

THE GNOSTIC CYCLE TOWARDS THE SUPERMIND



Reflections on the ideal society
compiling from Sri Aurobindo



As there has been established on earth a mental Consciousness and Power which shapes a race of mental beings and takes up into itself all of earthly nature that is ready for the change, so now there will be established on earth a gnostic Consciousness and Power which will shape a race of gnostic spiritual beings and take up into itself all of earth-nature that is ready for this new transformation. It will also receive into itself from above, progressively, from its own domain of perfect light and power and beauty all that is ready to descend from that domain into terrestrial being.

SRI AUROBINDO

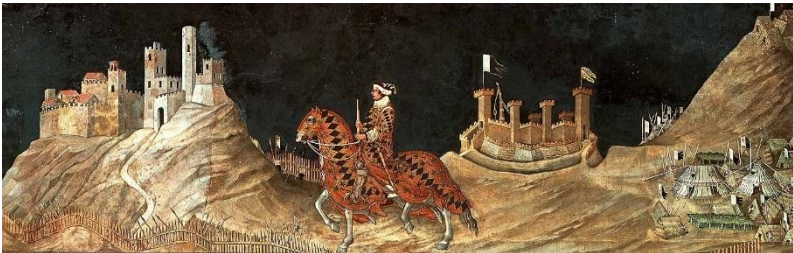
The Life Divine, chapter The Gnostic Being, CWSA 22, p.1022

“Nos quibus mundus patria est”

Dante, *De Monarchia*¹

Many years ago, in an ancient town belonging to an ancient civilisation, a group of high school students and their teachers often used to turn their classes into debates on the ideal society. The same spirit pervaded the universities of that ancient country. As in the Athens of Socrates and Plato, knowledge, culture were an apprenticeship for a higher living and society.

Those teachers, their pupils, like the ideal society they dreamed of, live within our noblest self. This book, dedicated to my teachers, is a call for that Dream to come true.



¹ Translated from the Latin, “Us for whom the world is the motherland”. Dante, “On Monarchy”.

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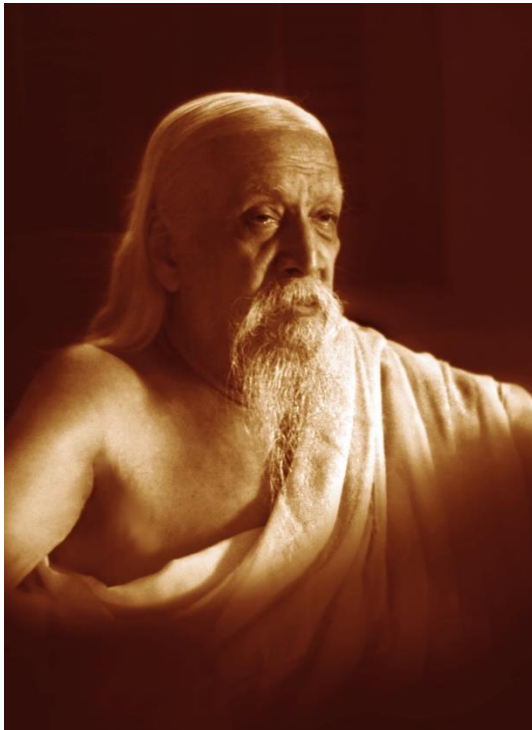
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PREFACE

"The Gnostic Cycle – Towards the Supermind", a seminal compilation from Sri Aurobindo's works, was a call to celebrate the new millennium with the highest teachings. The new volume continued *"Immortal India – Towards the Ideal Society"*, published in 1997 under the sponsorship of the Sri Aurobindo 125th Birth Anniversary Group, Auroville. Significantly, I published both books on behalf of the Centre for Indian Culture, with grants from the Government of India.

Simultaneously with *"The Gnostic Cycle – Towards the Supermind"*, on request of the Working Committee I published *"Auroville Prosperity"*, the foundation for my three books on Auroville during Mother's years. One thousand copies of *"Auroville Prosperity"* were made available, free, in the Matrimandir's amphitheatre, to be collected after the dawn-fire meditation. This is how we entered the year 2000, in Auroville.

Focusing upon the spiritualised society of ancient India as a preliminary attempt to build an ideal society, *"Immortal India – Towards the Ideal Society"* also analysed the decline that followed. The last section presented extracts from *"Essays on the Gita"*; this Vedantic canon contains the essence of perfection, individual as collective. In *"The Gnostic Cycle – Towards the Supermind"* (whose original title was *"Gnosis"*) the quest is the same, but enlarged to the whole history of the human kind. After analysing the first three ages (symbolic, psychological, and conventional) of human evolution, including cultural mores, societal organizations and political ideals, focusing afterward on the transition from an objective to a subjective mode of consciousness, this new selection from Sri Aurobindo's texts culminated with the ideal society of Gnostic, supramental beings taken from *"The Life Divine"* and *"The Supramental Manifestation"*.

Following the same rationale of *"Immortal India – Towards the Ideal Society"*, a Summary of the various

chapters, stringing together statements by Sri Aurobindo, was included as a brief outline.

An ad hoc Summary with reference to the supraconscious planes of 'divine mind', which Sri Aurobindo heralds as the next stage of evolution, was also introduced, so as to explain the evolutionary steps leading to the supramental being and society, the 'Gnosis' of the original title. The Glossary of transliterated Sanskrit terms was a simplified version of the one published in "*Immortal India*". To avoid external influences, the procedure was the same: a selection of words and sentences by Sri Aurobindo.

The Appendix featured writings of Aurobindo Ghose portraying national traits with wit and a tremendous sense of humour. A long extract from "*Karmayogin*" was also reproduced; the evolution of society was presented in terms of *gunas*, the three modes of human nature. The polity of past cultures, cradles of major civilisation, was examined as well.

Only a few copies of both books remain. The Introduction and Summary, the only ones of which I have the soft copy besides the Preface, are reproduced below.

Texts by Sri Aurobindo selected from "*The Human Cycle*" trilogy, such as those presented in the original volume, should be introduced in high schools and universities, especially those with a humanistic orientation, so as to nurture the growth of the young generation into citizens for whom the world is the motherland and all beings are oneself. Weaving together the multifarious aspects of culture, this should be the primary task of education.

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Auroville, 2000 version updated in 2024.

INTRODUCTION

No man's land and the quest for wholeness

Sri Aurobindo had received a full-fledged humanistic education at King's College, Cambridge. Not only was Sri Aurobindo a master of Latin and Greek poetry, but also of humanistic disciplines in general. This imprint is especially evident in the trilogy of "*The Human Cycle*", a treasure for anyone versed in the humanistic sciences, the way "*The Foundations of Indian Culture*" is for the Eastern counterpart. The theme is eternal and universal: the quest for the ideal society that is humanity's agelong dream.

Recurring in all traditions is a mythic golden age, a true *satya yuga* where people lived in harmony, justice and mutual love, abiding by the inner law of being. This often manifested as a matriarchal society; whether longing or memory, it often took the form of a communistic collectivity or an anarchic one.

The bankruptcy of all political creeds and ideologies is a tragic sign of our times, all revolutions have failed. The loftier the dream of an ideal society by a refined humanity, the more distant its advent appears. Under the disguise of a semi-civilised vernissage, the barbarian lurks within; its transformation is the *opus magnum* awaiting us. Is the key to the ideal society to be found in the pure state of communism, of anarchy – born out of the Idea-Force Sri Aurobindo evokes?

The last century has produced two World Wars; the second one, terminated by nuclear explosions, was followed by the Cold War. Imperialism under new forms is a major component; regional wars, internecine wars, proxy wars are its derivatives. We live face-to-face with poles of tension and endemic warfare threatening the entire civilisation; nuclear catastrophe is an impending possibility. Nor were the so-called 'socialist' countries immune from the evils plaguing humanity; when disintegration took over, unmasking a

political, social and economic body as decayed as that of the 'class enemy' in countries they decried and opposed.

Destruction, today, is brought about in countless other ways, all sanctioned and legal. From the de-humanised metropolis and anonymous suburbs that are neurosis and crime inducing, to the cruelty of biochemical weapons. Earth is dying because of the rapacity of the economic machine – the real political power – coupled to the cynical indifference of brainwashed masses or too desperate to even try to react. Legally empowered greed has induced monstrous phenomena such as planetary pollution, desertification, dramatic depletion of the ozone layer, unpredictable changes of weather. Recurrent cataclysms are by now routine.

By what consciousness have we entered the third millennium? In the essay "*Civilization and Its Discontents*", 1929, S. Freud foresaw the end of a civilisation that did not deserve to last; he wrote that without the constraint of law, humans would set free the most atrocious drives.² His pupil A. Adler saw the root of the problem in the superiority/inferiority complexes, intertwined, and the will-to-power. The real breakthrough, however, were the findings of the psychiatrist whom Freud had regarded as his heir: the discovery of a collective unconscious, storing the archetypes, by the 'psychologist of the depths' C. G. Jung.

The collective unconscious was the main reason for his split from Freud, who recognised only the individual unconscious he had discovered. All that Jung wrote was his direct experience. He warned that, on the verge of nervous/psychotic breakdowns, the primitive being (the *id* of Freud) in us resurfaces. Coming to terms with the archetypes' forceful irruption through the vicarious power of symbols, the self-healing process demands integrating to the waking

² At the end of his life, under the influence of Romain Rolland, Freud accepted that not the *libido* (which he had identified with the pleasure principle), or the death instinct he postulated afterward, but the 'ocean feeling of communion with everything' is humans' main drive.

consciousness those numinous content; if not, possession by the archetypes may lead to dismemberment and psychosis. Madness, in yoga, is possession, warned the Mother.

Jung's conceptual experience of the shadow and the evil persona is echoed in Sri Aurobindo's integral psychology, and so is the process of individuation/individualisation, led in the respective paths by the self/psychic being. As for the collective unconscious, the Mother pointed to atavism of family and race. Healing the world and society commences from the unconscious, individual and collective.

Cycles of society: symbolic, tygal and conventional, individualist, subjective – and the spiritual age

Viewing history from within intrinsic laws, instead of a mechanical succession of events, the apparent chaos makes sense; and the awareness of an ascent, and not a descent only, of an evolution at the very core of involution begins to surface. The German historian K. Lamprecht (1856-1915) departed from the conventional objective approach, of which scientific methodology is the apex, to introduce instead the psychological and subjective perspective. He distinguished the following social cycles, corresponding to specific ages: symbolic, tygal and conventional, individualist, subjective. Characterised by psychological types, these are common to humanity as a whole. Sri Aurobindo added the spiritual age, the crown of the human cycle.

The archetypes (idea-forces still close to the primeval source) belong to the collective unconscious of the human race. The Vedic age, those cultures revolving around initiatory mysteries (Egypt, Chaldea, fringes of the Greco-Roman world etc.), had an essentially intuitive character. The masses, though, had no access to it, whilst the rational and suprarational faculties had but faintly developed. Hence the need to recur to the compelling power of a multitude of

symbols, felt as present behind the activities of daily life. Norms and organisations were experienced as symbolic of a numinous reality, as characteristic of primitive groupings and civilisations. For symbols are the way archetypes, to which the average consciousness has no access, manifest.

