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A journal dedicated to the Social and Political Vision of Sri Aurobindo

RITĀGNI

A flame of aspiration for dynamic truth



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WHITHER HUMANITY ?

Today, humanity faces the question as to where it is headed. There is a crisis we face on all fronts-social, political, economic, cultural and spiritual. The assurances given by spiritual and secular leaders on the fate of humanity are not adequate to allay our apprehensions. That neither have arrived at a workable and lasting solution so far, is eloquent testimony to facts. The task at hand is so vast that we really do not know where to begin and having an begun, how to proceed. It appears as though nothing short of a divine intervention can push humanity beyond its present preoccupations and limitations, that nothing other than a widespread calamity can make us rework out the priorities we have set for ourselves. Need we wait for Nature to force us to search for what is beyond our immediate needs ? Is it possible to seek out the higher possibilities available to us and to make the change deeper and more radical ? Is the possibility of possessing a divine nature open to humanity ?

Sri Aurobindo's approach to life has been unique in that he spoke of a further evolution beyond humanity, of a divine gnosis beyond the mind. It would be the Spirit, not the ego guiding this evolution. It is this spiritual and integral view which will mark a turning point in the history of humanity. The change has to come from within. What should be our next move towards a spiritualized society of which he spoke, as a collectivity ? Would it be possible to create a set of outer circumstances by proposing some transitional systems that could lead to a freer and truer growth ?

The 'Sri Aurobindo Research Foundation' proposes to study applications of Sri Aurobindo's vision of the future in the present crisis of humanity in various fields of activities with a particular reference to India. Its Journal is to be a modest beginning towards that endeavour. We will attempt to articulate questions that haunt humanity today-whether social, political, economic, educational, cultural or spiritual and to put forward points of view based on the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In fact, we would like this Journal to be an instrument that would put each of us in touch with our inner selves so that we can find our own way to the true life-both as individuals as well as a collectivity.

As Sri Aurobindo put it - "Man's road to spiritual supermanhood will be open when he declares boldly that all he has yet developed including the intellect of which he is so rightly and yet so vainly proud, are now no longer sufficient for him, and that to uncase, discover, set free this greater light within shall be henceforward his pervading preoccupation. Then will his philosophy, art, science, ethics, social existence, vital pursuits be no longer an exercise of mind and life, done for themselves, carried in a circle, but a means for the discovery of a greater truth behind mind and life and for the bringing of its power into our human existence. We shall be on the right road to become ourselves, to find our true law of perfection, to live our true satisfied existence in our real being and divine nature." - *'The Human Cycle'* Pg. 230

This attempt is dedicated to the future of humanity, to the future of India - the land of great possibilities. We are at a critical stage in history when we need to break the pattern we have set for ourselves and arrest the downward plunge into chaos. We reach out to all humanity, for this endeavour involves all of us. Together we need to look beyond what has always been towards what is yet to come. This Journal is our contribution to that ideal and we invite everyone to join us in our journey.

- Editor

INVITATION

With wind and the weather beating round me
Up to the hill and the moorland I go.
Who will come with me ? Who will climb with me ?
Wade through the brook and tramp through the snow ?

Not in the petty circle of cities
Cramped by your doors and your walls I dwell;
Over me God is blue in the welkin,
Against me the wind and the storm rebel.

I sport with solitude here in my regions,
Of misadventure have made me a friend.
Who would live largely ? Who would live freely ?
Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend.

I am the lord of tempest and mountain,
I am the Spirit of freedom and pride.
Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger
Who shares my kingdom and walks at my side.

Sri Aurobindo

INVOLUTION AND EVOLUTION

The Western idea of evolution is the statement of a process of formation, not an explanation of our being. Limited to the physical and biological data of Nature, it does not attempt except in a summary or a superficial fashion to discover its own meaning, but is content to announce itself as the general law of a quite mysterious and inexplicable energy. Evolution becomes a problem in motion which is satisfied to work up with an automatic regularity its own puzzle, but not to work it out, because, since it is only a process, it has no understanding of itself, and since it is a blind perpetual automatism of mechanical energy, it has neither an origin nor an issue. It began perhaps or is always beginning; it will stop perhaps in time or is always somewhere stopping and going back to its beginnings, but there is no why, only a great turmoil and fuss of a how to its beginning and its cessation; for there is in its acts no fountain of spiritual intention, but only the force of an unresting material necessity. The ancient idea of evolution was the fruit of a philosophical intuition, the modern is an effort of scientific observation. Each as enounced misses something, but the ancient got at the spirit of the movement where the modern is content with a form and the most external machinery. The Sankhya thinker gave us the psycholocial elements of the total evolutionary process, analysed mind and sense and the subtle basis of matter and divined some of the secrets of the executive energy, but had no eye for the detail of the physical labour of Nature. He saw in it too not only the covering active evident Force, but the concealed sustaining spiritual entity, though by an excess of the analytic intellect, obsessed with its love of trenchant scissions and symmetrical oppositions, he set between meeting Soul and Force an original and eternal gulf or line of separation. The modern scientist strives to make a complete scheme and institution of the physical method which he has detected in its minute workings, but is blind to the miracle each step involves or content to lose the sense of it in the satisfied observation of a vast ordered phenomenon. But always the marvel of the thing remains, one with the inexplicable wonder of all existence, - even as it is said in the ancient Scripture,

*āścaryavat paśyati kaścid enam
āścaryavad vadati tathaiiva cānyaḥ
āścaryavaccainam anyaḥ śrṇoti
śrutvāpyenam veda na caiva kaścit.*

"One looks on it and sees a miracle, another speaks of it as a miracle, as a miracle another hears of it, but what it is, for all the hearing, none knoweth."

We know that an evolution there is, but not what evolution is; that remains still one of the initial mysteries of Nature.

For evolution, as is the habit with the human reason's

accounts and solutions of the deep and unfathomable way of the Spirit in things, raises more questions than it solves; it does not do away with the problem of creation for all its appearance of solid orderly fact, any more than the religious affirmation of an external omnipotent Creator could do it or the Illusionist's mystic Maya, *aḡhatana-gḡhatana-pāṭiyāsi*, very skilful in bringing about the impossible, some strange existent non-existent Power with an idea in That which is beyond and without ideas, self-empowered to create an existent non-existent world, existent because it very evidently is, non-existent because it is a patched up consistency of dreamful unreal transiencies. The problem is only prolonged, put farther back, given a subtle and orderly, but all the more challengingly complex appearance. But, even when our questioning is confined to the one issue of evolution alone, the difficulty still arises of the essential significance of the bare outward facts observed, what is meant by evolution, what is it that evolves, from what and by what force of necessity? The scientist is content to affirm an original matter or substance, atomic, electric, etheric or whatever it may finally turn out to be, which by the very nature of its own inherent energy or of an energy acting in it and on it, - the two things are not the same, and the distinction, though it may seem immaterial in the beginning of the process, is of a considerable ultimate consequence, - produces owing to some unexplained law, constant system of results or other unalterable principle a number of different basic forms and powers of matter or different sensible and effective movements of energy: these come into being, it seems, when the minute original particles of matter meet together in variously disposed quantities, measures and combinations, and all the rest is a varying, developing, mounting movement of organised energy and its evolutionary consequences, *pariṇāma*, which depend on this crude constituting basis. All that is or may be a correct statement of phenomenal fact, - but we must not forget that the fundamental theory of science has been going of late through a considerable commotion of an upsetting and a rapid rearrangement, - but it carries us no step farther towards the principal, the all-important thing that we want to know. The way in which man sees and experiences the universe, imposes on his reason the necessity of a one original eternal substance of which all things are the forms and a one eternal original energy of which all movement of action and consequence is the variation. But the whole question is, what is the reality of this substance and what is the essential nature of this energy?

Then, even if we suppose the least explicable part of the action to be an evolutionary development of the immaterial from Matter, still is that development a creation or a liberation, a birth of what did not exist before or a slow bringing out of what already existed in suppressed fact or in eternal potentiality? And the interest of the question becomes acute, its importance incalculable when we come to the still unexplained phenomenon of life and mind. Is life a creation out of inanimate substance or the appearance of a new, a suddenly or

substance or the appearance of a new, a suddenly or slowly resultant power out of the brute material energy, and is conscious mind a creation out of inconscient or subconscious life, or do these powers and godheads appear because they were always there though in a shrouded and by us unrecognizable condition of their hidden or suppressed idea and activity, Nomen and Numen? And what of the soul and of man? Is soul a new result or creation of our mentalised life, - even so many regard it, because it clearly appears as a self-conscious, bright, distinguishable power only when thinking life has reached some high pitch of its intensity, - or is it not a permanent entity, the original mystery that now unveils its hidden form, the eternal companion of the energy we call Nature, her secret inhabitant or her very spirit and reality? And is man a biological creation of a brute energy which has somehow unexpectedly and quite inexplicably managed to begin to feel and think, or is he in his real self that inner Being and Power which is the whole sense of the evolution and the master of Nature? Is Nature only the force of self-expression, self-formation, self-creation of a secret spirit, and man however hedged in his present capacity, the first being in Nature in whom that power begins to be consciently self-creative in the front of the action, in this outer chamber of physical being, there set to work and bring out by an increasingly self-conscious evolution what he can of all its human significance or its divine possibility? That is the clear conclusion we must arrive at in the end, if we once admit as the key of the whole movement, the reality of this whole mounting creation a spiritual evolution.

The word evolution carries with it in its intrinsic sense, in the idea at its root the necessity of a previous involution. We must, if a hidden spiritual being is the secret of all the action of Nature, give its full power to that latent value of the idea. We are bound then to suppose that all that evolves already existed involved, passive or otherwise active, but in either case concealed from us in the shell of material Nature. The Spirit which manifests itself here in a body, must be involved from the beginning in the whole of matter and in every knot, formation and particle of matter; life, mind and whatever is above mind must be latent, inactive or concealed active powers in all the operations of material energy. The only alternative would be to drive in between the two sides of our being the acute Sankhya scission; but that divides too much Spirit and Nature. Nature would be an inert and mechanical thing, but she would set to her work activated by some pressure on her of the Spirit. Spirit would be Being conscious and free in its own essence from the natural activity, but would phenomenally modify or appear to modify its consciousness in response to some reaction of Nature. One would reflect the movements of the active Power, the other would enlighten her activities with the consciousness of the self-aware immortal being. In that case the scientific evolutionary view of Nature as a vast mechanical energy, life, mind and natural soul action its scale of developing operations would have a justification. Our consciousness would only be a luminous translation of the self-driven unresting mechanical activity into

responsive notes of experience of the consenting spiritual witness. But the disabling difficulty in this notion is the quite opposite character of our own highest seeing; for in the end and as the energy of the universal force mounts up the gradients of its own possibilities, Nature becomes always more evidently a power of the Spirit and all her mechanism only figures of its devising mastery. The power of the Flame cannot be divided from the Flame; where the Flame is, there is the power, and where the power is there is the fiery Principle. We have to come back to the idea of a Spirit present in the universe and, if the process of its works of power and its appearance is in the steps of an evolution, there imposes itself the necessity of a previous involution.

This Spirit in things is not apparent from the beginning, but self-betrayed in an increasing light of manifestation. We see the compressed powers of Nature start released from their original involution, disclose in a passion of work the secrets of their infinite capacity, press upon themselves and on the supporting inferior principle to subject its lower movement on which they are forced to depend into a higher working proper to their own type and feel their proper greatness in the greatness of their self-revealing effectuations. Life takes hold of matter and breathes into it the numberless figures of its abundant creative force, its subtle and variable patterns, its enthusiasm of birth and death and growth and act and response, its will of more and more complex organisation of experience, its quivering search and feeling out after a self-consciousness of its own pleasure and pain and understanding gust of action; mind seizes on life to make it an instrument for the wonders of will and intelligence; soul possesses and lifts mind through the attraction of beauty and good and wisdom and greatness towards the joy of some half-seen ideal highest existence, and in all this miraculous movement and these climbing greatnesses each step sets its foot on a higher rung and opens to a clearer, larger and fuller scope and view of the always secret and always self-manifesting spirit in things. The eye fixed on the physical evolution has only the sight of a mechanical grandeur and subtlety of creation; the evolution of life opening to mind, the evolution of mind opening to the soul of its own light and action, the evolution of soul out of the limited powers of mind to a resplendent blaze of the infinites of spiritual being are the more significant things, give us greater and subtler reaches of the self-disclosing Secrecy. The physical evolution is only an outward sign, the more and more complex and subtle development of a supporting structure, the growing exterior metre mould of form which is devised to sustain in matter the rising intonations of the spiritual harmony. The spiritual significance finds us as the notes rise; but not till we get to the summit of the scale can we command the integral meaning of that for which all these first formal measures were made the outward lines, the sketch or the crude notation. Life itself is only a coloured vehicle, physical birth a convenience for the greater and greater births of the Spirit.

The spiritual process of evolution is then in some sense a creation, but a self-creation, not a making of what

Being. The Sanskrit word for creation signifies a loosing forth, a letting out into the workings of Nature. The Upanishad in a telling figure applies the image of the spider which brings its web out of itself and creates the structure in which it takes its station. That is applied in the ancient Scripture not to the evolution of things out of Matter, but to an original bringing of temporal becoming out of the eternal infinity; Matter itself and this material universe are only such a web or indeed no more than a part of it brought out from the spiritual being of the Infinite. But the same truth, the same law holds good of all that we see of the emergence of things from involution in the material energy. We might almost speak here of a double evolution. A Force inherent in the Infinite brings out of it eternally the structure of its action in a universe of which the last descending scale is based upon an involution of all the powers of the Spirit into an unconscious absorption in her self-oblivious passion of form and structural working. Thence comes an ascent and progressive liberation of power after power till the Spirit self-disclosed and set free by knowledge and mastery of its works repossesses the eternal fullness of its being which envelopes then and carries in its grasp the manifold and unified splendours of its nature. At any rate, the spiritual process of which our human birth is a step and our life is a portion, appears as the bringing out of a greatness, *asya mahimanam*, which is secret, inherent and self-imprisoned, absorbed in the form and working of things. Our world-action figures an evolution, an outrolling of a manifold Power gathered and coiled up in the crude intricacy of Matter. The upward progress of the successive births of things is a rise into waking and larger and larger light of a consciousness shut into the first hermetic cell of sleep of the eternal Energy.

There is a parallel in the Yogic experience of the Kundalini, eternal Force coiled up in the body in the bottom root vessel or chamber, *muladhara*, pedestal, earth-centre of the physical nervous system. There she slumbers coiled up like a python and filled full of all that she holds gathered in her being, but when she is struck by the freely coursing breath, by the current of Life which enters into search for her, she awakes and rises flaming up the ladder of the spinal cord and forces open centre after centre of the involved dynamic secrets of consciousness till at the summit she finds, joins and becomes one with the Spirit. Thus she passes from an involution in inconscience through a series of opening glories of her powers into the greatest eternal superconscience of the Spirit. This mysterious evolving Nature in the world around us follows even such a course. Unconscious being is not so much a matrix as a chamber of materialised energy in which are gathered up all the powers of the Spirit; they are there, but work in the conditions of the material energy, involved, we say, and therefore not apparent as themselves because they have passed into a form of working subnormal to their own right scale where the characteristics by which we recognise and think we know them are suppressed into a minor and an undetected force of working. As Nature rises in the scale, she liberates them into their recognisable scales of energy, discloses the operations

by which they can feel themselves and their greatness. At the highest summit she rises into the self-knowledge of the Spirit which informed her action, but because of its involuion or concealment in the forms of its workings could not be known in the greatness of its reality. Spirit and Nature discovering the secret of her energies become one at the top of the spiritual evolution by a soul in Nature which awakens to the significance of its own being in the liberation of the truth: it comes to know that its births were the births, the assumptions of form of an eternal Spirit, to know itself as that and not a creature of Nature and rises to the possession of the revealed, full and highest power of its own real and spiritual nature. That liberation, because liberation is self-possession, comes to us as the crown of a spiritual evolution.

