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A flame of aspiration for dynamic truth



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## What is the Role of Art?

This is an age of experiments and explorations. We are moving away from a distant classical past reaching out to an unclearly defined future. This is valid even in the realm of Art. The concept of beauty has differed from age to age and from culture to culture. And yet there is a subtler way of appreciating what lies beyond the obvious and creates universal appeal. This applies as much to painting, sculpture and architecture as to poetry, music and dance.

True Art is inspired. But what is not easy to understand is whether the inspiration comes from a lower or a higher plane. Is that which is outwardly appealing necessarily superior in essence? Need that which is superior in essence be necessarily appealing outwardly?

Art should not become utilitarian nor remain esoteric. But a society neglecting Art will vulgarize the profound and create something beautiful but shallow or else with depth but without vitality. It is when Art takes its roots in the psychic and spiritual and its expression is an efflorescence of this truth, that a culture becomes more rich and vibrant.

Unfortunately, economic barbarism today has bred the sensational man who has cheapened Art and has made amusement the prime need of life. Art needs to be focused on as an indispensable influence in refining our emotions, subtilizing our minds and a means of expressing eternal truth. What we should be aiming for is "the highest and most perfect Art which, while satisfying the physical requirements of the aesthetic sense, the laws of formal beauty, the emotional demand of humanity, the portrayal of life and outward reality...reaches beyond them and expresses inner spiritual truth, the deeper not obvious reality of things..."

*Sri Aurobindo, The Hour of God*

To begin with, we need to introduce Art as a necessary part of education at all levels—to be even extrapolated beyond formal education. Art is not simply technique of form. Nor is it limited merely to aesthetic values but also includes life-values, mind-values and soul-values. In short, Art is essential to human evolution. We cannot afford to ignore it.

"The system of education which instead of keeping artistic training apart as a privilege for a few specialists, frankly introduces it as a part of culture no less necessary than literature or science, will have taken a great step forward in the perfection of national education and the general diffusion of a broad-based human culture. It is not necessary that every man should be an artist. It is necessary that every man should have his artistic faculty developed, his taste trained, his sense of beauty and insight into form and colour and that which is expressed in form and colour, made habitually active, correct and sensitive. It is necessary that those who create, whether in great things or small, whether in the unused masterpieces of art and genius or in the small common things of use that surround a man's daily life, should be habituated to produce and the nation habituated to expect the beautiful in preference to the ugly, the noble in preference to the vulgar, the fine in preference to the crude, the harmonious in preference to the gaudy. A nation surrounded daily by the beautiful, noble, fine and harmonious becomes that which it is habituated to contemplate and realizes the fullness of the expanding Spirit in itself."

*Sri Aurobindo, The Hour of God.*

*Editor*

# Prayer

## *The Mother*

Now, Lord, things have changed. The time of rest and preparation is over. Thou hast willed that from the passive and contemplative servitor I was, I become an active and realising one; thou hast willed that joyful acceptance be transformed into joyful battle, and that in a constant and heroic effort against everything which in the world opposes the accomplishment of Thy law in its purest and highest present expression, I find again the same peaceful and unchanging poise which one keeps in a surrender to Thy law as it is now being accomplished, that is, without entering into a direct struggle with all that opposes it, making the best of every circumstance and acting by contagion, example and slow infusion.

In a partial and limited battle, but one that is representative of the great terrestrial struggle, Thou dost put my strength, determination and courage to the test to see if I can truly be Thy servitor. If the result of the battle shows that I am worthy of being the mediator of Thy regenerating action, Thou wilt extend the field of action. And if I always live up to what Thou expectest of me, a day will come, O Lord, when Thou wilt be upon earth, and the whole earth will rise against Thee. But Thou wilt take the earth in Thy arms and the earth will be transformed.

*Prayers and Meditations*

# A Model Framework Of Teaching

*Learning Suitable To Integral Education*

*Kireet Joshi*

It is not intended to present here a model of the required framework as *the* model, but as a tentative and experimental model that could be utilized, with the necessary modifications, for innovative experiments. The new model will be so flexible that it can accommodate or adjust itself with the various programmes of education of varying durations. In particular, this model will aim at providing the necessary structure and organization so as to permit the art of self-learning and integral development of personality as also various combinations of programmes of agricultural, technical, vocational, artistic and academic education. It will also facilitate the creation of the atmosphere and stimulation needed for dynamic methods. Besides, it will also meet the needs of multi-point entry system, non-formal education, part-time education, and of weaving examination system into the learning process itself.

## *I. Grouping of Students*

For each major stage of studies (lower primary, higher primary, etc.) there could normally be sections or groups of about 100 students. The differences of levels of capacities should not very much count in the formation of these large groupings. These groupings would be valid and useful for those areas of studies which yield easily to cooperative work, mass media or to the means of environmental influence. These would include works of productive labour, large portions of language-learning, as also introductory or panoramic portions of a number of subjects where demonstrations, exhibitions or stimulating and interesting lectures are suitable means of communication. These would also be relevant to what may be regarded as peripheral areas of studies, where the imparting of general information is intended. Areas of general explanations, general knowledge, general instructions are also appropriate to these large groupings.