Yet, as the cycles of society began to unfold, the supremacy of symbols receded or was reduced to a shadow-play. This reached the peak with the advent of the modern era and its leading movements: Italian Renaissance, Protestantism, Illuminism, succeeded by Positivism – the pragmatist ‘religion’ of the post-industrial revolution.

The ethical age succeeded to the symbolic age, religious or spiritual. Its great psychological types determined the four orders of society common to the East and the West. Though in a decayed form, these lasted until the eighteenth century’s revolutionary overturn. At its inception, the ethical age had been ruled by a sense of honour, social responsibility and service, binding all citizens alike. Its finest flower was *caturvarna*, the fourfold societal order of ancient India, where each class was the repository of its intrinsic qualities. This constituted its *dharma*, its function and role in the social body. But the more remote this grew from the primal archetypal source, the more all aspects of life tended towards stereotype enforced by external machinery.

The ethical traits that had been the foundation of the fourfold order were replaced by conventional wisdom; as decadence set in, an increasing number of individuals, challenging the status quo, called for the reign of reason; at its inception this movement was corrosive and largely destructive, as needed for the progress of humanity Sri Aurobindo observes. A questioning and denial, a rejection of stifled orthodoxy and obsolete custom: the age of individualism and reason was born. Whether this took the aspect of art and culture, of philosophy and ethics and polity, initially; or of science and technology – on the wave of

Positivism, the cultural corollary of the economic age – it was up to the individual to take the lead of human progress.

Sri Aurobindo explains that Idea-forces are an attempt to translate into rational terms what is, indeed, supra-rational; absolute ideals – an early manifestation of subjectivism – are the first signs. The great epochs of reason stream from that source. This was evident in the case of Athens, of Rome, of Italian Renaissance, of Illuminism. Sri Aurobindo introduced a further distinction: that between aesthetics (Athens, Renaissance, modern France) and ethics (the congeries of ancient Israeli tribes, republican Rome, protestant England, the early USA). These had sharply defined characteristics making for what Sri Aurobindo called ‘the soul of a nation’.

Another distinction he introduced is that of the evolving human cycle in terms of *gunas*. These universal forces, whose preponderance may vary according to the stages of life, determine the dynamic interaction of human personality. These are: *sattva*, knowledge, clarity, spirituality; *rajas*, energy, action; *tamas*, conservation, inertia. As with the individuals, however, so it is with the collective being: the types intermingle. Athens and France ranked amongst the highest typologies so far manifested, a *rajaso-sattvic* society; spiritual counterparts were India and China, prevalently *tamaso-sattvic*. As for the eventuality of a purely *sattvic* society, this may not necessarily be the summit: as Lord Krishna stresses in the Bhagavad-Gita, perfection demands the harmonious integration of the positive aspects proper to each *guna*; *trigunatita*, 'one who has transcended the three *gunas*', is the perfect individual.

From free city-states and republics to nations-souls: humanity as one single being

Two factors heavily conditioned the Greco-Roman civilisation, to which Sri Aurobindo paid a close attention: the institution of slavery and, too often, the marginalization of

women. He laid a special emphasis upon the city-states and free republics of Greece and medieval Italy, as well as those of ancient India and its village *samitis* (assemblies), seeing them as true expressions of the citizens' will and power – either by direct participation, or by an effective representation. He observed that these were the only times in which democracy, whose etymology is 'the people's rule', could flourish. As for ancient India's monarchies, the king's *dharma* was to abide by the *sastra* like any other citizen; he could be killed "like a rabid dog" he violated it, Sri Aurobindo noted. Codified later by the *brahmanas*, at the origin the *sastras* were the vision of *rishis*, beings of higher spiritual knowledge belonging to any of the *varna*, and to whose authority even the king bowed.

As Sri Aurobindo observes, those early political bodies often stood for patronage of arts and culture, and so did the principates of the Italian Renaissance. Athens was the unsurpassed model in the ancient Western world; whereas Rome, with its strong ethical types and super-efficient political machinery, provided the model for the Western polity, law, even its imperialistic expansion. The court of Frederick the 2nd, in Sicily, stood as a model for the medieval world; the Florence of Lorenzo de' Medici, called 'the Magnificent', of the Renaissance world.

Yet, he observed, history has proved that polity and culture depend on the social condition of the whole. This implies not just that of an uncultured populace struggling for survival at the margins of more evolved socio-political aggregates – but also the state of neighbouring peoples and clan-nations, still barbarian, pressing against the frontiers. Poles of civilisation that are isolated ivory towers will have to succumb; not only because of the intrinsic contradictions mentioned, but also because surrounded by a humanity still largely sub-rational. The need was for political units on a much larger scale; organisms no longer bound by political machinery or national traits that remain external, but nations in the modern sense.

Regarding the old empires of Alexander the Macedon, of the Romans, of the Carolingians (where the only means of unification was military conquest) or that of the Hapsburgs, and finally the British Empire, the concept itself implied an imperialistic polity, Sri Aurobindo continues. This pushed aside the necessity of psychological roots leading to national unity; but by merely crushing, or destroying, the weaker entities they assimilated, they could not last. As for the *cakravartin* federation that ancient India dreamed of, it remained essentially a myth.

What we mean by 'nation' is a product of modern times. An early concept is that of motherland, manifesting at first as a sensory, objective perception: the soil, the mountains, the rivers and lakes and seas of our ancestors' land. A step further is its ethnic, linguistic, cultural, even its spiritual specificity. Yet deeply within, in nations as much as in individuals, is a soul waiting for discovery. As individuals are discordant aggregates made of countless personalities and sub-personalities and the task of one's inner demiurge is to re-unify all of them into a single whole – so it is up to the inward power of the nation-soul, gathering the multitudinous complexity of the people it hosts and nurtures, to take the lead. In both cases, the starting point is the transition from objective or sense-awareness, to subjective or soul-awareness: a discovery, or rather a re-discovery, of the Self that is each and all.

Internationalism was one offspring of the revolutionary eighteenth century; yet, disfigured by the new bourgeoisie coming to power under Napoleon's empire, it aborted into nationalism. The international ideal rose up again in the nineteenth century, heralded by socialism and anarchism. Socialism became the promoter of internationalism by the very concept of a war of classes, instead of a war of nations. One immediate result was pacifism; for the outcome of the historical cry, '*Workers of the world, unite!*', was the rejection of World War I, of any war, in the name of a class solidarity exceeding the frontiers of national States and even the notion

of motherland. The power behind exploitation of the labour force was the same power promoting war. The collusion between capital and war industry was unmasked as the super power of the age to be.

The concept of humanity as a single race is the highest product of modern idealism. The grand ideals of socialism, of communism, of anarchism, in their original purity rising above the collective ego of family, clan, class, even that of national State, heralded the vision of a united human race living in peace, harmony and social justice. The vision of a world-State with a common governing body and a common law of nations; the vision of a federation of free nationalities with an equal status; finally, the vision of humanity as one Selfhood are landmarks of the dawning spiritual age Sri Aurobindo announces. Humanity is a single soul, of which nations and individuals are the incarnated soul-forms.

The age of Reason: democracy, socialism, communism, anarchy – and their failure

France was the cradle of Cartesianism and Illuminism, of an entirely new social order inspired by grand revolutionary ideals. In synchronicity with the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century, commenced in England and from there spreading to the whole Western world, the creed of *'Liberty, equality, brotherhood'*, though undermined by the rise of the bourgeoisie under Napoleon's empire, fostered the advent of the contemporary age. This creed, streaming from a purely *sattvic* plane of consciousness, has been influencing since then the most progressive socio-political movements. Over two centuries have elapsed: why is the way still so rugged? Auguste Comte (1798–1857), the founder of positivist philosophy, developed the religion of Humanity. *"The purpose of the religion was to increase altruism, so that believers acted always in the best interests of humanity as a whole. The priests would be international ambassadors of*

altruism, teaching, arbitrating in industrial and political disputes, and directing public opinion. They should be scholars, physicians, poets and artists. Indeed all the arts, including dancing and singing should be practiced by them, like bards in ancient societies. This required long training. ... They earned no money and could not hold offices outside the priesthood. In this way their influence was purely spiritual and moral."³ This was the creed, with liturgy, sacraments and a pontiff; power rested upon moral force alone. As Comte believed that feminine values call for ethics and feelings, the priests had to marry. The word altruism is born out of the cardinal injunction of the Religion of Humanity "*vivre pour autrui*" ("*live for others*"). In Europe and the United States, Comte "*contributed to the emergence of ethical societies and 'ethical churches', which led to the development of Ethical culture, congregational humanist, and secular humanist organisations.*"⁴ The British welfare state and its National Health Service are an indirect creation.

Sri Aurobindo observed that both democracy and socialism have been instrumental in fostering the 'religion of humanity' that, although imperfect, is the highest achievement of ethical reason in the present age. Whilst democracy stresses freedom, and socialism equality, the intrinsic character of modern 'religion' is especially evident in the pure forms of communism and anarchism bordering on utopia. But as Sri Aurobindo points out, where humanity falls short, by whatever political regime it tries, whatever the social formula, is brotherhood, despite the splendour of refined cultures and bygone civilisations; and also, despite the religious and spiritual experience, confined at best to lonely realisations by a few, but generally reduced to pietistic formulas imposed upon society.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_of_Humanity

⁴ Ibid.

The State-idea, a myth of the modern age, is bound to correspond to the domineering authority of a few over the ineffectual majority; and this, independently of the political regime of which it is the expression. Nor does this sheer reality change with the empty formulas of contemporary democracy, reduced to a plaything of the ruling economic power. With the advent of the capitalistic age, labour, the fourth order of society, has become the toiling proletariat. Nothing of the *sudra* concept (service – not servants!) of *chaturvarna* remains. The creation of this class had been brought forth by the dispossession of the instruments of production: no longer manufactured goods, but bare labour force became the only ‘merchandise’ left for the proletariat to sell. This resulted in major social upheavals and revolutions, unending strikes and lockouts that Sri Aurobindo considered the unavoidable equivalent of civil war.

Order and peace, a perfect social equality assured by a State that, advocating the wellbeing of the entire community, fairly regulates all aspects of life, including universal education, are the principles of socialism. The latter too, however, was bound to fail; endless class conflicts tended to reduce socialism to a merely economic factor, abdicating its nature and purpose. Furthermore, can a just and human society come to life via the abstraction of State-machinery? On the other hand, a socialism compromising with elements of a spurious democracy might lose sight of its goal, Sri Aurobindo pointed out.

Ethics and religion stress qualities such as tolerance, charity, compassion; but in an age of compulsory consumerism their call remains external. Undermining the humanitarian creed, a new tyranny is born: commercialism. Not only an essential component of capitalism, but a corrosive agent of socialism too, this is the one god of our utilitarian age. No longer the savant, the learned – no longer the aristocrat of feeling and action rule society, but the plutocrat and the dishonoured politician, with the help of mass media addressing the clerk, the bureaucrat, the shopkeeper. How could the ideals

of democracy and socialism, heirs of the Illuminist creed, still hold – wonders Sri Aurobindo.