We must consider all the packed significance of this involution. The Spirit involved in material energy is there with all its powers; life, mind and a greater supramental power are involved in Matter. But what do we mean when we say that they are involved, and do we mean that all these things are quite different energies cut off from each other by an essential separateness, but rolled up together in an interaction, or do we mean that there is only one Being with its one energy, varying shades of the light of its power differentiated in the spectrum of Nature? When we say that Life is involved in Matter or in material Force, for of that Force Matter seems after all to be only a various self spun formation, do we not mean that all this universal working, even in what seems to us its unconscious inanimate action, is a life-power of the Spirit busy with formation, and we do not recognise it because it is there in a lower scale in which the characteristics by which we recognise life are not evident or are only slightly evolved in the dullness of the material covering? Material energy would be then Life packed into the density of Matter and feeling out in it for its own intenser recognisable power which it finds within itself in the material concealment and liberates into action. Life itself would be an energy of a secret mind, a mind imprisoned in its own forms and quivering out in the nervous seekings of life for its intenser recognisable power of consciousness which it discovers within the vital and material supression and liberates into sensibility. No doubt, practically, these powers work upon each other as different energies, but in essence they would be one energy and their interaction the power of the Spirit working by its higher on its lower forces, depending on them at first, but yet turning in the scale of its ascent to overtop and master them. Mind too might only be an inferior scale and formulation derived from a much greater and supramental consciousness, and that consciousness too with its greater light and will a characteristic originating power of spiritual being, the power which secret in all things, in mind, in life, in matter, in the plant and the metal and the atom, assures constantly by its inevitable action the idea and harmony of the universe. And what is the Spirit itself but infinite existence, eternal, immortal being, but always a conscious self-aware being, - and that is the difference between the materialist's mechanical monism and the spiritual theory of the universe, - which here expresses itself in a world finite to our conceptions

whose every movement yet bears witness to the Infinite ? And this world is because the Spirit has the delight of its own infinite existence and the delight of its own infinite self-variation; birth is because all consciousness carries with it power of its own being and all power of being is self-creative and must have the joy of its self-creation. For creation means nothing else than a self-expression; and the birth of the soul in the body is nothing but a mode of its own self-expression. Therefore all things here are expression, form, energy, action of the Spirit; matter itself is but form of Spirit, life but power of being of the Spirit, mind but working out of consciousness of the Spirit. All Nature is a display and a play of God, power and action and self-creation of the one spiritual Being. Nature presents to Spirit at once the force, the instrument, the medium, the obstacle, the result of his powers, and all these things, obstacles as well as instrument, are the necessary elements for a gradual and developing creation.

But if the Spirit has involved its eternal greatness in the material universe and is there evolving its powers by the virtue of a secret self-knowledge; is disclosing them in a grandiose succession under the self-imposed difficulties of a material form of being, is disengaging them from a first veiling absorbed inconscience of Nature, there is no difficulty in thinking or seeing that this soul shaped into humanity is a being of that Being, that this also has risen out of material involution by increasing self-expression in a series of births of which each grade is a new ridge of the ascent opening to higher powers of the Spirit and that it is still arising and will not be for even limited by the present walls of its birth but may, if we will, be born into a divine humanity. Our humanity is the conscious meeting-place of the finite and the infinite and to grow more and more towards that Infinite even in this physical birth is our privilege. This Infinite, this Spirit who is housed within us but not bound or shut in by mind or body, is our own self and to find and be our self was, as the ancient sages knew, always the object of our human striving, for it is the object of the whole immense working of Nature. But it is by degrees of the self-finding that Nature enlarges to her spiritual reality. Man himself is a doubly involved being; most of himself in mind and below is involved in a subliminal conscience or a subconsciousness; most of himself above mind is involved in a spiritual superconscience. When he becomes conscient in the superconscience, the heights and the depths of his being will be illumined by another light of knowledge than the flickering lamp of the reason can now cast into a few corners; for then the master of the field will enlighten this whole wonderful field of his being, as the sun illumines the whole system it has created out of its own glories. Then only he can know the reality even of his own mind and life and body. Mind will be changed into a greater consciousness, his life will be a direct power and action of the Divinity, his very body no longer this first gross-lump of breathing clay, but a very image and body of spiritual being. That transfiguration on the summit of the mountain, divine birth, *divya janma*, is that to which all these births are a long series of laborious steps. An involution of spirit in matter is the beginning, but a spiritual assumption of

divine birth is the fullness of the evolution.

East and West have two ways of looking at life which are opposite sides of one reality. Between the pragmatic truth on which the vital thought of modern Europe enamoured of the vigour of life, all the dance of God in Nature, puts so vehement and exclusive a stress and the eternal immutable Truth to which the Indian mind enamoured of calm and poise loves to turn with an equal passion for an exclusive finding, there is no such divorce and quarrel as is now declared by the partisan mind, the separating reason, the absorbing passion of an exclusive will of realisation. The one eternal immutable Truth is the Spirit and without the Spirit the pragmatic truth of a self-creating universe would have no origin or foundation; it would be barren of significance, empty of inner guidance, lost in its end, a firework display shooting up into the void only to fall away and perish in mid-air. But neither is the pragmatic truth a dream of the non-existent, an illusion or a long lapse into some futile delirium of creative imagination; that would be to make the eternal Spirit a drunkard or a dreamer, the fool of his own gigantic self-hallucinations. The truths of universal existence are of two kinds, truths of the Spirit which are themselves eternal and immutable, and these are the great things that cast themselves out into becoming and there constantly realise their powers and significances, and the play of the consciousness with them, the discords, the musical variations, soundings of possibility, progressive notations, reversions, perversions, mounting conversions into a greater figure of harmony; and of all these things the Spirit has made, makes always his universe. But it is himself that he makes in it, himself that is the creator and the energy of creation and the cause and the method and the result of the working, the meachanist and the machine, the music and the musician, the poet and the poem, supermind, mind and life and matter, the soul and Nature.

An original error pursues us in our solutions of our problem. We are perplexed by the appearance of an antinomy; we set soul against Nature, the spirit against his creative energy. But Soul and Nature, Purusha and Prakriti, are two eternal lovers who possess their perpetual unity and enjoy their constant difference, and in the unity abound in the passion of the multitudinous play of their difference, and in every step of the difference abound in the secret sense or the overt consciousness of unity. Nature takes the Soul into herself so that he falls asleep in a trance of union with her absorbed passion of creation and she too seems then to be asleep in the whirl of her own creative energy; and that is the involution in Matter. Above, it may be, the Soul takes Nature into himself so that she falls asleep in a trance of oneness with the absorbed self-possession of the Spirit and he too seems to be asleep in the deep of his own self-locked immobile being. But still above and below and around and within all this beat and rhythm is the eternity of the Spirit who has thus figured himself in soul and Nature and enjoys with a perfect awareness all that he creates in himself by this involution and evolution. The soul fulfils itself in Nature when it possesses in her the consciousness of that eternity and its power and joy and

transfigures the natural becoming with the fullness of the spiritual being. The constant self-creation which we call birth finds there the perfect evolution of all that it held in its own nature and reveals its own utmost significance. The complete soul possesses all its self and all Nature.

Therefore all this evolution is a growing of the Self in material Nature to the conscious possession of its own spiritual being. It begins with form-apparently a form of Force- in which a Spirit is housed and hidden; it ends in a Spirit which consciously directs its own force and creates or assumes its own forms for the free joy of its being in Nature. Nature holding her own Self and Spirit involved and suppressed within herself, an imprisoned master of existence subjected to her ways of birth and action, - yet are these ways his and this Spirit the condition of her being and the law of her workings, - commences the evolution : the Spirit holding Nature conscious in himself, complete by his completeness, liberated by his liberation, perfected in his perfection, crowns the evolution. All our births are the births of this

Spirit and self which has become or put forth a soul in Nature. To be is the object of our existence,- there is no other end or object, for the consciousness and bliss of being is the whole beginning and middle and end, as it is that which is without beginning or end. But this means in the steps of the evolution to grow more and more until we grow into our own fullness of self; all birth is a progressive self-finding, a means of self-realisation. To grow in knowledge, in power, in delight, love and oneness, towards the infinite light, capacity and bliss of spiritual existence, to universalise ourselves till we are one with all being, and to exceed constantly our present limited self till it opens fully to the transcendence in which the universal lives and to base upon it all our becoming, that is the full evolution of what now lies darkly wrapped or works half-evolved in Nature.

Sri Aurobindo

'The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings'

What is a perfect technique of yoga or rather of a world-changing or Nature-changing yoga ? Not one that takes a man by a little bit of him somewhere, attaches a hook, and pulls him up by a pulley into Nirvana or Paradise. The technique of a world-changing yoga has to be as multiform, sinuous, patient, all-including as the world itself. If it does not deal with all the difficulties or possibilities and carefully deal with each necessary element, has it any chance of success ? And can a perfect technique which everybody can understand do that ? It is not like writing a small poem in a fixed metre with a limited number of modulations. If you take the poem simile, it is the Mahabharata of a Mahabharata that has to be done. And what, compared with the limited Greek perfection, is the technique of the Mahabharata ?

Next, what is the use of vicārabuddhi in such a case ? If one has to get a new consciousness which surpasses the reasoning intellect, can one do it on lines which are to be judged and understood by the reasoning intellect, controlled at every step by it, told by the intellect what it is to do, what is the measure of its achievements, what its steps must be and what their value ? If one does that, will one ever get out of the range of the reasoning intelligence into what is beyond it ? And if one does, how shall others judge what one is doing by the intellectual measure ? How can one judge what is beyond the ordinary consciousness when one is oneself in the ordinary consciousness ? Is it not only by exceeding yourself that you can feel, experience, judge what exceeds you ? What is the value of a judgement without the feeling and experience ?

What the supramental will do the mind cannot foresee or lay down. The mind is ignorance seeking for the Truth, the supramental by its very definition is the Truth-Consciousness, Truth in possession of itself and fulfilling itself by its own power. In a supramental world imperfection and disharmony are bound to disappear. But what we propose just now is not to make the earth a supramental world but to bring down the supramental as a power and established consciousness in the midst of the rest- to let it work there and fulfil itself as Mind descended into Life and Matter and has worked as a Power there to fulfil itself in the midst of the rest. This will be enough to change the world and to change Nature by breaking down her present limits. But what, how, by what degrees it will do it, is a thing that ought not to be said now- when the Light is there, the Light will itself do its work- when the supramental Will stands on earth, that Will will decide. It will establish a perfection, a harmony, a Truth-creation- for the rest, well, it will be the rest- that is all.

Sri Aurobindo

'Letters on Yoga I'

THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo is now well known all over the world as a great yogi, philosopher and poet, but he is not yet so well known as a great social philosopher, even though his contributions in the field of social philosophy are of as profound a significance as his contributions in other spheres. Especially at the present moment, when humanity has arrived at a critical turning-point in its historic development where it is confronted with a crucial choice affecting its very destiny, the necessity of having a precise understanding of Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy is very great because it alone can show a decisive way out of the present dilemma. Not only so, but in his social philosophy alone can the modern humanity find the true foundations on which a new social order can be built out of the present chaos.

Before undertaking to give a brief account of Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy, it needs to be pointed out that his social philosophy forms an integral part of his general philosophical system which embraces in its comprehensive scope all the aspects of existence. According to him, the social existence of man is not a thing apart but an intimate portion of the total universal existence, and so its nature, development and destiny are governed by the same principles and processes which govern the universal existence in all its spheres and in its totality. For this reason, his treatment of the problems of social philosophy is mostly done not independently but in the larger context of his treatment of the problems of general philosophy. So we do not have a separate treatise in which we can find a comprehensive exposition of his views on the problems of social philosophy, as we have in *The Life Divine* a separate work which contains a complete and elaborate statement of his views on the problems of general philosophy. Only the theme of social evolution has been given by him a detailed consideration in a separate work, *The Human Cycle*; his views on the rest of the problems of social philosophy are embedded in his various other works. All the materials needed to make a comprehensive system of social philosophy are there in his writings but not in a compact block. They need to be culled from these various writings and systematically organised.

When this is properly done, the inestimable value of his social thought clearly emerges in sight to a discerning eye. One feels that here is the fountain-head of tremendously potent idea-forces which can exert a decisive influence on the modern world in steering it out of its present impasse and leading it into a New Age.

This is because Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy, like his general philosophy is not a product of abstract intellectual speculation as most modern philosophy is, but is a presentation in intellectual terms of a direct revelation

and a living realisation of truths far beyond the limited range of the human intellect. That is why his words are aglow with a supernal light and his thoughts are charged with a supernal force. They carry with them a living and potent vibration which one never finds in the writings of even the world's greatest philosophical intellects. It is for this reason that to speak of Sri Aurobindo as a philosopher in the usual sense of the word is rather inappropriate. For philosophy in the usual sense is a creation of the speculative mind ranging in abstract ideas; even the greatest philosophical geniuses do not go beyond the range of the human intellect and therefore cannot overcome the limitations inherent in it. But Sri Aurobindo, being a supreme Yogi, far transcends these limitations and having at his command a concrete and living realisation of the eternal truths of the Spirit, has no need to labour with the abstract speculations of the intellectual mind. To speak of Sri Aurobindo therefore as a "philosopher" is quite inadequate. However, since he has presented his perceptions derived from his spiritual realisations in intellectual terms we may call him so, without however forgetting the immense gulf that divides him from even the greatest philosophical thinkers of the world.

The keystone of the whole structure of Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy is his subjective view of the nature of society. According to him, a society or a community is not merely a collection of individuals or a structure of their relationships, as most of the modern social thinkers maintain; in its essential reality it is a conscious being, a self with a real existence of its own independent of the individuals of which it is constituted. To understand fully this view of society we must relate it to the central concept of his whole philosophic system which he calls "The Omnipresent Reality" and of which he has given a complete explanation in *The Life Divine*. Here we quote only a short relevant passage:

"There is a Reality, a truth of all existence which is greater and more abiding than all its formations and manifestations; to find that truth and Reality and live in it, achieve the most perfect manifestation and formation possible of it, must be the secret of perfection whether of individual or communal being. This Reality is there within each thing and gives to each of its formations its power of being and value of being. The universe is a manifestation of the Reality, and there is a truth of the universal existence, a Power of cosmic being, an all-self or world-spirit. Humanity is a formation or manifestation of the Reality in the universe and there is a truth and self of humanity, a human spirit, a destiny of human life. The community is a formation of the Reality, a manifestation of the spirit of man, and there is a truth, a self, a power of the collective being. The individual is a formation of the Reality and there is a truth of the individual, an individual self, soul or spirit that expresses itself through the individual mind, life and body and can express itself too in something that goes beyond mind,

life and body, something even that goes beyond humanity."¹

It is evident from this passage that in Sri Aurobindo's view the community or society has a real self of its own, a truth of its being, as much as the individual, humanity and the whole universe have. Like them it is a living power of the eternal Reality in its cosmic manifestation.