In the general working of the organization, it is better not to have any fixed time-table for the work of these large groupings. Or, if it is found necessary for some reason to have a regular fixed timing, it is better to have it not for the main work but to confine it to what may be termed 'time for supplementary work.'

In any case, the fixed timings of various programmes of education should be so arranged that the hours of fresh study and labour which can be done by individual self-learning are not affected in any way. (The major portion of the daily work should be available to the students for their individual self-learning.)

For purpose of the individual self-learning, there will be, in a sense, no groupings since each individual will be free to choose his own area of work and pursue it at his own pace.

(a) But each teacher will have a number of students who will come to him more or less regularly for consultation of the subject of his competence. These students would, in a sense, constitute for the teacher in question a kind of a natural group. For, although these students will mostly come individually for consultations, they might also come in the form of a group from time to time.

(b) There will be, however, another kind of grouping or break-up of the large group, depending upon the mode of learning that a given topic imposes or upon the mode of learning chosen by the student. There are topics or areas which need to be pursued regularly, systematically, step by step, with rigour, measure and regulated or accelerated speed. Those who choose such topics or such a mode of learning will form a kind of a group—even though each of them may do his work mostly by himself. There are other areas or topics which may permit a leisurely and free pursuit. Those who choose such topics or such a mode of learning will form another group. These groupings will, however, be not tight and inflexible. The same student may belong to one group for a few topics and to another group for other topics; or, with regard to the same topic, he may offer to do both these kinds of work appropriate to both these groups. Thus he will belong to both the groups.

It may be noted that the grouping mentioned above under (a) and (b) will be, more or less, temporary, meant for some specific purpose or project and therefore dissoluble with the purpose in view. These groups will normally tend to be homogeneous from the point of view of capacities, or interests, but there will be no rigidity in this respect. They will often need to have group classes, and sometimes, even a fixed time-table for short or long periods. Normally, time-tables should be fixed for a month or two, reviewable for a longer period, if necessary.

Individual consultations with the teachers will also tend in the direction of regular prior fixation of timings in regard to each student. There are some obvious advantages and conveniences in such fixed appointments. But care should be taken to see that the teachers keep always one or two hours daily unfixed so that students may have the opportunity to come to them from time to time without any prior engagement.

One final point about grouping. If we are watchful, we shall find that, from time to time, there emerge

spontaneously extremely small groups of students who have common feelings and high aspirations, some common character or common trait of personality, even though they may differ in respect of capacities. Their homogeneity is by virtue of character or personality rather than capacities. Such groups are very valuable. They should be recognized, and they should be given all the help needed—individually or collectively. Such groups become, if properly encouraged, transmitters of enthusiasm, dedication and devotion to studies, work and ideals.

In regard to the above system of grouping, three obvious advantages can be mentioned:

(1) There has recently been a strong plea for multi-point entry system, particularly, in relation to the solutions which have been suggested for the implementation of the programme for the universalization of elementary education. It will be noted that this idea of multi-point entry system is extremely valuable, and this system will find a natural setting in the structure that is suggested here. Similarly, this structure will provide a favourable setting for 'unit' studies. And a new system of tests can easily operate in the proposed structure so that tests become a part of the natural rhythm of the process of learning.

(2) It would be possible in this flexible organization to ensure facilities for individual attention which is indispensable, particularly, in the field of moral and spiritual education.

(3) Works of productive labour can flourish in this setting with a naturalness that is so essential to the joy of work. These works need not be given as tasks. But students can be stimulated and encouraged by means of nourishment of interests, environmental needs and influences, as also through the medium of hobbies. In this setting, even specialization of vocational training can be initiated at early stages. General education, diversification of courses and vocationalization—all can blend harmoniously together.

## II. Teachers

(a) The role of teachers in this new organization is crucial. The teachers should have not only competence with regard to their subjects but also the necessary spirit and zeal.

The teacher's main occupation will be to observe his students, their inclinations and capacities, so as to be able to help them with deep sympathy and understanding.

The teacher will not be a mere lecturer, rather he will be an animator. He will inspire much more than instruct; he will guide by example and influence.

To aid students in awakening inner will to grow and progress—this will be the constant endeavour of the teachers.

To evolve a programme of education for each student in accordance with the needs of his growth; to watch the students with deep sympathy, understanding and patience,

ready to intervene and guide when necessary; to stimulate the students with interesting projects and programmes, striking words, ideas, questions and stories—this will be the main work of the teachers.

But to radiate an inner calm and a cheerful dynamism so as to create an atmosphere conducive to the development of the higher faculties of inner knowledge and intuition—that will be regarded as the very heart of the work of the teachers.

(b) In the initial stages, students will need to learn how to organize their freedom; teachers should, therefore, help students in the regard.