The same disintegrating force that has emptied democracy has uprooted socialism, which in the theory of pure communism is but an intermediary phase, like democracy. Communism and anarchism, the gateway to the ideal society, had no chance to even commence. For real communism, as foreseen by K. Marx, is a society without class, family, State or police; self-governed by the inner law of all its members, ultimately it is akin to spiritual anarchism. As for anarchism, the foundation of its free equality rests with spontaneous cooperation and brotherhood. In their unadulterated state both communism and anarchism command an ethical perfection that a complete change of consciousness only can manifest; hence the inadequacy of all attempts at social and political reforms by humans as they are, the failure of all revolutions.

Lofty ideals stream from the supra-rational consciousness; but their power of self-manifestation is distorted, as long as they are bound to percolate through a plane that remains essentially mental. For reason is a multifarious play of dualities and clashing truths that never meet, each asserting itself as absolute. The driving power behind all great revolutionary events and the most creative movements, a consciousness-force is at work. This truth-force alone can meet the needs of our times: the transition from a rational (still largely infrarational) to a subjective age, forerunning the spiritual age. This is the crossroads humanity has reached.

Consumerism, drive of the contemporary age. The ‘philistine’ and the ‘average sensational man’

Involution cannot be separated from evolution, and vice versa. But as in the Latin saying "*natura non facit saltus*", nature does not proceed in leaps. And since all classes cannot attain simultaneously to the same level any more than the individuals can, Sri Aurobindo acknowledged that the class, or classes,

temporarily ruling society are those who best fulfill the needs of the time. As long as it remained faithful to the ethics of its own type, an example was the cultural and political supremacy of aristocracy, towering over large masses of infrarational humanity. This is but nature's temporary device, though; a time comes when the dominant minority must necessarily abdicate. The king or emperor, together with the aristocracy, was the apex of European society – and the learned or sacerdotal class, of the Indian one. But with the advent of the industrial revolution and of nascent capitalism the hegemonic power, disguising the overruling economic factor, passed from a cultural and military aristocracy to the profit-making class.

To the ancients, the economic impulse was solely a mechanical need – and wealth, a means for political power. The Greeks and the Romans nurtured the rational, aesthetic and ethical being; to these the Asiatic soul added the spiritual being. The modern mind, however, is scientific and utilitarian. In our grossly materialistic age, the kinetic being has taken the lead: satisfaction of desires is the chief aim; to arrive, to cumulate and possess are the goals. This is the new barbarism of our age. As supremacy passed from the learned to the lesser classes of traders and labourers, mutually opposed, the driving force of society no longer remained with polity, culture, or religion, which turned into secondary factors. In the present mass media-oriented society, heavily conditioned by the dictate of consumerism, culture has become mainly decorative. Piety is a drawback. Ethics has virtually disappeared. Science is for ease and machinery. Education is for competition and success, which, along with money, are the triune gods of our age, as the mammoth capitalist is the hero. Economic power is the new social discriminator and only ruler, acting through a series of intermediaries, of which politicians are but the first layer.

The clash between what is right, and what is barely acceptable, has no end. Ordinary humanity tends to associate 'truth' with convenience (self-interests and personal well-

being); thus life, individual and collective, revolves around acceptability, which in turn feeds on self-esteem. This is the touchstone of the newly adapted 'common wisdom'. Professionalized and institutionalized, this is not the prerogative of any political group or social class: most of our social commentary is the offspring of newly articulated common wisdom. Politicians; public officers; managers; mass media commentators; academics: too often the *conditio sine qua non* of success is to be trained to expound commonplace 'truths' disguising vested interests. Articulated common wisdom nurtures both the ego and the evangelizing instinct; it is reassuring, not to say flattering, to hear stated from others, possibly some VIP, what one approves and, even more important, is largely approved by others. As the economist J. K. Galbraith stressed in a famous book, this operation '*is a religious rite. It is an act of affirmation like reading aloud from the Scriptures or going to church.*'

The ever-increasing vulgarity of the commercial age has produced two specific types. Sri Aurobindo called them 'philistine' and 'the average sensational man'. 'Innocent of art and beauty', unintelligent, uncultured, the philistine is the contemporary barbarian. The sense-mind, its platitudes and conventions govern this type, incapable of judgement or initiative of its own, and for whom life goes on at the mercy of blind drives and mechanic impulses. Towering on this infrarational mass, harboring a more insidious grossness, is the average sensational man. Art and culture; polity and economics; religion and spirituality too are food for arrivisme and the magic word: success, whilst science is for material comfort. Alert, voracious, majestically ambitious in his perpetual readiness to pick up the latest novelty, this pillar of glorified consumerism is mediocrity itself. For his entertainment brain-washing mass media exist; commercial advertisements are made on his own scale, and politicians mimic his attire and countenance.

Ruthless ambition. Incommensurable greed. In an era of worship of the pecuniary drive, made sacrosanct by the blessings of the latest common wisdom, satisfaction of material desires is the main pursuit. This is the stigma of the affluent society, where consumerist voraciousness and abysmal dejection live side by side. How far are we from the four original types of *caturvarna*, harmoniously serving society by a sense of honour and self-giving, is a riddle the present age is called to solve.

Education for a higher living

Progress called for the dissolvent power of reason, bringing to an end the conventional age. However, reason will fully manifest only when the masses will learn to use their intelligence; failing to acknowledge the necessity of education for all – an ideal recognised today by all the progressive nations – called for the decline and disappearance of once splendid civilisations. In the rational age, education is perceived as a necessity; not only mental education, but moral and aesthetic too. It is a return to the Greek ideal – in Athens, living itself was education – but emphasising utilitarianism rather than beauty and refinement.

The rationale of evolution, a major idea-force of our times, stresses the necessity of universal education. This is a major claim of that ‘religion of humanity’ Sri Aurobindo saw as the threshold of the oncoming spiritual age, when humanity’s loftiest ideals, from the objective to the subjective, will undergo the process of spiritualization upon which the future of the human species depends.

Education for all, a major concern of socialism, was one reason for the widespread appeal of this political system. Paradoxically, though, the age that most has strived to materialise this need is the one also enhancing gross values. What type of schooling do our materialistic times nurture? The split between pragmatic and utilitarian education, versus real

culture, keeps widening. The wealth of opulent nations is quantified in terms of mass consumerism, rather than education, culture, ethics. The abyss between the 1% rich and destitutes keeps widening exponentially, whilst the disappearance of once fundamental values has changed dramatically our global perception. Where do we stand, on the threshold of the third millennium?

The humanists of Italian Renaissance sought mastery over all aspects of knowledge. The highest exponent was Leonardo da Vinci, whose Vitruvian figure of a naked man squaring the circle stands for wholeness. No longer an unearthly God, but the intrinsic divinity of the human being, in all its components, at the centre of universe, was the new mystique. This was the momentous turning point, between the subliminal reveries of the Middle Ages and the dawning modern era. Alchemy, the art of transformation from base metal to gold offered many variations on the theme. However, the symbolism of that concept, universal and eternal, re-surfacing whenever humans strive for wholeness, exceeds Leonardo's genius, whom the Mother saw as a *vibhuti* of Sri Aurobindo. This should be the primary task of education: to foster the growth into whole, integral beings for whom microcosm and macrocosm are one – as the existential quest is one with that of the cosmic mystery.

We have entered a no man's land. The transition from the rational to the spiritual age is not yet accomplished, the infrarational being still largely dominates us. Is civilisation engulfed by commercialism? Substituting a super specialistic education, essentially empiricist, purposely utilitarian, instead of the humanists' search for all-encompassing knowledge – whilst the vision of the whole is lost? And with it, the quest eternal: the search of the soul, by the soul?

Sri Aurobindo had denounced the British Empire's system of education as instrumental to the building of a "nation of clerks". He claimed instead a nation of *ksatriyas* and *brahmanas* – of warriors and savants, offspring of the genius of ancient India. Should not this be a primary task of

education: the awakening of the *brahmana* and the *ksatriya* in us? By that power, re-building world and society? Enlightening at the same time by the sense of honour, and by the spirit of selfless service, the *vaisya* (the one who produces) and the *sudra* (the one who serves) that we also harbour as the fourfold aspects of personality we must fulfil to grow whole, integral, total? The supreme teaching is that of the Lord in the “*Bhagavad-Gita*”. With it rests the hope of the human kind.

Real education should nurture the building of all-round personalities to whom knowledge comes as perception from within. In the latest trends of Western art and culture Sri Aurobindo sensed a beginning of the subjective tendency, largely introspective, spiritually questioning. This was an overdue reaction to pragmatic materialism, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards underlying all of Western thought and life. Not only traditional domains such as philosophy and religion, or fledgling psychology – but literature and poetry too, theatre and cinema bore the influence of subjectivism. History and sociology, social sciences and law; even to polity and economics was the door open.

Is the subjective awakening – and with it, the quest for one’s utmost being, individual, collective – condemned to halt because of the impact on society of the dull bureaucrat, the stereotyped technocrat? The race for money and goods, prestige and success? While those who do not fit into the utilitarian system are marginalized and ousted? Is truly the scientist’s task to enhance the comfort of an opulent society, cynically unequal – and the economist’s, a productive system whose logic remains the profit’s law? In today’s commercialised version of the ‘nation of clerks’ of imperial memory that Sri Aurobindo immortalises, the main educational occupation seems to burden society by a trophy of such things and types.

What is our true nature? Is not the fulfilment of all that makes life vibrant and rich, from within, to be sought? What is the ultimate purpose of existence? Should not a perpetual

questioning, nurtured from a tender age, be the very core of education? Opening to introspective and subjective dimensions, philosophy played an essential role in the flourishing of culture and civilisation. In a materialistic age, philosophy may lead to the inquiry proper to the spiritual being, like some new trends of science. Yet, the ontological and teleological question – the primeval quest of the human species, the one journey – rises beyond the boundaries of philosophy. In the answer lies concealed the secret of being, harbouring the future of the human race.

Travail of economic science: from A. Smith to K. Marx, from J. Keynes and J. Galbraith to A. Sen

In the late eighteenth-century A. Smith fixed the workers' wages just above the bare survival needs. This 'iron law', which T. R. Malthus and D. Ricardo also embraced, was the counterpart of economic liberalism. Malthus, the forefather of demography, had asserted that war, famine and pestilence, together with misery and vice, positively prevented the increase of population. To the vehement reactions he raised, he replied by statistic studies and the proposal for moral restraint, postponement of conception and sexual abstinence by the indigent class. His correspondent and friend Ricardo, who systematized and gave a classic form to the nascent science of economics, shared Malthus's belief of the paupers as morally responsible for their condition, and proposed laws enforcing a merciless inequality. Ricardo observed that the rise of profits fosters both the accumulation of capital and the increase of productivity; as the latter expands, nevertheless, the population too is likely to increase, and the rents go up. Observing that profits vary inversely with wages, Ricardo recommended that these be kept on the edge of starvation.