Sri Aurobindo draws a close parallel between the nature of the society and the nature of the individual man. "The society or nation", he says, "is, even in its greater complexity, a larger, a composite individual, the collective Man."² As "the individual is not merely the ephemeral physical creature, a form of mind and body that aggregates and dissolves, but a being, a living power of the eternal Truth, a self-manifesting spirit", so too the community "is a being, a living power of the eternal Truth, a self-manifestation of the cosmic Spirit, and it is there to express and fulfil in its own way and to the degree of its capacities the special truth and power and meaning of the cosmic Spirit that is within it."³

We may also add that Sri Aurobindo does not conceive of this real self of society as only an impersonal spirit but also as a personal being, a living godhead which from behind the veil of the external communal life guides and shapes its evolutionary development and leads it to its eventual destiny. As the eternal Reality in its supreme aspect is not merely an impersonal Existence but also a Supreme Person, Ishwara or God, so also in each of its manifestations, individual, communal or universal it is not only an impersonal spirit but a conscious living person, a godhead. It is for this reason that Sri Aurobindo maintains that the soul of each nation-society is a living being, a deity presiding over its historical development through the ages and leading it to its ultimate perfection. This is his idea of the nation-soul which he made the pivot of the whole nationalist movement in India when he was its leader. The vibrant terms in which he spoke and wrote about the nation-soul of India as the divine Shakti, Mother India, had a tremendous impact upon the national mind during that period because for him it was not merely a symbolic fiction, as it is for the modern historians and political thinkers, but a living spiritual presence and power. We may recall his own words :

"Mother India is not a piece of earth; she is a power, a Godhead, for all nations have such a Devi supporting their separate existence and keeping it in being. Such beings are as real and more permanently real than the men they influence, but they belong to a higher plane, are part of the cosmic consciousness and being and act here on earth by shaping the human consciousness on which they exercise their influence."⁴

This is Sri Aurobindo's subjective view of the society

¹ *The Life Divine* (Centenary Edition, Vol 19), pp. 1048-49.

² *The Human Cycle* (Centenary Edition, Vol. 15), p. 66.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴ *Letters on Yoga* (Centenary Edition, Vol. 22), p.424.

parallel to his subjective view of the individual. But he also maintains that as the individual, though in his essential reality is a soul or spirit, yet has a phenomenal external being composed of a developing mind, life and body which are the instruments of his soul, so also the community though in its essential reality is a group-soul or spirit, yet has an external organic being made up of a developing communal mind, life and body, which are the instruments of the group-soul for the expression of its potentialities.

"The nation or society," Sri Aurobindo says, "like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist."¹

Hence to understand fully Sri Aurobindo's view of the nature of society we have to take into account both these aspects of the social being - its soul or spiritual self which is its essential reality and its external instrumental being which is a means and a medium of the progressive manifestation and expression of the potentialities of its group-soul in evolution. And we have also to note that in the earlier stages of its evolutionary development the communal soul, like the soul of the individual, remains mostly veiled and it is the outer instrumental ego-self of the community with its interests and ambitions and passions that dominates and governs the communal life and consciousness. The organised State, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the embodiment not of the soul of the nation but of its communal ego and its interests and ambitions.

It is very necessary to keep in view this distinction between the outer ego-self of the community and its true soul because an indiscriminate identification of the two is bound to lead to the same gross errors and dangerous consequences as those which result from the mistaken identification of the outer ego-self of the individual with his true soul. The communal ego, like the ego of the individual, is a formation of ignorant Nature and in its evolutionary development is subject to the same limitations, perversions and falsehoods as the individual ego is. In extreme cases, it may even, like the individual, be possessed by dark Asuric forces and bring ruin and disaster not only upon itself but also upon other communities. Instances of such possession are not wanting in human history and in recent times there have been such glaring examples of them that Sri Aurobindo has repeatedly warned against the misleading and dangerous tendency to confuse the true soul of the nation with its communal ego, as represented by the State. To quote on such warning : "The communal ego is idealised as the soul of the nation, the race, the community; but this is a colossal and may turn out to be a fatal error... this obscure collective being is not the soul or self of the community; it is a life-force that rises from the subconscious and, if denied the light of guidance by the reason, can be driven only by dark massive forces which are powerful but dangerous for the

¹ *The Human Cycle* (Centenary Edition, Vol. 15), p. 29.

race because they are alien to the conscious evolution of which man is the trustee and bearer."¹

Some exponents of what is known as the Idealistic Theory of the State in Western political philosophy, notably Hegel and his followers, have put forward a view of the Nation-State which is a clear example of the false representation of the collective ego of the nation as its true soul. The State, which is nothing else but the organised collective ego of the nation, is glorified by them as a super-individual omnipotent divine entity with absolute authority to command unquestioning obedience and worship of the individuals. This conception of the State has exerted an enormous influence in the recent political life of Europe and has powerfully encouraged the growth of various types of totalitarian regimes which have been mainly responsible for plunging the world into the two great wars. Sri Aurobindo has thoroughly exposed the fallacy of this idea of the State in his writings, especially in *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

Of all the problems of social philosophy, the problem of social evolution has received the most systematic and elaborate treatment at Sri Aurobindo's hands. *The Human Cycle*, one of his major works, is devoted to a comprehensive exposition of this problem and the main issues relevant to it.

We have to note that this theory of the evolution of society is based upon and derived from his general theory of evolution which applies equally to the individual man, to the community, to the whole of humanity, as well as to the entire terrestrial existence. It is the same upward movement from the material base to the spiritual summit which works itself out by progressive cycles in the whole cosmos as well as in the more restricted spheres of individual and communal existence. Sri Aurobindo has fully elaborated his general theory of evolution in *The Life Divine*, especially in its last eleven chapters. *The Human Cycle*, is an application of the same theory to the sphere of social life.

Sri Aurobindo's theory of social evolution, like his more general theory of terrestrial evolution, is a spiritual theory and must be clearly distinguished from the scientific theory of social evolution held by modern social thinkers.

The modern theory of evolution as a rational scientific concept is of comparatively recent origin. It emerged during the 17th and the 18th centuries and its most significant developments took place in the 19th century in the field of Biology, in the work of Darwin. Herbert Spencer, the British sociologist and philosopher, who was very much impressed by Darwin's theory, applied it with some modifications to the development of human society and culture. It was accepted by other social thinkers of the period and was very widely held as a scientifically valid interpretation of social and cultural change. This theory came to be known as the unilinear

theory because it assumed that social and cultural change occurs everywhere in a straight upward line by gradual, uniform and successive stages. It also assumed that social evolution was necessarily a movement of social progress, a continuous advancement from lower to higher forms. Sri Aurobindo's spiritual theory of social evolution is fundamentally different from this modern scientific theory even though he admits its limited value. Here we may note some main points of difference.

The scientific theory confines itself only to the objective external form and organisation of society which, beginning from a simple and rudimentary structure and function, develops into a more and more complex and intricate system by the process of differentiation and integration. The process here is similar to that of the growth of biological organisms from the initial unicellular to the more advanced multicellular structures. The validity of this theory insofar as it applies to the external organic system of society is fully admitted by Sri Aurobindo, but its limitation, according to him, is that it takes no account of the more important inner subjective development of society which consists in the emergence of higher and higher levels of communal self and its consciousness. Evolution, in Sri Aurobindo's view, is essentially a graded ascent of the consciousness from the lowest physical, through the vital and the mental, to the highest spiritual and supramental levels. The evolution of external physical form and structure is intended to be only a means or an instrumental mould for the embodiment and expression of the growing inner self and consciousness. Higher and higher grades of consciousness as they emerge in evolution require more and more complex, subtle and intricate organic structures to manifest their potentialities and it is in order to provide this need that the evolution of the external forms takes place.

For Sri Aurobindo it is the inner subjective development of consciousness that is the essential aim and significance of the evolutionary process; the development of the outer forms is only a secondary and subordinate means. This truth which is obvious in the evolution of the individual being is equally true in the evolution of the society or community. According to Sri Aurobindo, consciousness is the determining factor, the essential cause of the progressive movement of evolution through successive stages. It is the key that unravels the secret sense and significance of the whole historical development of mankind from the earliest primitive to the most advanced cultures and civilisations. And, for the same reason, it will also determine the emergence of the future social order. The future society, Sri Aurobindo maintains, will arrive only as a result of the emergence of a new level of consciousness in the life of humanity. Whatever new forms of outer social life will arise will only be its external expression.

This is the fundamental difference between Sri Aurobindo's subjective theory and the modern scientific theory of evolution. Useful as the scientific theory is, it explains only the outer aspect of social evolution which is of secondary and subordinate importance. It does not reveal to us the real

¹*The Life Divine* (Centenary Edition, Vol. 19), pp. 1056-57.

meaning and significance of social evolution nor its determining cause. Sri Aurobindo does not consider the scientific theory to be wrong but insufficient and inconclusive. For him the principal factor of evolution, as in the individual so in the community, is the ascension of consciousness from its lowest to the highest level.

From this fundamental difference between Sri Aurobindo's spiritual theory and the modern scientific theory, all other differences follow as logical corollaries.

Since the evolution of the social or communal consciousness is the basic determinant of the evolution of society, the successive stages through which that evolution proceeds are also, according to Sri Aurobindo, determined by the ascending grades through which that consciousness evolves. In *The Human Cycle* Sri Aurobindo has traced the whole cycle of social evolution first through a sequence of five stages, named symbolic, typical, conventional, individualist or rational and subjective; then through another sequence of three stages, named barbarism, culture and spirituality; and finally through one more sequence of three stages, named the infrarational, the rational and the suprarational. All these sequences are based upon a psychological criterion derived from his subjective concept in which the self or the consciousness is the determining factor. A passage from *The Human Cycle*, which explains the last sequence of three stages, will make this clear :

"There are necessarily three stages of the social evolution or, generally, of the human evolution in both individual and society. Our evolution starts with an infrarational stage in which men have not yet learned to refer their life and action in its principles and its forms to the judgment of the clarified intelligence; for they still act principally out of their instincts, impulses, spontaneous ideas, vital intuitions or else obey a customary response to desire, need and circumstance, - it is these things that are canalised or crystallised in their social institutions. Man proceeds by various stages out of these beginnings towards a rational age in which his intelligent will more or less developed becomes the judge, arbiter and presiding motive of his thought, feeling and action, the moulder, destroyer and re-creator of his leading ideas, aims and intuitions. Finally, if our analysis and forecast are correct, the human evolution must move through a subjective towards a suprarational or spiritual age in which he will develop progressively a greater spiritual, supra-intellectual and intuitive, perhaps in the end a more than intuitive, a gnostic consciousness. He will be able to perceive a higher divine end, a divine sanction, a divine light of guidance for all he seeks to be, think, feel and do, and able, too, more and more to obey and live in this larger light and power."¹

In the same way the stages of barbarism and civilisation or culture, which Sri Aurobindo elaborately discusses in

The Human Cycle, are also based on a subjective psychological criterion and therefore have quite a different meaning than that which the social scientists, cultural anthropologists and historians who adopt an objective external criterion, attach to it. "Barbarism," in Sri Aurobindo's view, "is the state of society in which man is almost entirely preoccupied with his life and body, his economic and physical existence.. and has few means and little inclination to develop his mentality, while civilisation is the more evolved state of society in which to a sufficient social and economic organisation is added the activity of the mental life in most, if not all of its parts."¹ Not to live principally in the activities of the sense-mind, but in the activities of knowledge and reason and a wide intellectual curiosity, the activities of the cultivated aesthetic being, the activities of the enlightened will which make for character and high ethical ideals and a large human action, not to be governed by our lower or our average mentality but by truth and beauty and the self-ruling will is the ideal of a true culture and the beginning of an accomplished humanity."²

Barbarism and culture are here distinguished not on the criterion of the economic development or social organisation but on the basis of the developing consciousness of the communal self. So long as the consciousness of the community remains at the level of the physical and the vital self, predominantly governed by its instincts, impulses and customary habits, it must remain essentially a barbarian society whatever may be its outer appearances. It is only when it ascends beyond that level into the light of the mental self, and governs its life by the ideals and values of the mind that it becomes a truly cultured society. Barbarism and culture are thus characteristics of the ascending levels of consciousness in evolution rather than of the external economic, political or social institutional organisation. The external institutional organisation is only a reflection or an expression of the inner psychological state of the society. As that inner state progresses on the upward curve of the evolutionary cycle, it manifests or expresses itself in progressive forms of external social life. Ascension of consciousness is thus the key-factor determining the whole course of social evolution through its successive stages.

Since culture in its true sense is a characteristic of the developed idealistic mind, Sri Aurobindo refuses to apply that term to individuals and communities which develop merely the external paraphernalia of civilised life but in their inner consciousness remain still at the level of barbarian mentality and are ruled by its tendencies and propensities. This pseudo-civilised type, individual and communal, was called "Philistine" by Matthew Arnold and others in the last century and Sri Aurobindo finds this term quite appropriate to describe the modern man who, according to him, is not truly cultured at all in spite of the plethora of material amenities of civilised

¹ *The Human Cycle* (Centenary Edition, Vol. 15) p. 173.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 85-6.

barbarian because he has developed reason and science, and yet since he has put them at the service of his lower physical and vital nature, Sri Aurobindo calls him the mental barbarian or the civilised barbarian. To put it in his own words: "The Philistine is in fact the modern civilised barbarian; he is often the half-civilised physical and vital barbarian by his unintelligent attachment to the life of the body, the life of the vital needs and impulses and the ideal of the merely domestic and economic human animal; but essentially and commonly he is the mental barbarian, the average sensational man."¹

It is the mentality of this Philistine that rules the modern world and its typical attitude is the spirit of commercialism which has penetrated and influenced all the spheres of modern life. The excessive preponderance of the utilitarian and the economic value and the consequent vulgarisation and debasement of all the higher values in culture, religion, art, poetry, philosophy, etc. is due to this commercial spirit which at present overrides all others.

The psychological or subjective criterion adopted by Sri Aurobindo for the demarcation of the successive stages of social evolution has a greater validity than any external objective criterion because it is based on the inevitable inner development of human consciousness and not upon any outward accidental forms or circumstances. The historians and the cultural anthropologists speak of the Old Stone Age and the New Stone Age followed by the Ages of Iron, Steel, Electricity etc., or of the economic stages of hunting, pastoralism, agriculture and industry; but these ages or stages depend upon outer accidental factors which are not inevitable in human evolution. On the contrary, the psychological stages marked by Sri Aurobindo are inevitable because they are related to the inherent nature of man's subjective being. As he himself has pointedly observed: "These stages or periods are much more inevitable in the psychological evolution of mankind than the Stone and other Ages marked out by Science in his instrumental culture, for they depend not on outward means or accidents, but on the very nature of his being."²

Another point of difference between the scientific theory of social evolution and Sri Aurobindo's theory is in regard to the pattern and character of evolutionary change. According to the scientific theory social evolution follows an unilinear pattern and proceeds by uniform, gradual and progressive adjustments from lower to higher forms. Sri Aurobindo, however, maintains that the movement of evolutionary progress is not in a continuously advancing straight line but in a series of spirals or cycles in which periods of advance alternate with periods of decline but eventually the curve of progress is resumed at a higher level. "The cycles of evolution", he says, "tend always upward, but they are cycles and do not ascend in a straight line. The process therefore gives the impression of a series of ascents and

descents, but what is essential in the gains of the evolution is kept or, even if eclipsed for a time, re-emerges in new forms suitable to the new ages."¹

The periods of decline which alternate with the periods of progress in this cyclic rhythm are not altogether periods of deterioration or fall but fruitful periods in which some necessary elements of perfection lacking in the earlier stages are worked out and in the new upward curve of progress are combined with previous gains to realise a higher perfection. "Even in failure", says Sri Aurobindo, "there is a preparation for success: our nights carry in them the secret of a greater dawn. This is a frequent experience in our individual progress, but the human collectivity also moves in much the same manner."²

Sri Aurobindo is thus a firm believer in human progress even though that progress occurs in an undulating rhythm marked by fluctuations and oscillations and not in a straight upward direction. It is for this reason that he does not take a pessimistic view of the modern civilisation even though he is fully aware of its serious imperfections and deep-seated maladies. He is not disheartened by its negative side, nor does he prophesy, like many modern social thinkers, that it is swiftly moving towards a cataclysmic self-destruction. To him it is only a passing phase, a temporary downward curve of a progressive cyclic evolution which, in spite of its imperfections, has some very important contribution to make to the forward march of humanity. We may emphasize this point by quoting his own words: "An unbiased view will prefer to regard this age of civilisation as an evolutionary stage, an imperfect but important turn of the human advance. It is then possible to see that great gains have been made which are of the utmost value to an ultimate perfection, even if they have been made at a great price. There is not only a greater generalisation of knowledge and the more thorough use of intellectual power and activity in multiple fields. There is not only the advance of Science and its application to the conquest of our environment, an immense apparatus of means, vast utilisations, endless minute conveniences, an irresistible machinery, a tireless exploitation of forces. There is too a certain development of powerful if not high-pitched ideals and there is an attempt, however external and imperfect, to bring them to bear upon the working of human society as a whole. Much has been diminished or lost, but it can be recovered, eventually, if not with ease. Once restored to its true movement, the inner life of man will find that it has gained in materials, in power of plasticity, in a new kind of depth and wideness. And we shall have acquired a salutary habit of many-sided thoroughness and a sincere endeavour to shape the outer collective life into an adequate image of our highest ideals. Temporary diminutions will not count before the greater inner expansion that is likely to succeed this age of external turmoil and outward-looking endeavour."

