knows about it. As K.D. Sethna reflects: “This was surely the mightiest act of renunciation in spiritual history.”

No new edition of the old fiasco

Of Sri Aurobindo’s battle in the following years to establish the new Consciousness of the Supermind on Earth, we have some ideas from his letters, his poetry, and Nirodbaran’s *Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*. At times his reports were very positive, to be followed by renewed difficulties and “tremendous resistance” soon

after. But in spite of everything the supramental manifestation in 1938, when in a direct attack by the hostile forces Sri Aurobindo broke his right thigh in a fall. 1938 was also the year of the infamous conference at Munich, when Hitler bluffed the representatives of the rival powers into submission, ready to pounce on Czechoslovakia and conquer Europe and the world.

Then the war broke out. “There was such a constant tension for Sri Aurobindo and me,” said the Mother afterwards, “that it interrupted the yoga completely during the whole war. And it was for that reason that the war had come: to stop the Work. For there was an extraordinary descent of the Supermind at that time, it came like this [massive gesture]! That was exactly in 1939. Then the war came and stopped everything, completely. For if we personally had gone on with the Work, we would not have been sure that we had the time to finish it before “the other one” [the Asura of Falsehood behind Hitler] had made a mess of the world, and the whole affair would have been postponed for centuries. That had to be stopped first of all: that action of the Lord of Nations – the Lord of Falsehood.”¹³ We find this confirmed in one of Sri Aurobindo’s letters: “Now in these times of world-crisis when I have to be on guard and concentrated all the time to prevent irremediable catastrophes ...”¹⁴

At stake was more than was and is generally realised. “It is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future. ... It is a struggle for the liberty of mankind to develop, for conditions in which men have freedom and room to think and act according to the light in them and grow in the Truth, grow in the Spirit. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there will be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise.” Thus wrote Sri Aurobindo in July 1942, when Hitler still had a fifty-fifty chance to be victorious. If he was, “*the work that has to be done*” would be postponed by centuries if not millennia, warned Sri Aurobindo.

He was not. Nirodbaran Talukdar and A.B. Purani have published what they had noted down of Sri Aurobindo’s conversations in the first months of the war. (After his accident, Sri Aurobindo had allowed some disciples, most of them visiting his rooms for medical reasons, to stay a while and enter into conversation with him.) From these publications, and still more of what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother later told and wrote, we have some inkling of their constant occupation with and direct interventions in the affairs of the war.¹⁵

When the war was over, life could start anew again, as could the effort to bring down the Supermind and found the future. Or could it? In June 1946, less than a year after the unconditional surrender of Japan, Sri Aurobindo wrote: “There was a time when Hitler was victorious everywhere and it seemed certain that a black yoke of the Asura would be imposed on the whole world; but where is Hitler now and where is his rule? Berlin and Nuremberg [where the trial of the Nazi criminals was taking place] have marked the end of that dreadful chapter in human history. Other blacknesses threaten to

overshadow or even engulf mankind, but they too will end as that nightmare has ended.” The threat, however, seemed to increase, for in April of the following year Sri Aurobindo wrote: “Things are bad, are growing worse and may at any time grow worst or worse than worst if that is possible.”¹⁶

Something at the root of things was blocking the Work. And Sri Aurobindo had stated irrevocably: “I have no intention of giving my sanction to a new edition of the old fiasco.”¹⁷ Once more he stood up for the future against all the past and the whole of the manifestation on Earth. What was the old, time after time repeated fiasco? “A partial and transient spiritual opening within with no true and radical change in the external nature.”

A new spiritual approach with no material effect, leaving the Earth and humanity as they were. Years ago, in his *Essays on the Gita*, he had already written: “Not till the Time-Spirit in man is ready, can the inner and ultimate prevail over the outer and immediate reality. Christ and Buddha have come and gone. But it is Rudra who still holds the world in the hollow of his hand. And meanwhile the fierce forward labour of mankind tormented and oppressed by the Powers that are profiteers of egoistic force and their servants cries for the sword of the Hero of the struggle and the word of the prophet.”

Now here he stood, after a life of sacrifice and battle “to bring the fire to man,” the burning sun of the Supermind — on the verge of another failure of which history shows us so many examples?

What the blockage at the root of things was, we cannot know. But its removal required a yogic master-act: to descend consciously into death. True, many spiritual masters have had the knowledge to go voluntarily into death, but not for reprogramming the course of the terrestrial evolution.