Not just in terms of cruelty and cynicism did those early economists defy conventional morality – but by propounding the economic principle of liberalism. This disrupted the

‘common wisdom’ that had revolved around the mercantilist State that, now superseded by the free market, no longer regulated economic life. As for the humanitarian question, it did not even arise: the paupers have always been poor – and the masses, slaves of a few privileged people. The latter came to be identified as the ‘fittest’ elements of society, whose heights they had abruptly climbed thanks to the brutal force of liberalism. Conventional wisdom had turned to the service of the latest power: capitalism.

This being the status quo, the Social Darwinists headed by H. Spencer were free to state that “*poverty is the socially therapeutic tendency that eliminates the unfit*”. This tells a lot about a certain mentality that periodically resurfaces under the mask of common wisdom. This type of ‘wisdom’ is largely diffused in third world countries, but not only there.

The inhuman conditions enforced upon the working class stirred the passionate reaction of the utopian socialists. To F. Engels – together with K. Marx the founder of communism – we owe a heart rendering description of London’s proletariat around the mid-nineteenth century. The real breakthrough, however, came through Marx, the founder of dialectical materialism: the perception of historical and political events as conflicting social forces, triggered by humanity’s most elementary needs. Projecting from the distant past into the future, the Marxian analysis had the character of a new mystique. Starting from Ricardo, Marx examined the lacerating contradictions of the capitalistic system that – he fathomed – ultimately would lead to its destruction. He observed that occasionally a worker might get more than a bare survival wage, for the same reasoning that a cow getting extra food produces more milk. Because of the ferociously competitive system, an ever-increasing number of artisans and farmers turned abruptly into expropriated proletarians; and as the manpower reservoir kept widening, so did unemployment, along with the harsh competition between old and newly expropriated labour force. Due to the virtually nihil purchasing

power of the working class, goods without buyers accumulated; this called for crisis. As capital accumulated, moreover, the return rate or rate of profit dropped; this weakened the incentives and fostered stagnation. Nor was the picture rosier in boom times: reduction of unemployment would automatically raise the wages, together with the costs of production, thus ending the boom. Marx opined that the same would happen in the case governments created jobs, and/or increased the working class's purchasing power; this would lead to deficits. These latter measures were anyhow unlikely, governments being but tools at the service of the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie. Finally, as the centralisation of production and capital resources in the hands of ever fewer and wealthier people proceeded, the ensuing cycle of repeated depressions would lead to self-destruction of the capitalistic system. Grown into a disciplined industrial army, the expropriated proletarians would overthrow the expropriators by revolution. After an initial phase of proletarian dictatorship, succeeded by temporary democracy, the successive development is a society that, police-free, above the particularism of family and class, abolishes the State. This is communism. Anarchy is the ultimate stage.

Marx's vision was that of a revolutionary, but his methods were those of a scholar and a scientist. Appealing to both proletarians and intellectuals, he profoundly influenced social, political, economic thought and happenings. No one before had made the link between social classes and endless class conflict. No one had denounced economic motivation as the one major factor triggering national war and imperialism. Too often these were the *causa prima*, Marx spelled out without mincing words; patriotism, religion, reformist crusading are but a facade. But Marx, an historian and a philosopher, ignored that only the irreversible transformation of the darkest, most recalcitrant drives of the individual and collective unconscious can free society from war, genocide, famine, ruthless exploitation and power struggle. Anything else falls short and

perpetrates the ‘debt to Rudra’ subduing the infrarational, still largely barbarian humanity we are, to which the higher realms of pure Ideas are precluded. Sri Aurobindo writes that democracy, socialism, communism, anarchy, which to those realms belong, in their pure form remain inaccessible, reason as social creator cannot translate the Ideas into political realities and regenerate society.

Would at last the ‘religion of humanity’, heralded by the French Revolution’s immortal credo, and which Sri Aurobindo calls for, come to the front as the Idea-Force leading humanity towards the perfect society?

By the second half of the nineteenth century Smith’s ‘iron law’ was rejected, and by the turn of the century wages tended to be equated with the marginal productivity: what the worker added – instruction, skill etc. – to the product’s value. This was a double edge sword, though, for those workers getting higher wages could be fired any time, thanks to the ever-increasing competition. The latter was, moreover, the main culprit for frequent bankruptcy, whilst fostering monopoly. All this made survival even more precarious, and not only for the proletariat. Introduced as a self-correcting attempt to contain the tragedy of the 1929 world crisis, the ‘business cycle’ took perpetual depletion for granted – with inequality and insecurity deemed as factors inherent to the ruthlessly competitive pattern of economic liberalism.

The successive generations have a great debt towards Marxist theory, even those who oppose it. It was up to the genius of J. M. Keynes, nevertheless, to revolutionize the international economic system. Viewed at first as a classical economist, and a financier and a journalist too, because of his works during the 1930s depression Keynes came to be regarded as the leading critic of orthodox economics. Not a science defending the socio-economic status quo, but an instrument of social control to achieve goals such as maximum national income, full employment and international monetary stabilization: this was Keynes’s vision of economics. By

acting on the aggregate demand, the kernel of the economic system he expounded, governments could influence the level of production, which depended on many factors. A first way is taxation, increasing or decreasing expenditures at will. Demolishing the current views, blatantly failing, the illustrious economist stated that the total expenditure by consumers, investors and governments was too low to employ the full potential of economic resources; this factor was in turn responsible for the high unemployment rate. Keynes proposed, instead, the deliberate promotion of the production of capital goods, a cheap monetary policy, and public investments; together with the stimulation of consumption through the reduction of savings. During World War II, though, he suggested the control of inflation by compulsory savings. Goal of all these measures, ultimately, was to maintain a high employment rate, even in the case of recessions.

The results were spectacular and Keynes converted most of his colleagues. During World War II and afterwards, up to the presidency of J. F. Kennedy, all the democratic countries of the West committed themselves to a high-employment policy. Between the late thirties and the early fifties of the past century, the eradication of unemployment by production became the one program of the liberals, in Great Britain as in the USA. Still in 1960, J. F. Kennedy won the presidential elections on this basis. Translating the ideal of internationalism into economics, a dream Keynes cherished was that of an international currency and a world bank. However, the myths of the Keynesian era too had their shortcomings. Like the welfare State, associated at its inception to the New Deal launched by the American President F. D. Roosevelt and the liberal Democrats; or in Great Britain, to Lloyd George, the Fabians and the Labour Party. Used as an electoral platform, Keynesian attitudes had turned into the latest conventional wisdom. For the liberals kept sticking to the productivity formula as the hallmark of political success,

even when this merely added to the stock of consumers' goods, opening the gate to mass consumerism.

A momentous contribution came from J. K. Galbraith, a public servant as an economist since his early thirties; also a university professor at Harvard, ambassador to India, and key adviser to President J. F. Kennedy. Widely read, his works possess high literary quality, wit, poignant humour and clarity that, attracting even the public at large, have powerfully stimulated the international debate on political economy. Controversial as much as influential, this economist has embarked on hot issues such as organised labour, to counteract the omnipotent corporations of American capitalism; less emphasis on production, more on public services; the growing similarity between the 'managerial' capitalism of USA and socialism. This outstanding figure has also denounced the urban disaster of unliveable cities, and the environmental question as a concern mainly of the relatively affluent middle classes – those who, at the same time, refrain from cogent humanitarian questions.

This leads to a major issue, one of special relevance in the attempt to interpret socio-economic history from an aurobindonian perspective. As Keynes had observed, the higher the general level of economic well-being, exponentially higher grow the needs of the wealthiest; and the more wants are satisfied, the more demanding become the newly created needs. The next postulate, Galbraith observed, is that enhancing a high standard quality production, this type of society evaluates people according to the goods they own, the touchstone of prestige and success.

"The Affluent Society", first published in 1958 (the fourth edition was revised in 1984), still provokes in depth reflection. As Galbraith points out, the creation of an opulent society, extended to a newly affluent petty and middle bourgeoisie of blue-collar workers, white-collar bureaucrats, enhanced professionals (besides those the welfare State protects from the hardship of unemployment, ageing, disease and others)

reduces but does not eradicate poverty. Once benefited by social security, this class begins to share with the older affluent classes indifference vis-a-vis the most unfortunate strata of society. The hopelessly poor, more than ever marginalized and abandoned, is the cruel counterpart to an affluent society. Paupers are still condemned to eternal hell.⁵

In an epoch of general unconcern, where arrivisme, money-making and consumerism merge – an epoch of mass unemployment, of ultra conservative ‘liberal’ governments eroding the welfare State and aid to the developing countries – have economists and politicians pushed aside Keynes’s grand vision, Galbraith’s prophetic insight?

The award of the 1998 Nobel Prize to Amartya Sen on account of his social-choice theory, for “*having restored an ethical dimension to economics*”, raises the cogent question: what should the economist’s role and ethical approach to society be? Formerly professor at Harvard of philosophy and economics, then master of the Trinity College, Cambridge, and a mathematician too, this economist has researched famine, aid programs, illiteracy and women’s inequality in the third world. Prof. Sen has entirely donated the conspicuous Nobel sum he has won to two trusts for the purpose of eradication of gender disparity and illiteracy, together with that of poor healthcare, in India and Bangladesh. As A. Marshall, one of the chief founders of the school of neoclassical economy, and also one of Keynes’s teachers stated, “*The economist, like everyone else, must concern himself with the ultimate aims of man.*” Like all of human sciences and endeavours, economics too cannot bypass the ‘religion of humanity’ that, stretching to spirituality whilst fostering the highest humanitarian ideals, Sri Aurobindo saw as preliminary to the birth of the new age.

⁵ The immigrants’ tragedy, the mass-pauperisation even of middle-class citizens, robotization, gentrification and all the plagues of contemporary society were to follow next – and with it, unending warring versus spiraling welfare crisis.

Committed to humanity's welfare, nurturing such a broad spectrum of interests to include the teaching of philosophy, of science and logic, does not a personality like Sen's rank amongst the contemporary humanists?

Not the relic of a magnificent era fallen into oblivion, but the universal, total being of Vitruvius and Leonardo, immanent and yet transcendent: humanists are amongst us, the leading figures of civilisation. Touched by the sattvic influence of a spiritualised religion of humanity, by compassionate love and service they guide society. A glittering of the immortal age when *rishis*, seers pointed out the way towards the ideal society: a path of spiritual light and knowledge, of mutual service and oneness.

Preliminaries of the ideal society, ancient India: ethical, social and spiritual perfection *purusasukta*, *virat purusha*, *caturvarna*, *trigunatita*, *the mahashakti's* four powers

Coupling intense mysticism to the quest for an ethic, more just society was characteristic of the heretical sects of early Christianity; the peak was reached with the Cathars, professing Manichean dualism. Of Celtic origin, the legend of the Grail, the most cherished in the Western world, enhanced the high ethical ideals of chivalry; an allegory of the human journey to perfection, this legend of the Middle Ages still is a living force.