Sri Aurobindo's evaluation of modern civilisation is thus not unduly pessimistic even though he is fully cognisant

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79
² *Ibid.*, p. 173

¹ *Letters on Yoga* (Centenary Edition, Vol. 22), p.1.

² *The Foundation of Indian Culture* (Centenary Edition, Vol. 14), p. 27.

of its glaring shortcomings. He looks at both its positive and negative aspects as transitional phases of a cyclic development in which both contribute towards an eventual progress.

For the same reason Sri Aurobindo does not entertain any misgivings about India's future even though more than anyone else, he is fully conscious of the deterioration and decline that have overtaken Indian life after the glorious achievements of its ancient culture. Taking a long-range view of the evolutionary cycle of its historical development, he knows that this deterioration is only a transitional curve of decline and he is convinced that it will be followed by an upward curve of progress in which India will rise to yet greater heights of glory than it did in its ancient past. As he maintains, "The decline of our past culture may even be regarded as a needed waning and dying of old forms to make way not only for a new, but if we will that it should be so, a greater and more perfect creation."²

But the most significant difference between the scientific theory and Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution is in regard to the future development of man and society. The scientific theory, which concerns itself with only the external forms, considers man to be the final product of evolution and does not envisage the emergence in future of any type superior to the human species. To the scientist the human mind is the summit of the evolutionary ladder and any ascension beyond it is to him inconceivable. But to Sri Aurobindo man is only a transitional type and his rational mind is only an intermediate grade and not the last term of the evolutionary process. As man, has emerged out of the animal and with the power of his intellectual capacity made achievements in his own life and in the world around him which were impossible to the animal, so a new being, as or even more superior to man than man is to the animal, is destined to emerge in the next evolutionary stage, who with the power of his higher spiritual and supramental consciousness will radically transform the nature and life conditions of present man and manifest here on earth new possibilities which to his limited view seem like impossible dreams. Has not evolutionary Nature several times made possible what would have seemed impossible before it was realised? To the lumbering primeval ape the emergence of man out of him and all that man has achieved on earth would have seemed an impossible miracle, but that has not prevented evolutionary Nature from making that miracle real and actual. According to Sri Aurobindo, the present man's attitude towards his evolutionary future is much the same as that of this ape. To quote his own words: "It is not very easy for the customary mind of man, always attached to its past and present associations, to conceive of an existence still human, yet radically changed in what are now our fixed circumstances. We are in respect to our possible higher evolution much in the position of the original Ape of the Darwinian theory. It would have been impossible for that Ape leading his instinctive arboreal life in primeval forests to conceive

that there would be one day an animal on the earth who would use a new faculty called reason upon the materials of his inner and outer existence, who would dominate by that power his instincts and habits, change the circumstances of his physical life, build for himself houses of stone, manipulate Nature's forces, sail the seas, ride the air, develop codes of conduct, evolve conscious methods for his mental and spiritual development. And if such a conception had been possible for the Ape-mind, it would still have been difficult for him to imagine that by any progress of Nature or long effort of Will and tendency he himself could develop into that animal. Man, because he has acquired reason and still more because he has indulged his power of imagination and intuition, is able to conceive an existence higher than his own.... but he finds the same difficulty in accepting its practical realisation here for his ultimate aim as would the ancestral Ape if called upon to believe himself as the future Man."¹

Sri Aurobindo therefore refuses to admit the argument which considers any farther evolution of man as an impossible dream. To him such an evolution to a superior status is not only possible but inevitable. The same evolutionary nisus which has produced man out of the animal must inexorably press forward and create out of him a new species of being embodying a level of consciousness higher than the rational mind and establishing its rule upon earth which will fulfil all the dreams of perfection which humanity has been till now entertaining without success.

That higher principle of consciousness which is now pressing to emerge and establish itself on earth is called by Sri Aurobindo the Supermind or Gnosis. The consciousness of the Supermind is so radically different from that of mind and its action so far exceeds the mental action that it is hardly possible to form any precise intellectual idea of its characteristic power and functionings. "In the gnostic change", says Sri Aurobindo, "the evolution crosses a line beyond which there is a supreme and radical reversal of consciousness and the standards and forms of mental cognition are no longer sufficient: it is difficult for mental thought to understand or describe supramental nature."²

When the supramental principle fully emerges and establishes itself securely in the earth-nature, it will create a new type of being whom Sri Aurobindo calls the gnostic being. As more and more of these gnostic beings arise they will form a new type of society - the gnostic society living a divine life. This will create a new age in the human cycle - the Supramental Age in which the Divine Truth-Consciousness will openly and directly rule the world and the life of humanity. Thus will be established the Kingdom of God upon earth for which humanity in its highest and deepest aspirations has always been yearning through the long millenniums of its history.

But Sri Aurobindo very firmly points out that this new age in the cyclic evolution of humanity cannot be cre-

² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹ *The Life Divine* (Centenary Edition, Vol. 18), pp. 55-6

² *Ibid.*, p. 965.

ated by any change of the external conditions of life. The external conditions are only a reflection of the inner consciousness and it is only when that inner consciousness is radically transformed that the external life and its conditions can also change. To try to change human life without such a radical inner change is, as he repeatedly points out, a vain chimera. The Kingdom of God without can be securely founded only on the Kingdom of God within man's heart.

Before we conclude this very brief outline of some of the main ideas of Sri Aurobindo's social philosophy, it is necessary to mention that Sri Aurobindo was not merely an utopian philosopher projecting before us beautiful visions of man's perfect life in a future Golden Age. All through the ages philosophers and poets have produced several such utopias, but none of them have fulfilled in concrete result even a fraction of the promise they have held out before the yearning eyes of humanity. We cannot over-emphasize the point that Sri Aurobindo does not belong to this tribe of ineffective utopian visionaries. It was Marx who said, "Philosophers have sought to interpret the world; what matters, however, is to change it." Even though Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the world is spiritual and therefore diametrically opposed to Marx's materialistic interpretation of it, he is in entire agreement with Marx that, more important than merely explaining the world is the task of changing it from its present imperfect condition to its future perfect state. Though on one side of his nature Sri Aurobindo was an idealistic visionary, he was also on

another side of it a dynamic Yogi, who was never satisfied until he successfully translated his vision into concrete fact. Therefore even since it became clear to his inner vision that the only lasting solution of all the persistent maladies of the world, and the only sure means of fulfilling all the age-long dreams and aspirations of humanity for a perfect life, lay in establishing the Supramental Truth-Consciousness on earth, he withdrew from all other activity however important it might otherwise be, and single-pointedly devoted himself to the task of bringing down the Supermind on earth. Not satisfied with merely explaining what was indispensably needed for changing the world, he bent all his energies for actually effectuating that change by means and methods that are far beyond the human mind to understand. So deeply was he concerned about humanity's fate at the present critical juncture that he sacrificed everything, finally even his body, in that herculean labour. And that labour still continues with a greater earnestness and urgency, for he is still concentrated upon it, even though imperceptibly to our human eyes. Some future historian will perhaps tell us how by his insistent invisible universal action he has fashioned and released the most potent irresistible formative force of history which will reach out of the four corners of the earth and visibly change human destiny.

Kishor Gandhi

Therefore the individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being. Even as the animal man has been largely converted into a mentalised and at the top a highly mentalised humanity, so too now or in the future an evolution or conversion- it does not greatly matter which figure we use or what theory we adopt to support it- of the present type of humanity into a spiritualised humanity is the need of the race and surely the intention of Nature; that evolution or conversion will be their ideal and endeavour. They will be comparatively indifferent to particular belief and form and leave men to resort to the beliefs and forms to which they are naturally drawn. They will only hold as essential the faith in this spiritual conversion, the attempt to live it out and whatever knowledge- the form of opinion into which it is thrown does not so much matter- can be converted into this living. They will especially not make the mistake of thinking that this change can be effected by machinery and outward institutions; they will know and never forget that it has to be lived out by each man inwardly or it can never be made a reality for the kind. They will adopt in its heart of meaning the inward view of the East which bids man seek the secret of his destiny and salvation within; but also they will accept, though with a different turn given to it, the importance which the West rightly attaches to life and to the making the best we know and can attain the general rule of all life. They will not make society a shadowy background to a few luminous spiritual figures or a rigidly fenced and earth-bound root for the growth of a comparatively rare and sterile flower of ascetic spirituality. They will not accept the theory that the many must necessarily remain for ever on the lower ranges of life and only a few climb into the free air and the light, but will start from the standpoint of the great spirits who have striven to regenerate the life of the earth and held that faith in spite of all previous failures. Failures must be originally numerous in everything great and difficult, but the time comes when the experience of past failures must be originally numerous in everything great and difficult, but the time comes when the experience of past failures can be profitably used and the gate that so long resisted opens. In this as in all great human aspirations and endeavours, an a priori declaration of impossibility is a sign of ignorance and weakness, and the motto of the aspirant's endeavour must be the solvitur ambulando of the discoverer. For by the doing the difficulty will be solved. A true beginning has to be made; the rest is a work for Time in its sudden achievements or its long patient labour.

Sri Aurobindo
'The Human Cycle'

SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

This subject focuses our attention on one of the central themes of our own times, viz., the impact of Science on Society. For we see today a humanity, satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of Nature, preparing to confront squarely the choice for a better and nobler future. To equip ourselves adequately, lest we might falter or make any fatal error, is perhaps our most important and urgent task.

Science had flourished in ancient and medieval ages, both in the East and the West, but the modern phenomenon of Science, which began and developed in the West and only at a later stage entered the East, has a distinguishing feature that it emerged out of the revolt of individualism against the conventional order of the medieval age. Individualism began in Europe with an endeavour to get back, more especially in the sphere of religion, to the original truth which conventions had overlaid, defaced or distorted. But this was only the first step, and it proceeded to others and culminated in a general questioning of the foundations of thought and practice in all the spheres of human life and action. In this process of questioning, scientific, and subsequently, technological progress played a major role.

The revolt of individualism was aided enormously by the Renaissance which gave back to Europe the free curiosity of the Greek mind and its search for first principles and rational laws. At the same time, Europe received back also the Roman's large practicality and his sense of the ordering of life in harmony with a robust utility and the just principles of things. Judaeo-Christian discipline also contributed to the passion, moral and almost religious fervour with which the Greek and Roman tendencies were pursued. At first, there was the fervent questioning of the mediation of the priesthood between God and the soul and the substitution of the Papal authority for the authority of the scripture. At a later stage, there was the questioning of scripture itself and then all supernaturalism and suprarational truth no less than outward creed and institute. In politics, there was the questioning of divine rights, established privileges, sanctified tyrannies and their oppressive power. In social order, there was the questioning of stereotyped reign of convention, fixed disabilities, fixed privileges, the self-regarding arrogance of the high, and the blind prostration of the low.

At first, the movement of religious freedom took its stand on a limited but subsequently on an absolute right of the individual experience and illumined reason to determine the true sense of inspired scripture and the true Christian ritual and order of the Church. It was, however, realised that the unrestrained use of individual illumination or judgement without any outer standard or any generally recognisable source of truth is a perilous

experiment. There was, therefore, a search for a general standard of truth and also for some principle of social order founded on a universally recognisable truth of things. The answer was found in the discoveries of physical science.

The first part of the answer was that physics demonstrated a truth of things which depended upon no doubtful scripture or fallible authority, and that truth was written by the Mother Nature in her eternal book for all to read who had patience to observe and intellectual honesty to judge. There was no room, it contended, for erratic self-will in the realm of laws, principles, fundamental facts of the world and of our being which all could verify at once for themselves and which must, therefore, satisfy and guide free individual judgement.

The second part of the answer was that science provided a standard, a norm of knowledge, a rational basis for life, a clear outline and sovereign means for the progress and perfection of the individual and the race. Here was, it contended, verifiable science which can govern and organise human life by a law, a truth of things, an order and principles observable and verifiable by all, to which all can freely and must rationally subscribe.

This answer constituted the culminating movement, the irresistible victory of science in the nineteenth century of Europe. This answer was preceded by two centuries of preparation, during which the method of scientific induction was evolved and a new scientific outlook on the world was developed. In the eighteenth century one could discern four ingredients of the scientific outlook, viz.,

- (1) Statement of fact should be based on observation, not on unsupported authority;
- (2) The inanimate world is a self-acting, self-perpetuating system, in which all changes conform to material laws;
- (3) The earth is not the centre of the universe, and probably Man is not its purpose (if any); and
- (4) The concept of purpose is scientifically useless.

This scientific outlook, which also came to be called 'mechanistic outlook', undermined authority and bestowed sovereignty to observation and verification, and it affirmed the autonomy of the physical world following Galileo and Newton who, between them, proved that all the movement of the planets, and of dead matter on the earth, proceed according to the laws of physics, and once started, will continue indefinitely. Although Newton still thought that a Creator was necessary to get the process going, he conceded that after that He left it to work according to its own laws, requiring no mind in the process. The eighteenth century materialists went one step farther and contended that all causes are material and that mental occurrences are inoperative by-products. In this view of the universe, teleology was dislodged,

and man was reduced to insignificance, particularly when the earth itself, man's home, came to be seen as a small particle in the Milky Way, an assemblage of about 300,000 millions stars, which itself is only one of 30million such known assemblages.

The victory of the physical science was, however, largely due to its application, its technique and technology. Gunpowder was discovered during the late Middle Ages, and since then the authority of States has increased, and throughout it has been mainly improvement in weapons of war that has made the increase possible. Another important discovery made during the Middle Ages was that of mariner's compass, which made possible the age of discovery. Three important developments that resulted were the opening of the New World to the white colonists, the conquest of India by the British, and important contacts between Europe and China. Through the enormous increase of seapower Western Europe came to dominate the World.

The next stage of technological progress was marked by the discovery of steam power and its resultant operation in transport. Steam was one of the most important elements in the industrial revolution. Steamers and railways produced large scale effects after the middle of the nineteenth century, when Middle West of America could open up and when its grain came to feed the industrial populations of England and New England. The resultant prosperity was largely responsible for the sunshine and optimism of the Victorian era. It is important to observe that the early age of steam and industrial revolution was marked by unspeakable misery both in England and America. Machinery caused human beings to be treated as machines ; children were required to work twelve to sixteen hours a day, and they were often beaten up to keep them from falling asleep while at work ; and yet many failed to keep awake and rolled into the machinery, by which they were mutilated or killed. Handicraftsmen were thrown out of work by the machines, and their fate was intensely miserable. Effects of machinery were equally disastrous with United States. However, the subsequent stages of industrial revolution were not attended with the same kind and degree of evils because of the plunder of colonies as also because of the abolition of slavery and growth of democracy.

The next stage of the technological progress was connected with electricity and telegraphy, and oil and the internal combustion engine. A major sociological effect was the increasing tendency towards centralisation, since in large organisations detailed control from a centre became much more possible than it had formerly been. Telegraph, power stations and long pipe lines generated hugeness of organisations, control from above, mechanisation of human relationship and loss of creativity and of joy of soul in work.