Before leaving his body, Sri Aurobindo wrote, at the Mother’s request, the important series of articles titled *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*. In these articles he expounded the situation at that time of his Work, of the Integral Yoga, explaining the role of the “Mind of Light,” and the necessity of a range of intermediary beings between the human and the future supramental species. These transitional species or subspecies in the making he gave no name, calling them in general “a new humanity,” but the Mother did give them a name in French, “surhommes,” literally meaning “overmen.” “This was certainly what he expected of us: what he conceived of as the overman, who must be the intermediate being between humanity as it is and the supramental being created in the supramental way ... It is quite obvious that intermediary beings are necessary, and that it is these intermediary beings who must find the means to create beings of the Supermind. And there is no doubt that, when Sri Aurobindo wrote this, he was convinced that this is what we have to do.” (*Questions and Answers*, 1957-58)

And then he finished *Savitri*, his bequest to those who would follow the path he had hewn in the virgin forest, going where none had gone. Gradually he prepared everything for his departure, especially taking into account its effect on the Mother, who had to remain behind for the continuation of the transformative effort because “your body is better than mine.” The significance of these words will become clear in the last years of the Mother’s yoga, the years covered by the *Agenda*.

The dramatic but dignified happenings at the time of Sri Aurobindo's passing have been witnessed by many and narrated elsewhere.¹⁸ His "death" was interpreted by most as the result of illness and/or advanced age. Who realised at the time — and even now — that there, in that place on Earth, a sacred mystery without precedence was enacted out on which humanity's future depended? In his poems we may find some predictive or relevant passages. In the 1930s he had already written in "A God's Labour:"

A voice cried, "Go where none have gone!
Dig deeper, deeper yet
Till thou reach the grim foundation stone
And knock at the keyless gate."
I saw that a falsehood was planted deep
At the very root of things
Where the grey Sphinx guards God's riddle sleep
On the Dragon's outspread wings.
I left the surface gods of mind
And life's unsatisfied seas
And plunged through the body's alleys blind
To the nether mysteries.

Was what was to happen prefigured in the following quatrain?

Torn are the walls and the borders carved by a miserly Nature,
I have burst into limitless kingdoms of sweetness and wonder.
Breaking the fences of Matter's gods and their form and their feature,
Fall'n are the barriers schemed and the vetoes are shattered asunder.¹⁹

Or perhaps we find the work that was to be done on pages 231-32 of *Savitri*, which have the lines:

Into the abysmal secrecy he came ...
And stood on the last locked subconscious's floor
Where Being slept unconscious of its thoughts
And built the world not knowing what it built.
.....
He saw the secret key of Nature's change.
.....
Then ...
Torn were the formats of the primal Night
And shattered the stereotypes of Ignorance... ..
He imposed upon dark atom and dumb mass
The diamond script of the Imperishable,

Sri Aurobindo's supreme intervention at the root of things must have been successful, for only six years later, on 29 February 1956, the Supermind manifested in the atmosphere of planet Earth. A new world was born. Its infant growth is causing the evolutionary acceleration expressed in the confusing phenomena of the present, perceptible for those who, as recommended by the Mother, have developed the necessary capacity of attention. In the years to come, and up to 1973 when she laid down what she had called "the residue" of her material body, the Mother will take up the Yoga of corporeal transformation, watched by all, understood by hardly anyone.

But our story ends here.

We have briefly followed three episodes in the avataric Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. All three illustrate to what extent their superhuman effort was an adventure into the unknown. Evolution is always a work in progress, and so is the evolutionary Yoga. Those whose souls have been made attentive to the true force currents in the world, and who have been called to consciously participate in their course, will be gifted with the eye that sees the meaning of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

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- 18 Cf. Georges Van Vrekhem: *Beyond Man*, and *The Mother - The Story of Her Life*.
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Notes On Authors

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Paul Antoine Richard was born on 17 June 1874 at Masillargues in Languedoc, Southern France. After finishing school, he enlisted in the army, and in October 1892 was sent to North Africa, where he served for four years. Richard received his law degree from the Academie de Lille in July 1908. Before long he became a barrister at the Paris Court of Appeals. In February 1910 he joined the Ligue de Defense et de Propagande Republicaine Raddicale et Radicale-Socialiste. It was probably this party that sent Richard to Pondicherry in March 1910 on an electioneering campaign on behalf of Paul Bluysen, a candidate from French India to the Chamber of Deputies in Paris. It was in 1914 that he met Sri Aurobindo for the first time. Paul Richard wrote a few books some of which were *Au Japon, To the Nations, The Lord of the Nations, The Scourge of Christ, The Dawn Over Asia, The Challenge of the Future, To India: The Messages of the Himalayas* (1921), *New Asia* (1922), *Messages from the Future, The Eternal Wisdom, The Seven Steps to the New Age*. In November 1920, he left Pondicherry and went to Chandernagore; then he became a *sannyasi* and spent some time in the Himalayas. In 1967 Paul Richard breathed his last.

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