With the advent of the age of reason culminating with the triumph of physical science, however, the Western dream of a perfect society took the shape of one brought about by socio-political machinery. Whereas the East followed another way, traceable back thousands of years, to Vedic and Upanishadic times, to Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism – before the split between religion and spirituality took over.

Above the highest ideals that are the beacon in humanity's unending quest, Yoga soars where space and time dissolve, and all that is, or not yet, is Oneness. The state Sri Aurobindo calls 'divine', 'waking *samadhi*', akin to the *samadhist* of the

Bhagavad-Gita, is the crown of all spiritual paths. *Samadhi* is the trance-state in which the mind seals the physical senses and withdraws into *cidakasa*, the inner space; *samadhista* is the settled existence in the Self, abiding and irreversible, transcending the distinction of waking, dreaming and sleeping state: Self-realisation. This is the real journey, back to the one Existence where division, fragmentation cease, each and all are the one eternal Reality.

Believed to have been composed and orally transmitted 6,000 years ago, the *Rig-Veda* is considered by some the oldest *sruti* or revealed scripture of the world. The *purusasukta* of the *Rig Veda* visualised the *purusa* or Cosmic Being in a human form. In this hymn we find the earliest hint of the ideal society, whose fourfold order, *caturvarna*, was born out of the head, arms, thighs and feet of the Universal Spirit, *virat purusa*. The four principles symbolised by its limbs, all equally necessary, correspond to human prototypes. The *brahmana*, the Divine as knowledge, is the learned and religious being; the priest, teacher, scholar or legislator. The *ksatriya* is the Divine as power; the warrior, ruler, political leader, administrator. The *vaisya* is the Divine in production; the merchant or trader, financier, artisan, agriculturist. The *sudra* is the Divine as service and labour: the peasant and sometimes artisan.

The sense of honour and self-giving by which all performed their duties towards society was common to all *varna* or social classes, each of them endowed with specific ethic qualities. Each *varna* correspond to a step on the ladder of one's spiritual evolution as various modes to serve the Divine; according to the *Bhagavad Gita*, faithful to the Vedic spirit, all human beings should host within themselves the highest values proper to the priest and the king, to the savant and the warrior. At the same time, those proper to the producer and to the labourer, to the trader and to the servant.

The work individuals executed to serve society at the best of their capacities was determined by their innate way of being, *svabhava* – at its origin, the pure quality of the Spirit;

this in turn determined one's socio-economic function or *varna*. Before the caste-system took over, heredity counted only as a secondary factor; the individuals' inner predisposition determined their effective role in society.

The *virat purusha* or Cosmic Being, by its sacrifice giving birth to the human being and society, is but an allegory of what we truly are. That spiritualised society worshipped the Supreme Being as indissolubly one with its creative Power, the *mahashakti*; the seed of the fourfold order of society – *caturvarna*, founded and systematised by Swayambhuva, the first *manu* (forefather) transmitting it to the rishi Brighu – can also be traced back to the four aspects of the Divine Mother in the play of earthly manifestation, and life ought to be an unfolding of those four cosmic principles. Maheswari, Knowledge and Wisdom. Mahakali, Power and Strength. Mahalakshmi, Harmony and Rhythm. Mahasaraswati, Work and Perfection. As these aspects correspond to the intrinsic perfection of the four *varna*, they stand for the perfection that each individual should strive to embody.

Within us the four *varna* manifest as quest for knowledge, as battle within oneself and with the forces that oppose light, as application of skill and, finally, as self-giving. The preponderance of one or more of these powers shapes our natural predisposition.

By fulfilling their societal role at the best of their capacities all human beings worked at the fulfilment of their spiritual destiny; this included as well the lesser class confined to menial activities – for the concept of social hierarchy was alien to the spirit of *sanatana dharma*, the eternal, universal religion that has no name.

The Bhagavad-Gita stressed one more factor: the intrinsic nature of the individual is determined by the prevalent quality of one of the three *guna*, which correspond to principles. Sattva (spirituality, knowledge, clarity) is the seat of intelligence; its abode is in the mind. *Rajas* (action and desire, but also energy and strength) has its seat in the vital nature.

Tamas (conservatism, inertia) has its seat in the body. Purified, the three *guna* change into their divine equivalent. Sattva becomes *jothi*, spiritual light. *Rajas* becomes *tapas*, spiritual force. And *tamas* becomes *sama*, divine quiet.

These universal forces, whose influence vary according to one's stages of life and experience, are the drive behind the human personality and behaviour; they apply to the collective being as well. The teachings of Lord Krishna demand perfection as the synthesis of both, the four varna's and the three *guna*'s highest aspects, reunifying our fragmented personalities under the guidance of the individual soul-force.

Trigunatita is who, rising above all the three *guna*, lives in freedom and attains bliss. In the three *guna*'s play, *svabhava* acts in a state of half-light and half-darkness. *Svadharm*a, the law of action determined by one's *svabhava*, alias one's inner law vis-à-vis life and society, is the outcome. All this made of *caturvarna* an institution striving for the highest values.

The inner predisposition, *adhikara*, which determined the individuals' rights to choose their specific Path, was of utmost importance; this accounted for the freedom of spiritual pursuit that made *Bharat Mata* unique; even atheism and agnosticism were regarded as a path. An individual perfection that demands the perfection of the whole, and vice versa, was the ideal fostered by ancient India, whose crown was abiding oneness with the Self: the journey back to one's original state, the *sahaja* or natural state of Selfhood.

This was the sole hierarchy, in ancient India: not political, or economic, or social and not even intellectual – but spiritual. Life's ultimate purpose was *moksa*, the liberated state of the spiritual being: the fourth and last stage, *ashrama*, of human existence; in order: *brahmacarya*, student; *grhastha*, householder; *vanaprasta*, spiritual wanderer; *sannyasa*, settler and realiser.

A society of gnostic beings

Known in Integral Yoga as the psychic being, the *caitya purusha* of Indian tradition is the spark of divine fire that stands behind the heart. The self, *atman*, is in its nature either transcendent or universal (*paramatma*, *atma*); when it individualises and becomes the central being, it is then the *jivatman*: feeling oneness with the universal, but at the same time his central separateness as a portion of the Divine. The soul is the divine essence in the individual; the psychic being is the developing soul-personality put forth by the soul as its representative in evolution.

Sri Aurobindo's choice of the term Gnosis as synonymous of true Supermind is highly relevant. In Greek, *gnostikos* is one who knows, and *gnosis* is knowledge of an esoteric nature; the object is *sophia*, wisdom. The gnostic creed⁶ is that the world was made by an imperfect spirit, the God of Abraham; within the human being, trapped in the ordinary physical world, there is a spark, fallen from the divine realms above; because of a revelation by its divine counterpart, this spark can be awakened and reintegrated to the spiritual world. Is this spark the psychic being, *caitya purusha*? The real God is good, but distant and not easy to know. *Gnosis* is the special secret knowledge given to few selected ones.

Sri Aurobindo uses the term Gnosis as an equivalent to the Supermind at its highest. The divine Gnosis is the wisdom, power, light of the Supreme Being by which he upholds and enjoys the universe. Gnosis, or true Supermind, is the self-

⁶ Gnosticism flourished in the Greco-Roman world, and early Christianity between the first and third century AD, before being persecuted by other Christians. Some Judaic and Islamic sects have also gnostic traits, and so have alchemy and other esoteric currents. There are analogies with Egyptian and Mesopotamian thought, as well as Persian. There have been contemporary gnostic groups; the great "psychologist of the depths" C. G. Jung had a special interest, and so had his disciple E. Neumann – as well as existentialist philosophers as H. Jonas. Some feel that gnostic elements can be found in the existentialist philosophy of M. Heidegger.

conscious Truth, knowing itself by its own power of absolute light or Truth-Consciousness. Moral ideals are mental constructions. Discovered in one's mind, the higher ethical law is founded in the Spirit. Self-determination is the abiding principle of true freedom: God's law is written in one's heart. Above and beyond race and nation, status, creed, human beings are sacred because the divine spark is in them. Each one has to live in humanity, and humanity in each one. This is the 'religion of humanity', the hope of the future.

The 'religion of humanity' remains unaccomplished unless love and brotherhood, human oneness come forward. *Liberty, equality, brotherhood* are eternal attributes of the Spirit: the highest fulfilment of the 'religion of humanity'. With brotherhood lies the key; in the soul, by the soul alone real brotherhood exists. Then, when the soul claims freedom, the divinity in all beings claims freedom for its self-development – whilst equality is the recognition of the one Godhead in each and all, claiming freedom for each and all.

A spiritualised society will regard individuals, communities, peoples and nations as means for the Spirit's self-manifestation, and will live in the Spirit as collective soul. The first essential requisite is subjectivism: the taking into oneself, by soul awareness, of creativity, of all activities and interests of life, all pursuits and investigations. Subjectivism may manifest at first in philosophy, psychology, ethics and art; in sociology too, in economics, even in politics – and science. But this is a prelude only. The ideal society, maintained by the spontaneous consensus of the perfected individual and, simultaneously, of the perfected collective being, can only come true by a free developing from within, fostering the others' free development. All will be free, for each one is the law: divine. This demands an epochal shift of consciousness.

Science is beginning to discover what yogic experience has known for ages. There is a secret consciousness involved in matter, a vibrating energy, one with the Spirit; this equation is the answer to the play of manifestation. Gnosis or true

Supermind is the intermediate world or plane of consciousness linking the upper hemisphere of *saccidananda* (existence, consciousness, bliss) to the lower one of mind, life and body. The dynamic aspect of *saccidananda*, Supermind, is the creative force presiding over involution-evolution, of which it is the lever. Self-involved, Supermind acts on beings and universes by progressively unveiling itself: one with the Spirit, essence and reality of all manifest and unmanifest existences.

A new humanity will be a race in possession of a mind of light. This stage, which is inevitable, precedes the advent of the gnostic, supramental consciousness that it heralds. The various systems of yoga usually tend to bypass the supramental plane, of which Sri Aurobindo first found evidence in the Vedas. With Supermind the kernel of evolutions rests, through the unfolding of successive gradations of matters.

The descent of the Higher Consciousness as the outcome of Self-realization triggers the second transformation, spiritual, stretching up to the threshold of the third and last transformation, supramental, proper to the Gnosis. A genetic mutation, to be brought about by spiritual transmutation, according to Sri Aurobindo is nature's secret purpose and endeavour. No longer a mutation through new bodily organisms, thus, preceding the change of consciousness, as in the low pace of nature, but the reverse: consciousness will necessitate whatever mutation is needed for the body. This is the next evolutionary step Sri Aurobindo foresaw, an overturn even more momentous than the appearance of *Homo sapiens*. The new order will be brought about by an ascension to the full range of the supra-conscious planes of mind, and the descent of their light and force into the energy centres of our subtle body, releasing the *cakras*' powers in full. The last consummation is the advent of the gnostic, supramental being, by a transmutation so complete as to involve the bodily organs and their functioning, or their abolition.