Big organisations also came to influence politics in a very big way ; but the development of flying had perhaps most significant effect on international politics and on the power of the governments. It is instructive to observe that only great Powers can afford a large air

force, and no small Power can stand out against a great Power which has secure air supremacy.

The discovery of atomic power and the technologies of the power have been the themes of the greatest concern for the entire human race, particularly since the holocaust of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Even today, when the world has tended to become unipolar and programmes of total disarmament are being seriously proposed, the threats of possible fatal errors cannot be ruled out, and as long as war continues to be a possibility, the presence of atomic weapons will remain a continuous source of disequilibrium of our planetary existence. On the other hand, when we think of peaceful uses of atomic energy, we are obliged to underline that these uses, particularly in the field of power, will carry further the processes of concentration and centralisation and this will intensify the adverse effect of industrialisation.

We have also to take note of the development in biological sciences and their actual and potential technologies. Moreover, the constantly diminishing gap between a scientific discovery and its large scale application gives us the measure of the rate of the speed of change in the external and internal life of individuals, societies and nations. As against 112 years taken to develop practical applications of the discovery of the principles of photography, only two years separated the discovery from the production of solar batteries. Drastic accelerations have taken place also in travelling and communications. Progress in electronics is the basis of a revolution comparable to the invention of writing. Scientific discoveries are multiplying with ever-increasing speed and they are producing tumultuous impact, good and evil, on society at all levels.

There is a dream or a promise that science would be able to abolish poverty in the world, to reduce drudgery and excessive hours of labour, and to increase health, comfort and happiness. It is, however, acknowledged that certain conditions will have to be fulfilled before this dream could be realised. The first condition is that population should not increase too fast or that should now become stable more or less at the level at which it is present. The second condition is that individualism that aims at self-determination and integral development should grow to such an extent that it would be able to counteract various forms of slavery and serfdom and exploitation that may grow, particularly under the influence of the rich and powerful sections of society, Not merely democracy as it is today, - which is really plutocracy - but real democracy that ensure high degree of synthesis of liberty, equality and fraternity, must spread all over the world. The third condition is related to the fact that both agriculture and industry depend upon irreplaceable materials and sources of energy. It is, of course, argued that science will discover new sources as the need arises. At the same time it is conceded that the world has been living on capital, and this capital is not unlimited; even new sources are not likely to be unlimited. The fourth condition is that, since in the ultimate analysis, industry depends

upon agriculture, food producing regions should be free from famines and such other calamities, - a condition which is not very easy to guarantee. And the fifth condition is that the ideal of human unity should be actualised to such a degree that there could be not only a world government but also a highly federal and decentralised form of that government, - a condition not unrealisable but realisable only by an unprecedented effort on the part of humanity to change human nature and to creation of collective forms of living that would synthesise liberty and order with diminishing use of the forces and powers of compulsion.

Consideration of these conditions should lead us also to realise as to what would happen to the world if it is devoid of science and technology. This realisation would enable us to draw up a more balanced evaluation of contributions of science and technology.

First and foremost, we must note that Science is an assertion of the mental being and supremacy of intelligence. As against barbarism and philistinism, science is the affirmation of civilization and culture. As against the earlier periods of rational, ethical or aesthetic cultures which were overrun by irresistible tides of barbarism, science has equipped the civilised world with weapons of organisation and aggression and self-defence which cannot be successfully utilised by any barbarous people, unless they acquire knowledge which only science can give and thus they cease to be barbarous.

Science has affirmed the virtues of impartiality and of ever-widening quest of knowledge. It has taught that ignorance must be removed wherever it is found. This has also enhanced the cause of education, and the objective of "education for all" has spread all over the world. Education has, in turn, underlined the need for scientific frame of mind and declared that nations can only achieve their own renewal and yet retain their national features by integrating science into the traditional cultures, and by integrating universal thoughts into their own national life. In sum, science has enlarged for good the intellectual horizon of the human race, and raised, sharpened and intensified powerfully the general intellectual capacity of mankind.

A closer study will, however, show that science is a manifestation of the dual operation of Reason, dispassionate and interested. In its dispassionate movement science pursues truth for the sake of truth and knowledge for the sake of knowledge; in this movement, science is performing its natural function; it is exercising its highest right. In the work of the scientist labouring to add something to the stock of our ascertainable knowledge, there is a perfect purity and satisfaction. It may even be said that even if there is any individual error or limitation, it will not matter; for the collective and progressive knowledge of the race can be trusted to get rid of the error.

But the difficulties and faults arise when science turns to its interested operations and tries to apply its discoveries and inventions to life-situations. For there it

becomes the plaything of forces over which it has little control. Science then becomes subject to what it studies and then servant and counsellor of the forces in whose obscure and ill-understood struggle it intervenes. This is the reason why the balance sheet of science is a mixed one, and in many respects the negative aspects outweigh the positive ones. While, on the one hand, science has made discoveries which have served a practical humanitarianism, it has, on the other hand, supplied monstrous weapons to egoism and mutual destruction; while, on the one hand, it has made a gigantic efficiency of organisation utilisable for the economic and social amelioration of the nations, it has, on the other hand, placed the same efficiency of organisation in the hands of national rivalries for mutual aggression, ruin and slaughter; while, on the one hand, it has given rise to a large rationalistic altruism, it has, on the other hand justified a godless egoism, vitalism, vulgar will-to-power and success; while on the hand, it has drawn mankind together and given it a new hope, it has, on the other hand, crushed it with the burden of a monstrous commercialism. Actually, this commercialism, which can be called another kind of barbarism, - economic barbarism, - marks a terrible regression that has sunk humanity in the mud of desire and hunger on a massive scale. For it makes the satisfaction of wants and desires and the accumulation of possessions its standard and aim. Its concept of the ideal man is not that of the cultured or noble or thoughtful or moral or spiritual, but the successful man. To this barbarism, the opulent plutocrat and the successful mammoth capitalist and organiser of industry are the supermen, and it is to them that this barbarism assigns the actual power to rule the society. Pursuit of vital success, satisfaction, productiveness, accumulation, possession, enjoyment, comfort, convenience for their own sake - these are essential ingredients of economic barbarism. To the barbaric economic man, beauty is a nuisance, art and poetry a frivolity or a means of advertisement. His idea of civilisation is comfort, his idea of morality social respectability, and his idea of politics the encouragement of industrialisation, opening of markets and exploitation.

It is not surprising that increasing number of sensitive and refined thinkers in recent decades have come to equate science and technology with domination and violence. They have attempted to show how science has become a Reason of State and how development has become a passport to politics of power and success. Some of them have focussed their attention on the way in which development is projected in India and developing countries, and they have brought out quite vividly the perils of plunder, propaganda and violence to which masses of people are being subjected in the name of science and development. Promises and presuppositions of scientific method have also come to be questioned. We also find new trends of thought which advocate new philosophies of growth. The ideas of limits to growth and of the use of technology to control technology have gained increasing currency; the idea of the 'small is beautiful' has achieved a wide appeal. There is a growing awareness that all is not well with science, particularly with technology, that things cannot be

allowed to develop unchecked and unchallenged, that fundamental issues of humanity's future are involved, and that we are required to consider urgently as to how to deal with our present state of society and how it can be transformed, with, without or in spite of science and technology, into a better and truer state of inter-related existence of individuals, societies and nations.

According to one trend of thought, the basic character of science and scientific method developed during the last three hundred and fifty years is quite sound and that science has proved itself as the only means of ascertainable knowledge; consequently, it is maintained, that while there is no room to question the nature and presupposition of science, there is a great need to effect major operations of change in human attitudes, passions and character of feeling, thinking and acting. It has, for instance, been contended that science is knowledge and knowledge is power, but power for evil just as much as for good. The conclusion that is drawn is that unless human beings increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow. It has been suggested that the things that humanity must avoid are cruelty, envy, greed, competitiveness, suspicious, fear, lust for power, hatred, intolerance. As for the means by which humanity can be induced to avoid them, there are no convincing suggestions. It has, for instance, been contended that love of power will be curbed when all serious military force is concentrated in the international army, that competition will be effectively regulated by law and mitigated by governmental controls, that fear will disappear when war is no longer to be expected, that hate and malevolence can be lessened by general prevalence of peace and material prosperity, by change in propaganda, by active instruction in schools on the evils of old times and the advantages of the new system, as also by increasing awareness that the alternative to wise and self-controlled life is radioactive disintegration.

It is not necessary here to enter into any debate to show that these contentions and suggestions can be contested. It has, for instance, been argued that the presuppositions and character of science have tended to be materialistic and mechanistic and that they can be and need to be rejected. It has also been argued that the growth of wisdom and changes in the human nature cannot be brought about merely by ordinary kind of education and training or by changes in structural or material conditions of mankind, that deeper psychological methods will be required, and that, in the ultimate analysis, human nature can be changed only by the uncovering of moral and spiritual force inherent in the depths of human personality.

This brings us sharply to the theme which has recently come to be discussed prominently, the theme of science and spirituality. This theme is quite complex and we do not have space to discuss it even briefly. We may, therefore, limit ourselves only to an outline statement of only two or three aspects.

First of all, we may consider the relationship between

science and materialism. It is true that the first tendencies of science have been materialistic; scientific explanations of the universe were for a long time mechanistic, which laid emphasis on inexorable and rigid laws, leaving no room for freedom or intelligent purpose; and the indubitable triumph of science have been confined to the knowledge of the physical universe and the body and the physical life. But, fundamentally, this materialism has been an expression of the mind turning its gaze upon its vital and physical frame and environment to know and conquer and dominate Life and Matter. From the point of view of advancing knowledge, there was a need to know the processes of Life and Matter so that they can rightly be transcended. It may even be said that the perfection of the physical sciences was a prior necessity and had to be the first field for the training of the mind of man in his new endeavour to know Nature and possess his world.

If modern Materialism, it may be urged, were simply an intelligent acquiescence in the material life, the advance might be indefinitely delayed. But we find that the latest trends are highly significant of a freer future. For as the outposts of scientific knowledge come more and more to be set on the borders that divide the material from the immaterial, so also the highest achievements of practical science are those which tend to simplify and reduce to the vanishing - point the machinery by which the greatest effects are produced. Wireless telegraphy is a signal for a new orientation, since the sensible physical means for the intermediate transmission of the physical force is removed, preserving it only at the points of impulsion and reception. It is also being increasingly acknowledged that materialism can be maintained only by ignoring or explaining away a vast field of evidence and experience which contradicts it. The arbitrariness of the materialistic premises is also being admitted in disguised or explicit forms. At one time it was confidently asserted that the physical senses are our sole means of knowledge and that reason, therefore, cannot escape beyond their domain. But today it is being acknowledged more and more widely that physical senses cannot give any disproof of anything that may be lying beyond their domain, if any, and that therefore there is no warrant to assert that physical senses are the only means of knowledge. In other words, physical senses cannot find any justification for the universal sweep contained in the orthodox premises of materialism. There is also today an overwhelming view among philosophers of science that the function of science is to describe the processes of Nature and not to venture on what may or may not be lying behind the observable and measurable processes. Science, it has been urged, is precluded from making metaphysical or a ontological affirmations or negations. It is even being maintained by many, if not most, that the so-called metaphysical statements of materialism or idealism or of any other school of thought are literally non-sensical.

Even in the domain of explanations of processes of Nature, the latest trends show the loosening of the orthodox rigidity. The old insistence on law is being supplemented by the perception of chance at work, particularly

in those aspects of the phenomena where there are undeniable but unaccountable freak and fantasy. Even the concept of law has undergone a radical change. It has now been admitted that laws do not describe any inevitable or necessary connections between events or phenomena, but only persistent repetitions of the same rhythms of action, which begin at random by a general chance. It is increasingly acknowledged that a theory of mechanical Necessity by itself does not elucidate the free play of the endless unaccountable variations which are visible in the evolution.

The attempt to explain phenomena is reaching now a breaking point; the rigid insistence on finding material explanations of phenomena is becoming more and more difficult to sustain. Even in regard to the development of a tree out of a seed, there is the difficulty of discovering how the life and form of the tree come to be implied in the substance or energy of the seed. Again, when it is asserted that genes and chromosomes explain hereditary transmissions, not only of physical but of psychological variations, the question as to how psychological variations can be contained and transmitted in the inconsistent material vehicle remains an unanswered mystery. Or while it is being expounded as a cogent account of Nature-process, that a play of electrons, of atoms and their resultant molecules, cells, glands, chemical secretions, and physiological processes manages by their activity on the nerves and brain of a Shakespear or a Plato to produce a Hamlet or a Symposium or a Republic, we fail to discover or appreciate how such material movements could have composed these highest points of thought and literature. It is becoming increasingly clear that the formulae of Science are formulae of a Cosmic Magician, which can explain nothing or everything; and in that situation, the idea of explanation itself is undergoing at present a severe critical examination. Is it not enough, it is being asked, that processes are described? Is there any justifiable meaning in seeking explanations? What is the net effect of all this for materialism? The answer is complex. The orthodox theory of mechanistic materialism has been overpassed.

The idea of causal necessity that had denied freedom in the universe has ceased to dominate the realm of science. Materialism as an ontological theory is no more in the field; the last fort of materialism as an ontological theory and as a sociological theory was Marxism-and that, too, has now collapsed. And yet, all this has not amounted to the denial of materialism. Materialism is still lingering in subtle forms. While matter is no more placed as the ultimate reality, there have emerged formidable methodologies of analysis or empiricism which do away with any conception of ultimate reality, thus preventing the formulation of any possible theory of Spirit as an alternative to crumbling theory or theories of materialism. At the same time, the climate has greatly changed. Science has become less rigid, and it is unable to reject a priori any claim of supraphysical experience. This does not mean that Science has come to accept the realm of supraphysical experience; but when pressed to do so, it does not deny it outright. It stands thus in a

middle position, and from there, it is able to throw the ball in the court of the advocates of the supraphysical and the spiritual with a demand to come up with clinching evidence. This is where the conflict between science and spirituality stands today.

In the meantime, several theories are emerging which tend to weaken the sting of materialism or the outlook that is still fixed on Matter with some kind of exclusive concentration. First, both physics and biology seem to concede that while it is not their business to come up with any ultimate or final explanation of the universe, there seems to be a great deal even in the processes of the universe which are mysterious and in regard to which not any laws but some kind of magical chance could be the only possible answer. But if theory of chance is pressed far enough, it becomes clear that in its very nature it can be put forward not as an inevitable or clinching theory but only as a possible plausible theory. This clearly opens up the possibility of other alternative theories and gives room for the consideration of those theories which are based upon experiences of the supraphysical or spiritual realities. We may also observe that in the field of biology, while the Darwinian theory of evolution by random chance, natural selection, struggle for existence and survival of the fittest is still surviving, powerful trends have emerged to challenge it through such theories as those of vitalism of Bergson, emergent evolution of Alexander, holism of Smutts, ingressive idealism of Whitehead, and spiritual evolution of Teilhard de Chardin. In our own country, Sri Aurobindo's theory of supramental evolution is a formidable answer to Darwinism and to materialism in general.

A major difficulty involved in a possible dialogue between science and spirituality lies in the insistence laid by physical sciences on the application of their methods on all sciences, even when the subject matters are not physical in character. The scientific method is so conceived that no evidence could be accepted as a fact unless it is objective and physical in character; even if the fact be very apparently supra-physical, this method refuses to accept as such unless it is totally unexplainable by other imaginable hypothesis or conceivable conjecture. But it should be evident that this demand for physical valid proof of a supra-physical fact is irrational and illogical. For the method of knowledge should be appropriate to the object of knowledge. If the nature of the object is itself supra-physical, would it be reasonable to demand that it should be physical and should be scrutinisable by means of physical senses? The occult, psychic and spiritual sciences have developed various kinds of evidence of the existence of other planes of being and communication with them. They include objectivisation to the outer sense, subtle-sense contacts, mind contacts, life contacts, contacts through the subliminal in special states of consciousness exceeding our ordinary range. It is normally argued that subjective experience or subtle-sense images can easily be deceptive, since we have no recognised method or standard of verification and a too great tendency to admit the extraordinary and miraculous or supra-natural at its

face value or on the ground of belief. This argument has a great force, and it may be conceded that belief by itself is not evidence of reality, and that it must base itself on something more valid before one can accept it. All truth, supra-physical or physical, must be founded not on mental belief alone, but on experience, but in each case experience must be of the kind, physical, occult or spiritual, which is appropriate to the order of truths into which we are empowered to enter; their validity and significance must be scrutinised, but according to their own law and by a consciousness which can enter into them and not according to the law of another domain. In any field of experience, error is possible; error is not the prerogative of the inner subjective or occult parts of us; even where physical and objective methods are employed, there is room for error. Mere liability to error cannot be a reason for shutting out a large and important domain of experience. As in the physical sciences, so in the supra-physical sciences, it is a reason for scrutinising it and finding out in it its own true standards and its characteristics appropriate and valid means of verification. It is important to observe that the very basis of our objective experience is our subjective being; hence it is not probable that only its physical objectivisations are true and the rest unreliable. The supra-physical consciousness, when rightly interrogated, is a witness to truth and its testimony is confirmed again and again even in the physical and the objective field; that testimony cannot then, be disregarded when it calls our attention to things within us or to things that belong to planes or worlds of a supra-physical experience.

Consciousness is the great underlying fact, the universal witness for whom the world is a field. To that witness, the worlds and their objects appeal for their reality and for the one world or the many, for the physical equally with the supra-physical, we have no other evidence that they exist. In the development of the western thought, two contemporary movements have brought out forcefully the significance of consciousness and subjective experience, namely, phenomenology and existentialism. Unfortunately, they are still circumscribed within a narrow field of subjective experience, and their data have not been wide enough so as to constitute a science of consciousness which can be placed at the same level as the sciences of the physical universe. The question is whether there is or there can be a science of supra-physical data, the scientific character of which is as great as that of the sciences of the physical data. Often we seem to be hesitant to answer this question, and often our claim for spiritual knowledge and its validity is sought to be authenticated on the basis of only a few examples of institutions, divinations, inspirations, or random radical experiences of the soul and the spirit. It does not occur to us that our Indian culture has developed over millennia a multi-sided science through the pursuit of which faculties which lie above the ranges of physical senses and rational intelligence can be developed. This science has developed assured methods resulting from the principles, powers and processes that govern experiences and realisations of the highest possible objects of knowledge. This science is, what Swami

Vivekanand called, science par-excellence. This is Indian yoga, developed and matured by Rishis and yogins of the Veda and the Upanishads and still further perfected in an unbroken chain throughout the history of India right up to our own times. This yoga has been looked upon as practical psychology and yogic methods have something of the same relation to the customary psychological workings of man as has the scientific handling of the natural force of electricity or of steam to the normal operations of steam and of electricity. And they, too are formed upon a knowledge developed and confirmed by regular experiment, practical analysis and constant result. Indeed, yoga is a science-an intuitive science-which deals with the ranges of psychological and spiritual being and discovers greater secrets of physical, psycho-physical and other higher worlds.

As in physical sciences, so in yoga, the object is an assured method of personal discovery or living repetition and possession of past discovery and a working out of all the things found.

Spirituality is thus not a matter merely of sporadic or occasional experience, but a matter of authentic possession of knowledge and effective power of realization and action. It is on the basis of this science that we can bridge the gulf that seems to be existing between science and spirituality. It is on the basis of the yogic knowledge that one can confidently hope to seek enlargement of physical sciences and also to develop the required power of transformation of human limitations, human passions, human ignorance and all the frailties which are found in human nature. The dreams of science can come true, the developments of science can be guided properly, the evil uses to which scientific knowledge normally becomes subject in its application can also be prevented or cured, provided that humanity consents to undertake a great effort that yoga demands. Indeed, mere ethical control, rational control or social control are not enough; even religious piety and religious life of ritualistic worship is not enough; spirituality transcends the limitations of ethics and religion and opens our mind and heart and our total being to the light and power by the infusion of which human nature can begin to be changed, converted and transformed. Science has so far produced its own effects on society, the time has come now when society needs to awaken and produce effects on science and technology.

When science of the physical and those of the supraphysical and the spirit will meet in one spectrum, the individualist age, which brought forth and nourished the modern epoch of science, could culminate into the spiritual age. Problems of this transition and culmination deserve a special and separate study. Fortunately, a detailed study has been made by Sri Aurobindo, particularly in his three major works, *"The Human Cycle"*, *"The Ideal of Human Unity"*, and *"The Foundations of Indian Culture"*. I would like to share three of many illuminating passages from *"The Human Cycle"* which appear to me to have a direct bearing on the subject of this paper. The

first one concerns the basic condition in society that would give us a sign of the coming transition towards the new age.

"... If the common human mind has begun to admit the ideas proper to the higher order that is in the end to be, and the heart of man has begun to be stirred by aspirations born of these ideas, then there is a hope of some advance in the not distant future."¹

The second indicates the comprehensive scope of the spiritual aim of the new age.

"The thing to be done is as large as human life, and therefore the individuals who lead the way will take all human life for their province. These pioneers will consider nothing as alien to them, nothing as outside their scope. For every part of human life has to be taken up by the spiritual, - not only the intellectual, the aesthetic, the ethical, but the dynamic; the vital, the physical; therefore for none of these things or the activities that spring from them will they have contempt or aversion, however they may insist on change of the spirit and a transmutation of the form."²

And the third one gives a glimpse of the nature of various activities of the society at the initial stage of its spiritualisation.

"Therefore a society which was even initially spiritualised, would make the revealing and finding of the divine Self in man the whole first aim of all its activities, its education, its knowledge, its science, its ethics, its art, its economical and political structure. As it was to some extent in the ancient Vedic times with the cultural education of the higher classes, so it would be then with all education. ... It would pursue physical and physical science not in order merely to know the

world and Nature in her processes and to use them for material human ends, but to know through and in and under and over all things the Divine in the world and the ways of the spirit in its masks and behind them... A spiritualised society would treat in its sociology the individual, from the saint to the criminal, not as units of a social problem to be passed through some skillfully devised machinery and either flattened into the social mould or crushed out of it, but as souls suffering and entangled in a net and to be rescued, souls growing and to be encouraged to grow, souls grown and from whom help and power can be drawn by the lesser spirits who are not yet adult. The aim of its economics would be not to create a huge engine of production, whether of the competitive or the co-operative kind, but to give to men - not only to some but to all men each in his highest possible measure - the joy of work according to their own nature and free leisure to grow inwardly, as well as a simply rich and beautiful life for all. In its politics it would not regard the nations within the scope of their own internal life as enormous state machines regulated and armoured with man living for the sake of the machine and worshipping it as his God and his larger self... It would regard the peoples as group-souls, the Divinity concealed and to be self-discovered in human collectives, group-souls meant like the individual to grow according to their own nature and by that growth to help each other, to help the whole race in the one common work of humanity. And that work would be to find the divine Self in the individual and the collectivity and to realise spiritually, mentally, vitally, materially its greatest, largest, richest and deepest possibilities in the inner life of all and their outer action and nature."¹

Kireet Joshi

¹ *The Human Cycle*, (Centenary Edition, Vol. 15), p. 233

² *Ibid.*, p.251

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2402

I have once before told you what I think of the ineffective peckings of certain well-intentioned scientific minds on the surface or apparent surface of the spiritual Reality behind things and I need not elaborate it. More important is the prognostic of a greater danger coming in the new attack by the adversary, the sceptics, against the validity of spiritual and supraphysical experience, their new strategy of destruction by admitting and explaining it in their own sense. There may well be a strong ground for the apprehension; but I doubt whether, if these things are once admitted to scrutiny, the mind of humanity will long remain satisfied with explanations so ineptly superficial and external, explanations that explain nothing. If the defenders of religion take up an unsound position, easily capturable, when they affirm only the subjective validity of spiritual experience, the opponents also seem to me to be giving away, without knowing it, the gates of the materialistic stronghold by their consent at all to admit and examine spiritual and supraphysical experience. Their entrenchment in the physical field, their refusal to admit or even examine supraphysical things was their tower of strong safety; once it is abandoned, the human mind pressing towards something less negative, more helpfully positive will pass to it over the dead bodies of their theories and the broken debris of their annulling explanations and ingenious psychological labels. Another danger may then arise, - not of a final denial of the Truth, but the repetition in old or new forms of a past mistake, on one side some revival of blind fanatical obscurantist sectarian religionism, on the other a stumbling into the pits and quagmires of the vitalistic occult and the pseudo-spiritual-mistakes that made the whole real strength of the materialistic attack on the past and its credos. But these are phantasms that meet us always on the border line or in the intervening country between the material darkness and the perfect Splendour. In spite of all, the victory of the supreme Light even in the darkened earth-consciousness stands as the one ultimate certitude.

Sri Aurobindo
'Letters on Yoga I'

CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH TO BUSINESS MANAGEMENT-I

Men, Materials & Methods

The Consciousness Approach is applicable to any field of human activity. Before considering in depth the specific case of Business Management, let us discuss the fundamental principle upon which the entire approach is based and consider its wider application in the life of an individual. We do so because there can be no clear division between a man's personal and professional life; the two overlap and constantly interact.

This principle denotes that there is a direct correspondence between man's inner life of thoughts, feelings and impulses - his consciousness - and the circumstances and events in his outer environment. The external situation is an extension of his inner consciousness expressed in outer life. This principle is derived from the most universally accepted spiritual knowledge, the truth of Oneness. There is but One Reality which manifests itself as many. All are essentially One. The sense of separation, independence, difference is a surface phenomenon. Yet even on the surface all beings, things and events are linked in mutual inter-dependence. Man's ego acts as a knot dividing the individual from the world around, the inner from the outer. But the fact of oneness remains. This principle implies a very powerful tool for affecting the external world by discovering the point in one's consciousness which corresponds to an outer condition and acting on that point by an inner effort. Normally life events are a reaction to one's inner condition. When a conscious effort is made to change oneself within, life responds to that effort.

If one scrupulously examines the events of a single day in the light of his thoughts, feelings, impulses, a pattern of correspondence will begin to reveal itself. This knowledge can gradually be extended to include all the conditions, circumstances, events in his personal and professional life. Then by a firm decision in the mind or an intense will in the heart one can modify his thoughts, feelings, impulses. He can replace negative attitudes, biased opinions, impatient expectations, confused rambling thoughts with clear, objective, positive mentation or even silent receptivity which allows a higher understanding to be born. He can reject turbulent feelings, insatiable desires, possessiveness and selfish demand to attain a calm, peaceful, harmonious condition in which the deeper emotions of sympathy, goodwill, self-giving and love can emerge. To the degree that this inner mastery and perfection is achieved, outer conditions and events take on a strongly positive and co-operative character. Life brings constant opportunity and fulfils every requirement. The area of one's effectivity depends upon the development of his consciousness and the field of outer life with which he concerns himself, identifies in thought and emotion. It is most powerful in

the close proximity of one's personal environment, family home and profession. As the consciousness grows, expands, enlarges to identify itself with wider fields of human activity, there is an increasing capacity to affect the greater life of the society. This type of effort falls within the domain of Yoga.

In business these correspondences can be seen in all aspects of institutional operation, most easily perhaps in the relationship between management's attitudes and feelings on specific issues and the behaviour of employees. For example, it is a common complaint of management that staff are not interested in the quality of work they do, only in the monetary rewards for the job. Yet in almost all such cases it can be easily verified that the manager is not at all interested in the individual worker for his own sake, only in his productivity. Both look after their own interest and do not bother about any greater good. In unusual cases where the manager truly takes interest in each individual, in his health, welfare, creativity and happiness, the workers are very much concerned about the quality of the work performed and the success of the entire enterprise. In either case, the attitudes and behaviour of the employees toward work are a direct reflection of management's attitudes towards them.

Another common situation is one in which management concerns itself with the happiness and welfare of its employees only when a crisis comes, such as a threatening walk-out or a strike. The corresponding employee attitude is a refusal to work without constant supervision and reprimand. In either case, a sincere attempt by the organizational heads to reverse their attitudes will bring about an immediate change in the behaviour of the staff.

There are any number of examples for this principle, for it expresses itself in an infinite number of ways through every aspect of life. All of the other principles derive from this truth. These separate principles are considered because it is easier for the mind to see life from a single viewpoint and each of these principles looks at the Oneness of Life from a different angle. If one becomes directly aware of the One divine Reality through the practice of Yoga, then all mental principles fall away before the clear perception of the true relationship between all the manifold elements of existence.

All of the illustrations which follow are from the author's personal experience testing these principles in actual practice both in India and in the United States.

An institution cannot be properly described by categorizing it solely in terms of a business, social, political or educational function. It is much closer to the truth that an institution is a living organism with a personality, history, life experiences, skills and capabilities all its own. The original founding idea, concept or ideal, the pioneering individual, the social and economic climate

and context, the prior condition of the field in which it is established, all contribute to determining the character of the institution even in the distant future. All present attributes can be traced back to their seed origin in the past. In Sri Aurobindo's terms, each institution has a mental part composed of the constituting ideals, principles and rules for governing its operations, decision making processes and systems of communication. It has a vital part composed of the energies and dynamic processes which translate plan into action and yield concrete results and it has a physical part, the building, equipment, tools and machines. The individuals employed by an institution contribute their own personal qualities and resources to these different levels. But besides these, every institution is like every individual and every nation, an evolving being which has behind and within it a higher element of divinity, a soul-spark. Like the individual and the nation, the institution can only fulfill itself by discovering this element, bringing all its life into conformity with that living ideal and expressing it in daily functioning. In short, every institution regardless of its nature-political, social, religious and economic- has a role to play in the growth of those who participate in it, a role to play in the growth of the larger community of which it is a part, a rightful seeking for its own fullest and highest development as a manifestation of some aspect of divinity. A business institution is a living organism and, like any person, it responds to us.

The practical value of this viewpoint is immense when rightly applied to a specific institution, a business for instance. First, it makes for a much truer awareness of exactly what the business is and the important role played by so many factors in forming its present makeup. With individuals, it is natural to attribute a particular personality characteristic to a childhood circumstance or other life events. Such an approach yields a fuller comprehension of who the individual is. The same is true of an institution. Secondly, this approach provides a key for the proper understanding and resolution of specific problems in the present. A company is dependent on but not limited by any element such as owner, manager, expertise, sales potential, etc., though all of these contribute to its character and may powerfully influence its very existence. Whoever seeks to truly know the company or fully relate to it, whether he is management, staff, client, etc., can best do so by recognizing this truth and seeking contact with the central personality. Furthermore, to the extent that anyone does relate to the central personality and identify with it, to that extent he gains influence over all aspects of its present existence and future destiny. One individual taking sincere interest can change the functioning of a large enterprise. All depends on the degree of his interest and the application of his will.

There is no matter animate or inanimate that does not respond to attention. In an institution the employees, the ideals, systems of functioning, rules, machinery, material and physical space all require a certain minimum of attention and all of them respond to increased attention by serving better. The result is most pro-

nounced where the attention given is motivated simply by respect and concern for the thing and without demand or expectation. The truth is that the Divine is in all things and all things are Divine. By giving attention in the form of mental interest, loving concern, enthusiasm, physical care, we contact and respect the Divine in matter. Let us consider the role of attention in a number of areas.