In the world and of the world, yet living in his transcendent self; universal, and free in the universe that he individualises: this is the gnostic being, to whom world-life is a perfect work of art, and all beings are oneself, the one Godhead. To be is to be all that is. Each individual is a new totality, the one Existence in its infinitely diverse manifestation, carrying within itself the universe and all its beings. An all-inclusive universality, where all beings are apprehended as oneself by an intrinsic knowledge by identity; a unity fulfilled in an infinite diversity: this is the code of the gnostic consciousness. Pioneered at first by individuals and/or small *sangha* (spiritual communities), this is the summit humanity is called to reach. Behind millennia of human history, behind partial victories and temporary failures is the veiled action of Gnosis, the supramental consciousness, using for evolutionary purposes whatever means it has at its disposal. This is the guiding force behind the entire human cycle, where ages of darkness and chaos are but relative, and light and progress are concealed only temporarily. With the gnostic principle rests the advent of that spiritual age Sri Aurobindo heralds as the crown of the human saga and of which subjectivism is the beginning. Then the ideal society, the dream of a soul-state one with the real essence of communism, of anarchism, ceases to be an ever-fleeing mirage and asserts itself as evolutionary necessity: a call from within brought about by the highest planes of consciousness.

This demands a synchronicity that has never happened before: the readiness of both the individual and the group-soul, widening to nation-soul, to world-State, to a federation of free nationalities, and finally to the all of humanity as a single soul. Beyond endless attempts and remolding, beyond upheavals and shipwrecks, this is our call and destiny: the gnostic, supramental being and society. A race of divine beings upon earth is humanity's last consummation.



S U M M A R Y⁷

PART ONE: THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIETY

Transition from the symbolic to the psychological to the conventional age of society. The birth of individualism

In the primitive beginnings of society, religious-spiritual, we find a strong symbolic mentality. This early stage is religious and actively imaginative or intuitive; the ethical, psychological, economic elements are subordinated. The symbol – the Divine, the gods, some mysterious entity or nature of things – is experienced as present behind one’s life and activities. All religious and social institutions are symbols in which early humanity seeks to express those mystic influences. An example is the *purushasukta* of the “Rig Veda” seers; the four orders of society correspond to the head (the *brahmana* or being of knowledge), the arms (the *ksatriya* or being of power), the thighs (the *vaisya* or being of production) and the feet (the *sudra* or being of service) of the cosmic Person, of which society is the expression.

The next stage, typical, is predominantly psychological and ethical. There is a progression towards a fixed but not yet rigid social order; the corresponding ethical discipline determines the function. The above Indian system of society, *caturvarna*, is an answer to four cosmic principles; religion becomes the mystic sanction for the ethic discipline, *dharma*. The typical stage creates the great social ideals; when this stage is over, the principal active contribution it leaves behind is the ideal of social honour.

In the conventional age birth, economic function, rituals, family customs etc. are fixed into a hereditary groove. This is the age of rigid hierarchies, of unchangeable forms, of

⁷ Outline ‘condensing’ Sri Aurobindo’s language.

infallible authorities. The ethical type, the economic basis too vanish; the masquerade of caste sets in.

The age of European individualism commenced as a revolt of reason; in its culmination, it is the triumph of physical science. Individualism always dawns as a questioning and denial of stereotyped conventions, fixed privileges and authorities; real knowledge and science are persecuted and/or banned, or rendered obsolete. The religious motive led first, the social and political followed behind: this phenomenon typical of Europe commenced with the white heat of heretical sects such as the Anabaptists, Independents, Socinians and countless others. While in the East this movement – divorced from political, or strongly iconoclastic social significance – would just produce religious reformers, saints, new beliefs with their appropriate cultural and social practice, in the West secularism and atheism were the inevitable goal.

Rational – or infrarational?

A temporary reign of the dissolvent, largely destructive critical reason is imperative for progress. Europe's evolution flourished by the vigorous return of the Greco-Roman mentality of the Italian Renaissance, manifesting with an almost religious ardour, more than by the Reformation.

In the infrarational age people act principally out of instincts and impulses, obeying mechanical customs and tradition. Yet this age too has its elements of reason and spirituality, of masked divinity, though crude and underdeveloped; it can even arrive at lofty ideals, as in the beginnings of Greek civilisation, or in the prehistoric period of mystic India. The mass, though, remains largely infrarational, infraspirtual.

As reason and spirituality develop, the solitary thinkers are replaced by an increasing number of writers, poets, scientific enquirers, as in the age of the Greek sophists; whole classes of society seek for spiritual light, as in the Upanishadic age of

India. But the intellect must develop in full, although it can do away for a time with the spiritual tendency, as in ancient Greece; or spinning around it a vast web of its workings, as in ancient India, whose early seers were replaced by philosophers-mystics.

The age of reason can manifest in full only not when just a few, but the multitude has learned to exercise its intelligence. Until then society is a mixed one. As reason and spirituality at first develop by exceptional individuals, so they develop next by exceptional communities or nations; Greece and later Rome, in Europe; India, China and Persia, in Asia. But all these civilisations collapsed because surrounded by enormous masses of an infrarational humanity. Moreover, the ruling classes are obliged to throw religion and spirituality into forms acceptable by the mass they lead. When intellectual or spiritual movements arise to prevent the degeneration into traditionalism, then the rational age is instituted.

Civilization is not safe, if confined to a small minority; the Greco-Roman civilization perished from within as from without. In the age of reason, general education is a necessity, at this stage. Not only as mental capacity, but also as moral and aesthetic training. This is a return to the Hellenic ideal, but emphasising utility more than beauty and refinement.

Knowledge, science, art, ethics, philosophy, religion: this is the real business of the mental being. There is a progressive movement, an affirming and questioning, fixing a rule and getting free from it, by which the progress of the race is assured. But intelligence is also turned inward and upward, deriving an indirect knowledge of the universal principles of our existence, and turning those great ideas, that are forces, and where knowledge and freedom are one, into intellectual forms. Ethics, emotions, aesthetic –science and philosophy, politics and society, governed by conflicting ideas, are plaything of forces over which reason has little control. For the imperfect light of reason has always been used to impose opposite principles.

Commercialism: economic barbarism

The triumphal lead of the vital, kinetic being is the significance of the great economic and political civilization of Europe's nineteenth century. The ancients – primarily political beings in the Aristotelian sense – held the opposite view: life was to develop the rational, aesthetic, ethic spiritual being. Greeks and Romans stressed the first three elements, whilst Asia looked at them as stepping-stones to a spiritual consummation; the economic impulses were worked out as a mechanical necessity. As for the relations between states, the commercial interests were a secondary factor, and the increase of wealth was primarily regarded as a means of political power.

Commercialism is the whole phenomenon of modern society. The commercial and industrial classes predominate, whilst the military and cultural/spiritual aristocracy declines. In the economic age culture has chiefly a decorative value, and religion is a hindrance; education is utilitarian, and science is for machineries and the organisation of the economic resources. As for politics, it is an instrument for the development of an industrialised society, divided between bourgeois capitalism and an economic socialism.

The primary impulse makes family, society and national life a means for the satisfaction of the vitalistic individual. Barbarianism is that state of society whose main concern is the economic and physical existence; in this sense all societies are semi-civilised. Science has rendered impossible the return of real materialism, typical of the barbarian mentality; nevertheless, by its attitude, by its discoveries it has encouraged a form of barbarism that is peculiar to the commercial age: that of the vitalistic being, for whom the satisfaction of desires is the first aim of life. To arrive, to succeed, to accumulate, to possess are the goals. Civilization is thus intended as morals and comfort, as social respectability. By politics it is meant the encouragement of industry; by religion, the satisfaction of vitalistic emotions. Education is for

competition and success, science for machinery of production and ease. The mammoth capitalist is the superman.

Conventional, unintelligent, this new type – the philistine! – is endowed with the crudest aesthetic taste and moral, for his social conventions and respectabilities are those of the group-mind. Yet a new giant is replacing the philistine: the average sensational being, open to all the new intellectual problems, fashions, ideas. For him do the mass media exist, and politics are shaped in his image. Commercialism, the sensational activism of the crude mental being is the driving forces of modern civilization, but in this latter type much more open and freer. Art and literature, talent and genius, science have been democratised, sensationalised. And yet new principles of education and society are dawning: the prelude to a cultured humanity.

Reason as social creator: democracy, socialism, communism, anarchy

Reason is destined to manifest in three successive stages: democracy, socialism (ending perhaps in governmental communism), and anarchism. Democracy and socialism are the signs of a ripening self-consciousness. The wellbeing of all the individuals in the society, accepted by all the progressive nations, is the basis of the socialistic tendency.

In individual democracy the reason and will of each and all count equally. But humanity is not rational yet; a dominant class rules, in the name of democracy, over the ignorant masses; the ordered tyrannies of the past are replaced by a sort of ordered conflict. Universal education, to rationalize human society, is the attempted remedy; but this too falls short. Individuals and masses are as helpless vis-a-vis the new bodiless power, the democratic State, as they were with monarchs and aristocrats. The results are inhuman social inequality and economic exploitation, an incessant class war, a monstrous and opulently sordid wealth and productive

machinery. Ruthless economic struggles, strikes and lockouts are the new form of civil war this regime takes – and revolutions.

The failure of democratic individualism has brought about a democratic socialism; compelled to work itself out by a war of classes, socialism has taken a purely economic appearance. These accidents disfigure its true nature: to replace a system of organised economic battles by an organised order and peace. Equality, not political only, but a perfect social equality is the basis. This means equality of status, of opportunities for all, enforced through a perfect State that is the organised will of the whole community. But this is the intrinsic contradiction of socialism, for which the individual exists only as a member of the society. It is true that this inevitable character of socialism is minimised by social-democracy; yet because of this foreign element socialism may perish without having sounded its own possibilities. In the theory of communism State socialism is a passage only; the ideal is a free communal life, classless and Stateless. But it is not likely that the machine-State, with all that are interested in its maintenance, would allow itself to be abolished without a struggle. Capitalistic industrialism has reached its monstrous limits; the future lies between a labour industrialism not very different, some greater socialistic or communistic society, or a new principle.

Collectivism subordinates the isolated ego to the greater group-ego; when again the individual asserts his freedom he may have learnt to do it on the basis of this communal unity. An ancient tradition of humanity believes in a Golden Age where the individual was freely social without society, holding in himself the right law of living. In the perfect society governmental compulsion is abolished, and the individual lives with one's fellow-beings by free agreement and cooperation. Relying on the enlightening power of reason, anarchism recognises the same right of freedom in others by a self-found, unperverted human nature. But this could be sufficient only if the individual lived in predominant isolation.

The ideal of anarchism is a free equality founded upon spontaneous cooperation. This seems leading towards a free cooperative communism, where labour and property are for the benefit of all – or to communalism. But this does not take into sufficient account the infrarational egoism. The solution is a spiritual, or spiritualised anarchism, harmonising the antagonisms and discords of the vitalistic being. The unique Godhead in each being can found itself only in the true communism of the equal Godhead in the race, the spiritual comradeship that is an inner realisation of oneness, realizing the perfection of one's life and nature in the existence of all. It may be objected that this puts off a better human society to a far-off date, no machinery invented by reason can perfect the individual or the collective; an inner change is needed, too difficult except for the few. But if this is not the solution, there is no solution; then a greater race, a form of life must come nearer to the divine.