Attention to Employees

We have stated earlier that attention given to men creates interest in work. To elaborate, one can see an individual as a whole person and not just in his role as employee, try to know and understand his life circumstances, his goals, strengths, habits, weaknesses, likes and dislikes, problems, attitude towards work, his feelings towards the work. One can treat him according to this knowledge with due respect for his ideas and feelings, desires and needs, interest in his development, concern for his growth, happiness, health and wellbeing. One can translate this knowledge and feeling into concrete attempts to help him whenever that falls within the reasonable scope of one's means and does not threaten to cause undue problems in the relationship between management and staff. It is true that certain rules, positions and formalities should be respected and maintained in behaviour but that does not limit one's capacity to understand and sympathize and should not be used as an excuse for hardness and indifference towards those who serve one. The best means to give attention to men is to take interest in the work that they do and give just recognition, and in that context to provide each worker with the opportunity to constantly learn new skills and obtain new knowledge and exercise new responsibilities appropriate to his capacities. It is possible to provide even the lowliest of workers with the opportunity for advancement by setting clearly before him the steps to perfection in his present work and presenting new opportunities when that perfection is reached. No worker can remain indifferent to the sincere concern of the employer for his growth and well-being. He will definitely respond by showing that same concern in his execution of the work. What responsibility one inwardly feels and accepts for his life, he will automatically feel and express in his work. The inner concern must be genuine but in outer expression the attention should be limited by the extent to which he identifies himself with the work. One will find that when his inner attitude is proper, this identification will follow of itself. Give him the attention he deserves.

One's success can be measured by the effect on an employee's non-work life-either creatively by preparing him for a better job or encouraging him to further education, or at least functionally in terms of his manners, conscience, behaviour, family life, etc. One should encourage the progress of employees even if it seems to be away from the company. Encourage all expansive movements.

There are a number of criteria to ensure that each man receives the attention he deserves :

1. He should be considered as a human being more than as an employee;

2. The job he does should result in psychological satisfaction making him desire to have more work;
3. He should find constantly newer skills added to his capacity;
4. His work-pattern should include a built-in recreation that prevents accumulation of frustration or tension;
5. His work should help to harness all his energies and given them to the work so that tedium, except the physical part, will be minimal;
6. There should be a genuine appreciation and psychological recognition of talents when they are found or freshly emerge. Work must help to reveal and develop these talents.

There is a negative side to attention as well :

1. No man should be given even a little more than he deserves; he must not be in a position to take from the management more than is his due;
2. No more interest should be given than the person's psychological identification warrants;
3. No man should be employed in such a way that only a part of his capacities are utilised. This gives him extra energies which often express themselves in a manner detrimental to the work;
4. No man should be at any work requiring him to give an excessive effort which may create tension and spread to other men;
5. The surest way of bringing trouble into any relationship is to give someone more than what he deserves.

There are cases in which attention should not be given. A manager of a large government service bureau in California complained about the behaviour of one of his staff who kept his office in state of complete chaos, who was always speaking in a loud and crude language to the staff members, interrupting and contradicting them in staff conferences and disagreeing with the manager on every possible occasion. From a description of his behaviour it was obvious that all this was done merely to gain attention from the manager and other employees. In such cases attention should definitely not be given to these negative expressions which only reinforce occurrence. Rather they should be completely ignored. Efforts should be made to identify the underlying sources of the problem and attention applied either silently within oneself or in conjunction with external measures to remove the trouble.

There are innumerable examples illustrating the benefit which results from acting out of compassion, understanding, patience, goodwill, leniency with the faults of others, giving people the freedom to make mistakes and the chance to exercise responsibility. All such qualities will prove a great asset in any work, only they must be applied with one qualification. To the extent that a man identifies himself with the work project, feels a part of it, sincerely works for its progress, both the work and his own personality will benefit from this attitude. Where a man is only interested in himself or is hostile, one may still be compassionate but not allow him to unduly jeopardise the work. It is wrong to exploit others. It is equally wrong to let others exploit you.

Successful industrialists often respond to this point by saying that they have seen it proved in their own business in the early stages when the staff was small and close personal contact with each worker was possible. The men worked enthusiastically and took pride in the production. But later when business expanded and the labour force doubled or tripled in size, it was no longer possible to get to know every man and attend to him. Then the outside unions come in and everything is further depersonalized. The answer to this is for management to continue to give the same close attention to those with whom they work, to their supervisory staff, aides, etc. and in turn to instil the same attitude in these people, encouraging them to take active interest in the lives of those whom they have responsibility for in the work. A manager of 20 men can know each one very well. When the staff expands to 200 he can still take lively interest in twenty and each of them can relate to 20 men under them. It is possible to develop a hierarchy of personal relationship and genuine attention.

Outward attention to another is of limited value if it becomes a matter of policy or habit rather than an expression of genuine inner concern. Yet even in this form it is far better than unconsciousness towards others. Best of all is to strive towards an awareness of the true inner person behind another's appearance, gestures, words, thoughts and feelings. This can only come about by corresponding effort at self-knowledge and self-discovery. Behind the personality of every man the soul resides, a spark of the Divine. By contacting that point in oneself and relating to that same point in others, one will spontaneously bring forth the best qualities in others. They will offer maximum co-operation and reap maximum growth.

Attention to Other Living Beings

Recently there has been an increasing amount of literature about the sensitivity of plants to various types of human stimulation, thought, emotion and touch as well as their response to mechanical stimuli. It is a fact that plants are conscious, though not with the normal human mentality or emotions, and they are highly receptive to mental, emotional and nervous vibrations as well as various forms of physical energy. Like people, plants respond to all positive vibrations - thoughts for their welfare, happy emotions, peace, calm and harmony, etc. They express this response by their rate of growth and the quality and quantity of flowers and fruits. It has also been documented that certain negative vibrations like fear, anger, loud noise or violent chaotic music cause retardation of their development. What is true for plants is even more true for animals.

Attention to Tools and Machines

When a tool breaks or a machine is constantly in need of repair or some item is lost - all these are warnings that one's attention to these things has not been adequate. Constant use means attention to material things. As with living things so with inanimate objects. Not only our outer handling of them but also the thoughts and feelings or unconsciousness we have

concerning them affect their performance and life-span. It is true from our side that an active concern leads to better handling and maintenance. It is also true that concern elicits an active response from the objects themselves. They serve better and even if lost find their way back. For all matter, not only plants animals and men, possess a consciousness. But while in living organisms the consciousness manifests itself as growth, movement, sensitivity, feeling, thought, etc., in inanimate matter it is involved and invisible to sense perception. Nevertheless all matter responds to the consciousness of beings near to it. Also like the living organisms, it is in its essence Divine. If one has progressed far enough in his own conscious development, the inner consciousness of inanimate objects and their response to conscious attention is a matter of everyday experience. Many famous spiritual personalities have been known to treat the objects around them as if they were living beings and there are numerous stories of how the objects have responded by performing far longer than is normally possible without wearing out.

Not only objects but areas of space, rooms and buildings respond to attention. Naturally in most cases the response is more subtle, less easily perceptible. Yet most people are aware that some places have a nicer "atmosphere" than others. In some one feels more comfortable, better able to concentrate, more relaxed, happier, more alert. These qualities are directly attributable to the consciousness of the individuals who normally occupy the place and to the manner of their behaviour. Cleanliness, orderliness, absence of loud sounds or of the expression of anger, positive thoughts and feelings, the presence of beautiful music or fresh flowers, all contribute to creating a positive atmosphere. Once created, this atmosphere actually responds by discouraging the occurrence of such events or the approach of such behaviour as would tend to disturb or diminish its quality. When established in a business enterprise it serves as a powerful influence increasing the efficiency and perfection of the work done as well as the satisfaction enjoyed by those who work in it.

Attention to Systems

Systems of administration, planning, operation, finance,

etc., are not mere forms. They are formulations of the mind. They express a certain equilibrium which is capable of constant improvement. If one reviews the working of systems, examines the basic principles of their functioning, gives continual attention to their maintenance and perfection, they have a tendency to reveal better possibilities for innovation or greater efficiency. When not given regular attention, most systems respond by breaking down partially or completely, or some outside element comes drawing attention to the deficiency. For instance, the system of communication in a business between management and staff or between different departments may be primarily a written formal system with a regular chain of communication or an informal system of notes or oral conversation with fewer restrictions or fixed pathways. In either event if the system is ignored or violated frequently or insufficient effort made to maintain receptivity and flow of ideas, a breakdown in communication may result, leading to misunderstanding of orders, requests, information, feelings, procedures and policy, etc. Any such incident of confusion or failure of adequate communication is an indication that the system itself needs attention and perhaps improvements. Other systems such as mail distribution and response, telephone calls, cleaning, filing, accounting, transportation, food, systems of verification, referral, authorization, education, training, production lines, etc., all follow the same principle.

In any business it is a valuable exercise to periodically list all the operational systems both formal and informal, review their basic function and the procedures established to carry out that aim, and evaluate the quality of the present operation in terms of speed, economy, efficiency, accuracy, harmony etc. Then make efforts to update and improve the system wherever possible by even a small amount.

If the atmosphere is positive, management can initiate a study of the company including employee relations, use of machines, tools and materials, operation of systems, etc. A questionnaire may be a helpful source of information from the staff. Such a study should place emphasis on the possibilities for greater progress and perfection rather than on destructive criticism of others, self-defence or justification of the *status quo*.

Gary Jacobs

*M*oney is the visible sign of a universal force, and this force in its manifestation on earth works on the vital and physical planes and is indispensable to the fullness of the outer life. In its origin and its true action it belongs to the Divine. But like other powers of the Divine it is delegated here and in the ignorance of the lower Nature can be usurped for the uses of the ego or held by Asuric influences and perverted to their purpose. This is indeed one of the three forces- power, wealth, sex- that have the strongest attraction for the human ego and the Asura and are most generally misheld and misused by those who retain them. The seekers or keepers of wealth are more often possessed rather than its possessors; few escape entirely a certain distorting influence stamped on it by its long seizure and perversion by the Asura. For this reason most spiritual disciplines insist on a complete self-control, detachment and renunciation of all bondage to wealth and of all personal and egoistic desire for its possession. Some even put a ban on money and riches and proclaim poverty and bareness of life as the only spiritual condition. But this is an error; it leaves the power in the hands of the hostile forces. To reconquer it for the Divine to whom it belongs and use it divinely for the Divine life is the supramental way for the Sadhaka.

Sri Aurobindo
SABCL Vol. 15 PP. 72-73

THE PROBLEM OF WOMAN

I wish to speak to you about the problem of woman, a problem as old as humanity in its appearance, but infinitely older in its source. For if one seeks to find the law governing it and solving it, one must go back to the origin of the universe, even beyond the creation.

Some among the more ancient traditions, perhaps the most ancient ones, have given as the cause of the creation of the universe the will of a Supreme Absolute to manifest in a self-objectification and the first act of this objectification seemed to have been the emanation of the creative Consciousness. Indeed, these ancient traditions speak habitually of the Absolute in the masculine and the Consciousness in the feminine gender, thus making of the primordial gesture the source of the differentiation between man and woman and, with the same stroke, giving a sort of priority to the masculine over the feminine. Although, in fact, they are one, identical, coexistent before the manifestation, it was the masculine that took the decision first and it was he that emanated the feminine to carry out the decision; which comes to mean that if there is no creation without the feminine, there is neither the feminine manifestation without the preliminary decision from the masculine.

Certainly one could ask whether this explanation is not a little too human. But, to tell the truth, all explanations that man can give, at least in their formulation, must necessarily be human. For, certain exceptional individuals, in their spiritual ascent towards the Unknowable and Unthinkable have been able to go beyond the human nature and identify themselves with the object of their seeking in an experience sublime and, in some way, unformulable. But as soon as they wanted to make others profit by their discovery, they had to formulate it and their formula, in order to be comprehensible, had to be human and symbolic.

One may ask, however, whether it was these experiences and what they reveal that were responsible for the sense of superiority which man bears always towards woman or, on the contrary, it was the sense of superiority so wide-spread that was responsible for the formula given to the experiences.

In any case the indubitable fact is there. Man feels himself superior and wants to dominate, the woman feels oppressed and revolts, openly or secretly; and the eternal quarrel between the sexes continues from age to age, identical in essence, innumerable in its forms and shades.

It is well understood that man throws the whole blame upon the woman, as woman in the same way throws the entire blame upon man. In truth the blame should be equally distributed between the two and neither should boast as being superior to the other. Moreover, as long

as this notion of superiority and inferiority is not eliminated, nothing or nobody can put an end to the misunderstanding that divides the human race into two opposite camps and the problem will not be solved.

So many things have been said and written on the problem; it has been approached from so many different angles that a volume would not be sufficient for an exposition of it in all its aspects. Generally speaking, the theories are excellent; in any case, each one has its own virtue, but the practice has proved less happy, and I do not know if, on the level of achievement we are any more advanced than the stone age. For in their mutual relations, man and woman are, at once and towards each other, quite despotic masters and somewhat pitiable slaves.

Yes, slaves; for so long as you have desires and preferences and attachments, you are a slave of these things and of those persons on whom you depend for their fulfilment.

Thus woman is the slave of man because of the attraction she feels for the male and his strength, because of the desire for a home and for the security it brings, lastly because of the attachment to maternity; man too on his side is a slave of woman because of his spirit of possession, his thirst for power and domination, because of his desire for sexual relation and because of his attachment to the little comforts and conveniences of a married life.

That is why no law can liberate women unless they free themselves; men too likewise, cannot in spite of all their habits of domination, cease to be slaves unless they are freed from all their inner slavery.

This state of secret conflict, often not admitted, but always present in the subconscious, even in the best cases, seems inevitable, unless human beings rise above their ordinary consciousness to identify themselves with the perfect consciousness, to be unified with the supreme Reality. For when you attain this higher consciousness you perceive that the difference between man and woman reduces itself to a difference purely physical.

As a matter of fact, there might have been upon earth originally a pure masculine and a pure feminine type, each with its clearly differentiated special characters; but in course of time, inevitable mixture, heredity, sons resembling their mother and daughters resembling their father, social progress, similar occupation - all this has made the discovery of any pure type an impossibility in our days: all men are feminine in many of their aspects, all women too are masculine in respect of many characters, especially in modern societies. Unfortunately, on account of the physical appearance, the habit of quarrel continues, even aggravated perhaps by the spirit of

rivalry. Both man and woman can, however, in their best moments forget the difference of sex, but it reappears at the least provocation, the woman feels she is woman and man knows he is man, and the quarrel starts again indefinitely, in one form or another, open or veiled and all the more bitter the less it is avowed. One may ask if it will not be so till the day when there will be no longer men and women, but living souls expressing their identical origin in sexless bodies.

For we dream of a world in which all these oppositions will at last disappear, where a being will be able to live and prosper who will be the harmonious synthesis of all that is best in human production, identifying conception and execution, vision and creation in one single consciousness and action.

Until there is this happy and radical solution of the problem, India remains, on this point as on many others, the country of violent and contradictory contrasts, which nevertheless can be resolved into a very wide and comprehensive synthesis.

Indeed, is it not in India that we find the most intense adoration, the most complete veneration of the Supreme Mother, creator of the universe, conqueror of the enemies mother of all the gods and all the worlds, dispenser of all boons ?

And is it not in India that we find the most radical condemnation, the utmost contempt for the feminine principle, Prakriti, Maya, corrupting Illusion, cause of all fall and misery, Nature that decoys, defiles and carries one away from the Divine ?

The entire life of India is saturated with this contradiction. She suffers from it in her mind as well as in her heart. Feminine goddesses are everywhere erected on her altars; it is from their Mother, Durga, that the children of India await salvation and liberation. And yet it is an Indian who said that the Avatar would never incarnate in the body of a woman, for no wellthinking Hindu would recognise him ! Happily, the Divine is not affected by such a narrow sectarian spirit and is not moved by such petty considerations. And when it pleases Him to manifest in a terrestrial body, He cares very little whether he is or is not recognised by men. Besides, through all His incarnations He seems to have preferred children and simple hearts to scholars.

In any case until the appearance of a new conception and a new consciousness compelling Nature to create a new race which will have no need any more to submit to the necessity of animal procreation and will not be under the compulsion of being cut into two complementary sexes, the best that can be done for the progress of the present human race is to treat the two sexes on a footing of perfect equality to give both one and the same education and training and to teach them to find, through a constant contact with a Divine Reality which is above all sexual differentiation, the source of all possibilities and all harmonies.

And perhaps India, the land of contrasts, will also be the land of new realisations, even as she was the cradle of their conception.

*The Mother
Bulletin, April 1995*

To unite your physical existences and your material interests, to associate yourselves so as to face together the difficulties and successes, the defeats and victories of life- this is the very basis of marriage- but you know already that it does not suffice.

To be united in feelings, to have the same tastes and same aesthetic pleasures, to vibrate together in a common response to the same things, one by the other and one for the other- it is good, it is necessary- but it is not enough.

To be one in profound sentiments, your affections, your feelings of tenderness for each other not varying in spite of all the shocks of existence; withstanding weariness, nervous irritations and disappointments, to be always and in every case happy, most happy to be together; to find, under all circumstances, one in the presence of the other, rest peace and joy- it is good, it is very good, it is indispensable- but it is not enough.

To unite your mentalities, your thoughts harmonising and becoming complementary to each other, your intellectual preoccupations and discoveries shared between you; in a word, to make your spheres of mental activity identical through a broadening and an enrichment acquired by the two at the same time- it is good, it is absolutely necessary- but it is not enough.

Beyond it all, at the bottom, at the centre, at the summit of the being, there is a Supreme Truth of the being, an Eternal Light, independent of all circumstances of birth, of country, of environment, of education; the origin, cause and master of our spiritual development- it is That that gives a definite orientation to our existence; it is That that decides our destiny; it is in the consciousness of this that you should unite. To be one in aspiration and ascension, to advance with the same step on the spiritual path- such is the secret of a durable union.

*The Mother
'Mother India', Oct. 1966.*

DIVINE HUMANISM

A good many European scholars and philosophers have found Indian spirituality and Indian culture, at bottom, lacking in what is called 'humanism. So our scholars and philosophers on their side have been at pains to rebut the charge and demonstrate the humanistic element in our tradition. It may be asked, however, if such a vindication is at all necessary, or if it is proper to apply a European standard of excellence to things Indian. India may have other measures, other terms of valuation. Even if it is proved that humanism as defined and understood in the West is an unknown thing in India, yet that need not necessarily be taken as a sign of inferiority or deficiency.

But first of all we must know what exactly is meant by humanism. It is, of course, not a doctrine or dogma; it is an attitude, an outlook-the attitude, the outlook that views and weighs the worth of man as man. The essential formula was succinctly given by the Latin poet when he said that nothing human he considered foreign to him. It is the characteristic of humanism to be interested in man as man and in all things that interest man as man. To this, however, an important corollary is to be added, that it does not concern itself with things that do not concern man's humanity. The original father of humanism was perhaps the father of European culture itself, Socrates, whose mission it was, as he said, to bring down philosophy from heaven to live among men. More precisely the genesis should be ascribed to the Aristotelian tradition of Socratic teaching.

Humanism proper was born-or reborn-with the Renaissance. It was as strongly and vehemently negative and protestant in its nature, on one side, as it was positive and affirmative on the other. For its fundamental character- that which gave it its very name- was a protest against a turning away from, whatever concerned itself with the supra-human, with God or Self, with heaven or other worlds, with abstract or transcendental realities. The movement was humanistic precisely because it stood against the theological and theocratical mediaeval age.

The Græco-Latin culture was essential and predominantly humanistic. Even so, the mediaeval culture too, in spite of its theological stress, had a strong basis in humanism. For the religion itself, as has been pointed out, was deeply humanistic, in the sense that it brought salvation and heaven close to the level of human frailty-through the miracle of Grace and the humanity of Christ- and that it envisaged a kingdom of heaven or city of God-the body of Christ-formed of the brotherhood of the human race in its solidarity.

The Indian outlook, it is said, is at a double remove from this type of humanism. It has not the pagan

Græco-Roman humanism, nor has it the religious humanism of Christianity. Its spirit can best be rendered in the vigorous imagery of Blake; it surrounds itself

With cold floods of abstraction and
the forests of solitude

The religious or Christian humanism of the West is in its essential nature the pagan and profane humanism itself, at least an extension of the same. The sympathy that a St. Francis feels for his leprous brother is, after all, a human feeling, a feeling that man has for man; even his love for an animal or an inanimate object is also a very human feeling, transferred to another receptacle and flowing in another direction. It is a play of the normal human heart, only refined and widened; there is no change in kind.

It goes without saying that, in the East too, there is no lack of such sympathy or fellow-feeling either in the saint or in the ordinary man of the world. Still there is a difference. And the critics have felt it, if not understood it rightly. Indian *bhūṭadayā* and Christian charity do not spring from the same source-I do not speak of the actual popular thing, but of the ideal and ideology; even when the manner of expression is similar or the same in both, the spirit and the significance are different. In the East the liberated man, or the man aiming at liberation, may work for the good and welfare of the world, but also he may not; and, what is more important, when he does so work, the spirit is not that of benevolence or philanthropy, nor is there the ethical sense of duty.

The Indian sage is not and cannot be human in the human way. For the end of his whole spiritual effort is to transcend the human way and establish himself in the divine way, in the way of the Spirit. The feeling he has towards his fellow-beings men and animals, the sentient and the insentient, the entire creation, in fact- is one of identity in the One Self. And, therefore, he does not need to embrace physically his brother, like the Christian saint, to express or justify the perfect inner union or unity. The basis of his relation with the world and its objects is not the human heart, however purified and widened, but something behind it and hidden by it, the secret soul and self. It was Vivekananda who very often stressed the point that the distinctive characteristic of the Vedantin was that he did not look upon created beings as his brethren, but as himself, as the one and the same self. The profound teaching of the Upanishadic *Rishi* is- what may appear very egoistic and inadmissible to the Christian saint-that one loves the wife or the son or anybody or anything in the world, not for the sake of the wife or the son or that body or that thing, but for the sake of the self, for the sake of one's own self that is in the object which one seems to love.

The pragmatic man requires an outward gesture, an external emotion to express and demonstrate his kinship with the creation. Indeed the more concrete and tangible the expression, the more human it is considered to be and all the more worthy for it. There are not a few who

think that giving alms to the poor is more nobly human than, say, to have the abstract feeling of a wide commonality, experienced solely in imagination or contemplation if the Wordsworthian way.

There is, indeed, a gradation in the humanistic attitude that rises from grosser and more concrete forms to those that are less and less so. At the lowest rung and the most obvious in form and nature is what is called *altruism*, or more especially, philanthropy, that is to say, doing good to others, some good that is tangible and apparent, that is esteemed and valued by the world generally. In an altruism refined and sublimated, when it is no longer a matter primarily of doing but of feeling, when, from a more or less physical and material give and take, we rise into a vital and psychological sympathy and intercommunion, we have what is humanism proper. Humanism is transfigured into something still higher and finer when, from the domain of personal or individual feeling and sympathy, we ascend to cosmic feeling, to self-identification with the All, the One that is Many. This is the experience that seems to be behind the Buddhistic compassion, *karunā*.

And yet there can be status even beyond. For, beyond the cosmic reality lies the transcendent reality. It is the Absolute, *neti, neti*, into which individual and cosmos, all disappear and vanish. In compassion, the cosmic communion, there is a trace and an echo of humanism- it is perhaps one of the reasons why Europeans generally are attracted to Buddhism and find it more congenial than Hinduism with its dizzy Vedantic heights. But in the status of the transcendent Self-hood, humanism if totally transcended and transmuted; one dwells there in the Bliss that passeth all feeling.

The Upanishadic summit is not suffused with humanism or touched by it, because it is supra-human not because there is a lack or deficiency in the human feeling, but because there is a heightening and a transcendence in the consciousness and being. To man, to human valuation, the Bodhisattva may appear to be greater than the Buddha; even so to the sick a physician or a nurse may seem to be a diviner angel than any saint or sage or perhaps God himself-but that is an inferior view-point that of particular or local interest.

It is sometimes said that to turn away from the things of human concern, to seek liberation and annihilation in the Self and the Beyond, is selfishness, egoism; on the contrary, to sacrifice the personal delight of losing oneself in the Impersonal so that one may live and even suffer in the company of ordinary humanity, in order to succour and serve it, is the nobler aim. But one may ask, if it is egoism and selfishness to seek delight in one's own salvation beyond, would it be less selfish and egoistic to enjoy the pleasure of living on a level with humanity with the idea of aiding and uplifting it? Indeed, in either case, the truth discovered by Yajñavalkya, to which we have already referred, stands always justified, -that it is not for the sake of this or that thing that one loves this or that thing, but for the sake of the Self that one loves this or that thing.

The fact of the matter is that here we enter a domain in which the notion of egoism or selfishness has no *raison d'être*. It is only when one has transcended not only selfishness, but egoism and all sense of individuality that one becomes ready to step into the glory and beatitude of the Self or *Brahman* or *Sunyam*. One may actually and irrevocably pass beyond, or one may return from there (or from the brink of it) to work in and on the world-out of compassion, or in obedience to a special call or a higher Will, or because of some other thing; but this second course does not mean that one has attained a higher status of being. We may consider it more human, but it is not necessarily a superior realisation. It is a matter of choice of vocation only, to use a mundane figure. The Personal and the Impersonal are two co-ordinates of the same supreme Reality-some choose (or are chosen by) one and others choose (or chosen by) the other, perhaps as the integral Play or the inscrutable Plan demands and determines, but neither is intrinsically superior to the other.

The humanism with which Europe is familiar, both in its profane and religious aspects, would look, from an Indian- Vedantic-standpoint, all 'human, too human'; it was a European who declared it so. It was for this reason that the Promethean prophet conjured man to transcend his humanity anyhow and rise to a superior status of culture and civilisation-of being and consciousness, as we would say.

Indian spirituality envisages precisely such a transcendence. According to it, the liberated soul, one who lives in and with the *Brahman* or the Supreme Divine, is he who has discarded the inferior human nature and has taken up the superior divine nature. He has conquered the evil of the lower nature, certainly; but also he has gone beyond the good of that nature. The liberated man is seated above the play of the three Gunas that constitute the inferior hemisphere of manifestation, *apāra prakṛti*. Human intelligence, human feeling, human sentiment, human motive, even at their best and purest, do not move him. Humanism has naturally no meaning for him. He is no longer human, but supra-human; his being and becoming are the spontaneous expression of a universal and transcendent consciousness. He may not always live and move externally in the non-human way; but even when he appears human in his life and action, his motives are not humanistic, his consciousness lies anchored somewhere else, in the transcendent Will of the Divine that makes him be and do whatever it chooses, human or otherwise.

And yet there is a humanism that is proper to India- it is not 'human humanism' but, as it is called, 'divine humanism'. That is to say, the human formula is maintained, but a new significance, a transcendent connotation is put into it. The general contour of the instrumentation is preserved, but the substance is transmuted. The brain, the heart and the physical consciousness not only change their direction, but their very nature and character. And the Divine Himself is conceived as such a Divine Person- for the norm of the human personality in this view is an eternal verity in the divine consciousness.

Esoteric Christianity also has given us the conception of the Human Divine; but it is somewhat different from the Vaishnava revelation which has found rather the Divine Human. In other words, as I have already said, one has brought down the divinity nearer to human appreciation and has humanised it; in the other, the human has been uplifted and made into an archetypal reality where the human terms are more or less symbols and figures, having not merely a human but a suprahuman significance. The entire Vaishnava *Lila* takes place not on this earth at all, but eternally in the eternal world of the inner consciousness-*cinmaya*-behind all earthly (and human) manifestation and expression. It is the cult of the Divine Human which enunciates the mystic truth that *Man* is greater than all and surpasses even the Vedic Law (which aims usually at the impersonal Absolute). But *Man* here is to be

understood as the Divine Person in his human norm, not the human man at all, as modern humanists of our country would like to have it. It does not mean the glorification of man's human attributes and movements, even if they be most sattvic and idealistic; it refers rather to the divinised type, the archetype that is eternally in the superconsciousness. And when such a *Man* lives and acts on earth, he does so in a manner and measure that do not belong to this place of humanity familiar to us.

-Nolini Kanta Gupta

'Collected works of Nolini Kanta Gupta, Volume 1'

For the ethical being like the rest is a growth and a seeking towards the absolute, the divine, which can only be attained securely in the suprarational. It seeks after an absolute purity, an absolute right, an absolute truth, an absolute strength, an absolute love and self-giving, and it is most satisfied when it can get them in absolute measure, without limit, curb or compromise, divinely, infinitely, in a sort of godhead and transfiguration of the ethical being. The reason is chiefly concerned with what it best understands, the apparent process, the machinery, the outward act, its result and effect, its circumstance, occasion and motive; by these it judges the morality of the action and the morality of the doer. But the developed ethical being knows instinctively that it is an inner something which seeks and the outward act is only a means of bringing out and manifesting within ourselves by its psychological effects that inner absolute and eternal entity. The value of our actions lies not so much in their apparent nature and outward result as in their help towards the growth of the Divine within us. It is difficult, even impossible to justify upon outward grounds the absolute justice, absolute right, absolute purity, love or selflessness of an action or course of action; for action is always relative, it is mixed and uncertain in its results, perplexed in its occasions. But it is possible to relate the inner being to the eternal and absolute good, to make our sense and will full of it so as to act out of its impulsion or its intuitions and inspirations. That is what the ethical being labours towards and the higher ethical man increasingly attains to in his inner efforts.

In fact ethics is not in its essence a calculation of good and evil in the action or a laboured effort to be blameless according to the standards of the world, - those are only crude appearances, - it is an attempt to grow into divine nature. Its parts of purity are an aspiration towards the inalienable purity of God's being; its parts of truth and right are a seeking after conscious unity with the law of the divine knowledge and will; its parts of sympathy and charity are a movement towards the infinity and universality of the divine love; its parts of strength and manhood are an edification of the divine strength and power. That is the heart of its meaning. Its high fulfilment comes when the being of the man undergoes this transfiguration; then it is not his actions that standardise his nature but his nature that gives value to his actions; then he is no longer laboriously virtuous, artificially moral, but naturally divine. Actively, too, he is fulfilled and consummated when he is not led or moved either by the infrarational impulses or the rational intelligence and will, but inspired and piloted by the divine knowledge and will made conscious in his nature. And that can only be done, first by communication of the truth of these things through the intuitive mind as it purifies itself progressively from the invasion of egoism, self-interest, desire, passion and all kinds of self-will, finally through the suprarational light and power, no longer communicated but present and in possession of his being. Such was the supreme aim of the ancient sages who had the wisdom which rational man and rational society have rejected because it was too high a truth for the comprehension of the reason and for the powers of the normal limited human will too bold and immense, too infinite an effort.

Therefore it is with the cult of Good, as with the cult of Beauty and the cult of the spiritual. Even in its first instincts it is already an obscure seeking after the divine and absolute; it aims at an absolute satisfaction, it finds its highest light and means in something beyond the reason, it is fulfilled only when it finds God, when it creates in man some image of the divine Reality. Rising from the infrarational beginnings through its intermediate dependence on the reason to a suprarational consummation, the ethical is like the aesthetic and the religious being of man a seeking after the Eternal.

Sri Aurobindo
'The Human Cycle'

A DREAM OF SURREAL SCIENCE

One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink
At the Mermaid, capture immortality;
A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink
Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.

A thyroid, meditating almost nude
Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal Light
And, rising from its mighty solitude,
Spoke of the Wheel and eightfold Path all right.

A brain by a disordered stomach driven
Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled and fell,
From St. Helena went, perhaps, to Heaven.
Thus wagged on the surreal world, until

A scientist played with atoms and blew out
The universe before God had time to shout.

Sri Aurobindo