The objective and the subjective tendencies of society

Proceeding by analytical reason, objectivism takes an external, mechanical view: the world is an object to be studied, with rules acting upon the individual or the group to be applied by one's abstract reason, or that of other individuals, or the group – as science applies the laws it discovers. Within this context the modern State is viewed as an entity that has the right to control the individuals in the fulfilment of some idea of right. A law outside oneself is the governing idea of objectivism. But the nineteenth century's Materialism gave place to the vitalism of the will-to-be and will-to-power of Nietzsche, and to the pragmatic philosophy: a new intuitionism. Art, music, literature also shifted to an increasingly psychological vitalism. These subjective tendencies became even more evident in the new ideas about education, fostering the development of the child out of his or her temperament and capacities.

The subjective impulse is to live, inwardly as outwardly, from an internal centre. A tendency to mysticism, to occultism accompanies this movement. The subjective periods are the most fruitful and creative. True subjectivism teaches us that we are a higher self than the ego. Secondly, that we are not only ourselves, but all others too: Being is one in all, in the individual and in the collectivity. Only by realising our unity with others can we fulfill our true self.

Aesthetic – or ethic culture?

The opposition between culture and conduct, between aesthetic and ethics reached its peak with antithetic civilizations as Hellenism versus Hebraism or early Republican Rome. Or in Greece itself, with Sparta versus the Athens of Pericles, of Phidias, of Sophocles, to be followed by the Athens of the philosophers. In the early period of Athens art and intellectual discussions, freedom and enjoyment, were for the beauty of ideas; ethics too tended to be expressed in terms of beauty. But Athens, without some kind of high discipline, exhausted its vitality within one wonderful century. The later Hellenic and Athenian centre of culture gave to Rome the ethical discipline of Stoicism: the opposite of its nature, not its fulfilment.

Republican Rome with its high and strong character building stands as one of the most striking psychological phenomena of human history. Will disciplined the emotional/sensational mind for a self-mastery of a definite ethical type.

Making our whole life and being beautiful is a necessary character of the perfect individual and society. But neither the ethical, nor the esthetic is the whole being or the sovereign principle. The action of the intuitive mind must complete the action of the rational intelligence and even replace it, touching the universal, absolute beauty, the soul of beauty. To find beauty is to find God.

PART TWO: THE GROUP-SOUL OF HUMANITY

The interaction individual-society

The principle of individualism admits no limits to the rights of managing one's affairs except the obligation to respect the same right in others. The individual age is remodeling society and the inter-nations relationships by this principle. The individual is a whole in himself – but incomplete without others, even unable to satisfy his personal needs. Therefore, one's personal law of conduct is englobed in a group-law, that of the pack or herd. But humans have two distinct master impulses, the individualistic and the communal. The attempt to find their equation lies at the very roots of civilization.

The individual belongs not only to humanity, but also to his race and class-type – mental, vital, physical, spiritual. Hence his grouping in churches, sects, communities, classes. In modern times this society is the nation. By enriching himself he also enriches the national life and the life of humanity. And yet the individual is not limited by any of these groupings, or the nation, or humanity: he belongs to God, to all beings. The community stands as mid-term only. The individual has to live in humanity, and humanity in the individual.

Long after the individual, eager for spiritual progress, has become aware of an inward life, society continues to be a material, mechanical organism, more intent upon self-preservation than self-perfection. The claim of society is that the individual immolates himself for the tribe, clan or nation. But the ideal society stands for the perfected life of all its members, maintaining itself by the spontaneous consent of the whole. As for the law of the individual, it is to perfect his individuality by a free developing from within – whilst aiding and being aided by the same free development in others: a force for growth into humanity's perfection. And so is the law for the community, or the nation, or humanity.

Above the natural individual law, setting up as standard of conduct the satisfaction of needs and desires – above the communal law, setting up as a superior standard the satisfaction of the needs and desires of the community as a whole, there is an ideal moral law controlling, even annulling them for an ideal mental order. Then the aesthetic, intellectual and emotional desires predominate over the physical and vital nature.

But the progress of all the individuals in a perfected society doesn't proceed with an equal march; hence the emergence, though temporary only, of a dominant class. If strength of character is the need of the time, a dominant aristocracy emerges; if knowledge and science, the savant class; if economy and efficient organisation, the bourgeoisie. But the final aim cannot be the exploitation of the many by the few – or even of the few by the many; so the dominant minority has to abdicate in good time. Even in the case of a unity as perfect as that a social, administrative and cultural machinery can provide, still the individual exceeds the limits of family, clan, class and nature. As the systems of social aggregation depending on the domination of a class or classes must change or dissolve, so are the social aggregates coercing the individual with their limited class or national interests.

Law and self-determination: the child of inner freedom

In the early stages of society there is only a mass of binding habits, like the ancient Jewish law and the Hindu *sastra*, embracing the whole life of society. When these acquire a fixed status, they crystallise into laws. This customary law was often attributed to an original legislator: Manu, Moses, Lycurgus. But Manu is rather a symbol, the mental demi-god fixing the law of human society. An embodied Manu, a living Moses or Mahomed is only the spokesman of the divinity.

The rational development is the creation of a central authority – at first, the king, becoming the head of the law as

well as the embodiment of the public order. Originally these powers, belonging to the natural, organic society, were enforced by loose, customary devices, and only to a minor extent by the king or elders. The judicial administration of the early societies was extremely complex; as the State developed, unity occurred, and along with it, uniformity. The sacrosanct character of the laws and customs tended to keep the king or State in bound, or a theocratical element developed. Where the law, expressing the social habits of the people, is freely customary, a variety of customs may be present, fixed by the intuition of the group-life rather than by reason.

The first sign of a rational evolution is the prevailing of codes and constitution over customs; but in these too there are gradations, like a written, or partly written, floating mass of laws that still admit the customary law. Or the Hindu *sastra* that takes the code form, but is only an ossification of custom. Then, there are deliberately ordered codes that merely modify the intelligent unity of the system. With the fixed and uniform constitution, and a uniform, and intelligently structural, civil and criminal law, society is ready for the uniform ordering of its whole life in the light of reason. This is the principle of modern socialism, the drift of the utopia of the thinkers.

The laws and institutions of a society are the framework for its life and *dharma*. The rational order and self-governed perfecting of a developed society is the whole rationale of modern progress, of which unity and uniformity are the principal trends. Socialism is the complete expression of this modern utopia, by means of a fundamental equality of all, the management by the State of the whole society and economic life, a State education organised upon a scientific basis. But freedom is necessary to life, as it is law. And diversity is necessary to our completeness as it is unity. For existence is one in its essence, but necessarily multiform in its play. In a perfect spiritual unity not uniformity, but unlimited diversity is real oneness.

Within every human creature, within every human collectivity there is a being that has the right to find itself and make its life an instrument and image of itself. This is the principle of self-determination, by the free individual within the free collectivity. Liberty should proceed by the law of one's being, *svadharma*, evolving out of itself. Our self-fulfillment calls at each step for true unity with others. Society progresses in proportion, as law becomes the child of freedom. For perfection is the spontaneous law of society as the outward mould of one's self-governed inner liberty.

Human unity: a federation of free nationalities

A tradition once universal believed in a Golden Age of primeval humanity: in the hearts was God's law written. The Asiatic mind is still prone to the inspiring forms of the second coming of Christ, the City of God, the Avatar: a religious or spiritual idealisation of future humanity. But the European mind demands a secular, social, political dream: a perfected democracy, socialism, communism – or anarchism. For humanity cannot do without some kind of futuristic idealism; this has recently taken the form of a political and economic society of nations.

Humanity as a single race is the most significant product of modern idealism. Internationalism was born of the thought of the eighteenth century, but what came out of the French Revolution was nationalism – not internationalism. In the nineteenth century this ideal grew again, till it took a clear form with socialism and anarchism. Overcoming the dividing force of the nation-idea, it was even possible to regard it as the extension of socialism to all the nations. But socialism proved to be not immune against the dividing nationalist spirit; moreover, forces other than socialism might arise.

What came into existence as the League of Nations is a league of governments, instruments of a capitalistic system assailed by socialism. The policy is to compromise on details,

so that capitalism may still be the dominant power within a new semi-socialistic order. These governments are compelled to struggle with all the strength at their disposal against the new rule of labour; this cannot be stopped, though it may be put off for a time, because it is the outcome of the whole evolution of European society. Parliamentarism, a great machine of the propertied classes, is discredited. A new system of government, with its inevitable reversal of existing conditions, is bound to come. By the victory of an ideal, socialistic or other, a World-State may be created with a common governing body, a common law of the nations. But how out of this formal unity – mechanical, administrative, politic, economic – can a psychological unity be created? Besides, the ideal of human unity appeals to the human mind, but so does that of separative life too. The most desirable form would be a federation of free nationalities all having an equal status; a world union of this kind would have the greatest chances. The ideal of human unity would be an accomplished fact, and its preservation given into the charge of the united human peoples. The World-State will give peace, well being, security, cultural and social progress. But to make the change persist a religion of humanity, universal, much more powerful than nationalism, is needed. This is the recognition of a single soul in humanity, of which each individual and nation is an incarnation and a soul-form.

A spiritual religion of humanity: hope of the future

War, capital punishment, the taking of human life, cruelty (not only physical, but moral too), the degradation of any human being or class, oppression or exploitation by individual, class, nation are crimes against the religion of humanity. Human beings are sacred, regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, nationality, status etc. This is the religion of humanity. This ideal has humanized society, and may have succeeded in humanizing war entirely but for the contrary trend of modern

science; but at least war has become an interlude, though yet only of an armed peace.

The religion of humanity, mind-born child of the thinkers of the eighteenth century, tried to give itself a body in Positivism, but on a too rationalistic basis. The aim of the religion of humanity was formulated by a sort of primal intuition: to re-create society in the image of three kindred ideas, liberty, equality, brotherhood. None of the three has really won, because in an intellectual age the ideal of humanity had to mask its true character of religion. It has laboured to establish a political, social and legal liberty, equality and mutual help in an equal association. Yet these aims can only be secure when founded upon a change of the inner nature and way of living. Love, mutual recognition of human brotherhood, a living sense of human oneness: the religion of humanity remains unaccomplished, till these are brought about.

Brotherhood is the key to the triple gospel: the union of liberty and equality can be achieved only by human brotherhood. But brotherhood exists only in the soul, and by the soul. When the soul claims freedom, it is the freedom of its self-development, and the divinity in all beings. Equality is the claim for freedom equally for all, the recognition of the same godhead in all human beings. Brotherhood is founding of equal freedom of self-development on a common aim, a common life founded upon the recognition of this inner spiritual unity. For freedom, equality, brotherhood are eternal attributes of the Spirit. The practical recognition of this truth is that to which the religion of humanity must arrive.

A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. It is the growing realisation that there is a divine Reality in which we are all one, and the human race and being are the means of its self-revelation. Oneness with our fellow-beings will become the principle of our life, of a deeper brotherhood, an inner sense of unity and equality. It is the realisation that one's individual life is complete only in the life of one's fellow-

beings, and that only in the free and full life of the individual can the perfection of the race be founded.

PART THREE: GNOSIS DELIGHT OF INTIMATELY DIFFERENTIATED ONENESS

Conditions for the coming of the spiritual age: pioneering individuals and the group-soul

The mind of ancient Greece was philosophical, aesthetic and political; the modern mind is scientific and utilitarian. Moral ideals are mental constructions; but beyond the moral and mental being in us is a greater being, spiritual and supramental. The individual discovers the higher ethical law in his mind, will and psychic sense; but it must also be discovered in his spirit. The first mark of the suprarational is the growth of absolute ideals.

The later religions declared God's law through the mouth of an avatar or prophet, and erected a complex *sastra*, combining the social rule and moral law with certain eternal principles of our highest nature, treating the three of them as equal expressions of everlasting verities, *sanatana dharma*. But the first two are mental constructions, human readings of the eternal will, whilst the third shares the fortunes of its form. Thus, either the *sastra* grows obsolete, or it stands as a barrier to the development of the individual and the race, for it ignores the indeterminable elements of the secret spiritual force within: the supreme thing to be discovered.

A certain pre-eminence of religion, except in comparatively brief periods, has always been the normal state of human society. True religion is spiritual religion, beyond the intellect, beyond the aesthetic, ethical and practical being. Religionism stresses dogmas and ceremonies. Society used religion in its most unspiritual parts, setting over it a pack of watchdogs.

A spiritualised understanding of the individual and communal self is the way to social perfection: a spirituality taking up into itself rationalism, aestheticism, ethics, vitalism, all the urges of the human being.

The coming of the spiritual age must be preceded by an increasing number of individuals no longer satisfied with the ordinary intellectual, vital and physical existence. The mass follows in a confused fashion. Therefore, the spiritual change needs simultaneously two conditions most difficult to bring together: pioneering individuals –and a communal mind, the possibility of a group-soul. The readiness of the common mind is of the first importance; even if the condition of society and the rule governing it oppose the spiritual change (as it is certainly the case at present with the human masses), still there is hope. The first essential sign is the growth of the subjective idea of the soul. The subjective trend is likely to declare itself first in philosophy, psychology, art, ethics, the social question – even, perhaps, politics and economics. In science too, thinning the wall between soul and matter. The individuals who will most foster the new age are those who, indifferent to particular belief and form, knowing that this has to be lived out by each one inwardly, recognize spiritual evolution as destiny. The stumbling intellectual reason has to be converted into the luminous Intuition, rising then to the Overmind and the Supermind or Gnosis.

Foundation of a spiritualized society: *svadharma*, the illimited freedom of one's inner law

A spiritualized society would live in the Spirit as a collective soul, like its individuals. It would make the revealing of the Self the first aim of education, knowledge, science, art, ethics – economics and politics, of all its activities. It would regard the people as group-souls, meant to grow according to their own nature, like the individuals, so as to help the human race in the one common work: the Self- manifestation in the

individual, in the collectivity. Therefore, the law of a growing inner freedom, abiding by the law of one's own nature, *svadharmā*, will be the one most honored.

A spiritualised society will allow that freedom to science and art and philosophy too, to the seeking for social and political perfection. This is the freedom, even to deny the Spirit, that ancient Indian religion gave: to seek the Divine in every way of one's being, *sarvabhāvena*, by as much free space as possible. For science, thought and philosophy too have their *dharma*: to seek the truth dispassionately by the intellect, as the *dharma* of art is to find the Divine through beauty.

The spiritual aim in society will regard all human beings as souls incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth, and will help them to believe in their highest possibilities. As it will regard the individuals, so it will regard the collectivity as a soul-form of the Infinite, embodied upon earth in a myriad of forms for a divine fulfilment. It will hold sacred the physical, vital, dynamic, emotional, aesthetic, ethical, intellectual, psychic evolution of the being, as instruments for a divine living. And it will similarly regard society, nations, people, any organic aggregate as sub-souls and means for the self-manifestation of the Spirit. All will be free, in the perfectly spiritualised society, because each individual is: the law, divine. Not an ego, but a soul led by the law of one's own liberated divine nature. A spiritual society is diversified oneness, for the Divine in oneself is the Divine in all others; a perfect unity is the sign and condition of the perfect life.

The one who sees God in all will not live for the individual or collective ego, but for God in himself and the universe.

Knowledge by identity: delight of an intimately differentiated oneness

Universal compassion has been made a rule of religious ethics. But oneness with others has to be in the soul, and this only

comes by liberation from the ego. There are three steps of self-realisation. First, the discovery of the soul. Next, the realisation that liberates and universalises: to become aware of the eternal self in us, unborn, one with the self of all beings. Lastly, to know the supreme, transcendent Self, the Cosmic Being, foundation of our universality, and the Divine within, of which our psychic being is a spark, and become channels of his *sakti*.

The *jivanmukta*, the *rishi* embody the widest ideal of doing good to all creatures. The Christian virtues of charity, faith and resignation, the Pagan virtues of courage and justice are the very sap and stem of Vedantic morality. The Being contains and knows all existences as beings of its being, consciousness of its consciousness, power of its power, bliss of its bliss. The base of all spiritual knowledge is this consciousness of identity and by identity. The Self is the knower and the known, the subject-object in one. Knowledge by identity is a tertiary power, when the Supreme draws a little back from itself as object. It is an intermingling of oneness with oneness, of delight of being with delight of being. The Spirit's self-experience moves between sheer identity and a multiple identity, a delight of intimately differentiated oneness and self-rapture.

The perfect supramental action proceeds by a spontaneous outflowing from the summits in the totality of an illumined being. If all humanity at once could raise to this level, we should have on earth something of the Golden Age of the traditions, a new *satya yuga*. Unity and universality; absolute love; equality consistent with hierarchy and perfect in difference; justice in harmony with one's truth and that of the things: this would be the consciousness of the race. The individual is a precursor; if a collectivity could be formed, some divine creation could take shape.

The supramental descent would establish a supramental race of beings. But even without such a complete transformation, even if only a section of the race would pass

onward, even so there must be a bridge: a status of mind receiving and growing in the light towards Supermind. A new humanity would be a race of mental beings, possessed of a perfected mind, a Mind of Light. Those parts of humanity that still cannot reach it will consciously tend towards it. The Mind of Light is an inevitable stage. Truth-conscious, at its highest it would be capable of passing into a part or projection of the Supermind. From these new types of human beings would be recruited the race of supramental beings. Thus, the human mind could become a power of light, a power of knowledge: a special action of the Supermind. As for the gulf between humans and animals and the evolutionary nisus, there may be gradations of consciousness between the least developed humans and the higher animals.

The creation of a supramental being and life on earth, at the head of evolutionary Nature, will also confirm the Overmind, the Intuition and the other gradations of divinised mind in possession of terrestrial birth. A race of gnostic beings would then be established, and a hierarchy with intermediate steps of self-formation. In the untransformed part of humanity, the intuitive or illumined or partly intuitivised or illumined mental beings would emerge, more and more numerous and secure in their type. This higher humanity would lead the less evolved in a true fraternity born of the sense and manifestation of the One Divine in all beings. At the higher end of evolution, the summits of Supermind would begin to raise towards the supreme manifestation of the pure spiritual Existence, Consciousness and Bliss: *saccidananda*.

The consummation of the spiritual being is the gnostic individual, governed by a vast, universal spirituality. All his existence is fused into oneness with the transcendent and universal Self, felt in every centre of his consciousness, every vibration of his life-force, every cell of his body. He will see his natural Being as the becoming and manifestation of the power of the World-Mother. He will act and live in an entire transcendent freedom, by an inclusive universality where all

beings would be to him his own selves. His own life and the world-life would be to him like a perfect work of art. He would be in the world, and of the world – but also live in his Self of transcendence above it, universal but free in the universe. His individuality is universal, for he individualises the universe. The individual, the cosmic Entity and the Reality present in both, and beyond them, find in him a united fulfilment of their harmony.

The law of the Supermind is unity fulfilled in diversity; there would be an infinite diversity in the manifestation of the gnostic consciousness. All being is one, and to be fully is to be all that is. Each being is a new totality of the One Being manifesting in infinitely diverse fashions. The gnostic existence and delight of existence is a universal and total being and delight; in each separate movement is its entire being and integral bliss of being. The gnostic being will mould life into its own spiritual image; the same power and principle will operate in any common gnostic life. This change must recreate the whole being, mind, life and body; and not only in the individual, but also as a collective life of gnostic beings. A total gnostic living would include the life of others made one with the individual in a common uniting consciousness, selves of himself in the One Existence, his own universal existence, carrying the universe and all its beings within himself. There will be a mutual knowledge based upon a consciousness of oneness and identity, a conscious communication of mind with mind, heart with heart. Unity in diversity is a various manifestation of oneness; this spontaneous expression of unity presupposes a mutuality of consciousness aware of others' consciousness by a direct inner contact and interchange. Others' mind, life, physical being are felt as one's own. The gnostic being lives in and for the Divine Being in himself, in the collectivity, in all beings. The realised oneness of all is the law of his divine living. The complete individual is the cosmic individual. The freedom from law of the spiritual being,

including the moral law, is founded on the unity of his will with the will of the Eternal.

The individual's spiritual fulfilment is the first essential condition. The perfection of the spiritual and pragmatic relation of the individual with all around him is the second preoccupation: a complete universality and oneness with all life upon earth. The third desideratum is a new world, or at least a perfected collective life. This calls for many gnostic individuals and a new common life, where all will be united by the Truth-Consciousness in them, the soul of a single Reality. Truth of Oneness creates its own order, a self-determined law, expression of the truth of a spiritually united life. There would be a considerable free diversity between different gnostic communities – and in the self-expression of the individuals within a single community, as that of a common self in many consciousness and bodies. It will be a universality expressing the One in many figures of itself, a single Consciousness-Force acting through all.

An inner spiritual freedom can accept its place in the Truth of an inner spiritual hierarchy, as well of a fundamental spiritual equality. Unity is the basis of the gnostic consciousness; mutuality, the result of its direct awareness of oneness in diversity; harmony, the inevitable power of the working of its force. Unity, mutuality, harmony are the inescapable law of a collective gnostic life. It will be a freedom of the diverse play of the Infinite in diverse souls, an order of the conscious unity of souls that is the law of the supreme Infinite. The greatest richness of diversity as self-expression of Oneness is the law of the gnostic life, carrying all divergences in itself as its own opulence.

Love will be the union of self with Self, a power and joy and intimacy of soul to Soul, of the one to the One: a joy of an intimately self-revealing diversity of the One. Creation will have the same sense. Aesthetic or dynamic, mental or vital or material, it will be the creation of significant forms of the eternal Force, Light, Beauty: Reality.