(c) For every unit of 100 students, there should be a coordinator of a 'First Teacher' whose functions will be as follows:

(i) *He will be available to students for guidance so as to help them in organizing their work and in learning the art of self-learning as also other ways of learning;*

(ii) *He may, by personal contact provide motivation to the students for various works, topics or subjects, according to the needs and circumstances;*

(iii) *He will ensure that all the material needs of studies and work are provided for;*

(iv) *He will keep an overall record of the work of every student in the unit and he will see that the students get the necessary guidance from himself or from the other teachers or else from the environment;*

(v) *He will also ensure that the entire organization runs smoothly and harmoniously;*

(vi) *He will work as a brother among brothers and will consult all concerned before arriving at decisions; and*

(vii) *He will also give the necessary help in framing time-tables, particularly, in view of the fact that, since there will be no time-tables fixed in advance for the whole year, there will be the need to frame ad hoc time-tables for short or long durations in consultation with students and teachers for various subjects and for various purposes.*

(d) In addition to the First Teachers, it seems practicable that for each major subject, a full-time competent teacher could take charge of about 30-40 students (this number may vary according to the special needs of a given subject and also the age and capacity of the students). These teachers may form themselves into a small committee to help the Coordinator, and maintain a personal contact with the students in the Unit.

(e) Problems of irregularity, indiscipline and misuse of facilities will primarily be dealt with by the Coordinator and his Committee. To this Committee may be nominated some of the best students of the Unit.

(f) All administrative problems should be handled carefully so that all points of view are given their due

weight, and decisions emerge out of consultations.

(g) All work should be carried out by utmost goodwill and cooperative action, rather than by any arbitrary authority.

(h) There should be no place for gossip, politics, canvassing, manoeuvring, ugliness and untidiness. There should be an atmosphere of self-control and utmost inner discipline.

(i) A full-fledged working of this model will pre-suppose new educational material in the form of booklets, work-sheets, charts, maps, pictures, albums, tapes, slides, film-strips, magazines, journals, exhibits, tools, and equipment and apparatus. And new curricula and syllabi have to be worked out, particularly, in regard to interdisciplinary studies and interweaving of work and knowledge. In these tasks, teachers will have to make their own contribution.

(j) The very disposition and arrangement of the classes would be such that the students will have facilities to work on their own and to consult the teachers according to the needs of their progress. Teachers, instead of being at the head of the class, will be found at convenient places so that they are readily available to those who need help, guidance and consultation.

### *III. Organization of the Work.*

In the proposed organization, a special emphasis will fall upon 'individual work', 'Individual work' may be pursued in several different ways;

- (a) by individual consultation or interviews with teachers;
- (b) by doing works such as those of carpentry, knitting, embroidery, decoration, etc.
- (c) by working on work-sheets;
- (d) by studying books or relevant portions of books;
- (e) by quiet reflection or meditation;
- (f) by carrying out experiments;
- (g) by writing compositions; or
- (h) by drawing, designing, painting, etc.

There can be several situations in which a group work is desirable or necessary. There are a number of projects in which there can be a division of labour; there can be educational games of team work; and there can be joint experimentation, joint pursuit of the subject, or collective discussion.

It may, however, be noted that the collective work often tends to become mechanical, and this tendency should be discouraged.

Freedom to choose a work or a subject is a necessary element of the training in the art of self-learning. It is, therefore, necessary that this free choice should be given to the students, but it should be aided by proper guidance

of the teacher so that freedom is not misused. The aim should be that the student's choice should reflect his real and serious quest.

In order to facilitate the freedom of choice, students may be invited to indicate what lines of work or study they would like to undertake. Teachers may present to the students a suggestive but detailed list of suitable works and topics. They may also give a few talks to the students to explain the main outline of the subject in order to stimulate their interest.

Each work or topic selected by the student will constitute a short or a long project, depending upon its nature.

In exploring each project, students will take the help of the teacher, as and when needed.

Teachers, on their part, will endeavour to relate the explanation of the project to the inner needs of the students, and they will be expected to help students widen and intensify the areas of their exploration so as to avoid narrow specialization or a mere idle superficiality.

Each student's programme of studies will be flexible, supple and evolutionary. The student will be encouraged to progress at his own pace; and he will be encouraged also to correlate various topics of study around a given area of productive labour as also to synthesize, more and more progressively, science, fine arts, humanities and technology.

Tests will be given to the students where necessary, and their aim will be to provide to the students occasions for exercise, revision, comprehension, encouragement and self-evaluation.

At the end of every two or three months each student will submit to the Coordinator a report on his work in regard to each topic, subject or work under study. This report will give details of the progress he has made in regard to what he has read or written or the reflections and conclusions he has arrived at. (It is understood that younger students will not be capable of giving this kind of report, and in their case teachers themselves will prepare reports for them.)

The quality of the work will be considered more important than the quantity of the work, although the latter should not be meagre, but commensurate with high standards.

### *IV. Lecture System, Syllabus System and Examination System*

In this organisation, the lecture system will no more be given the central place. Lectures will be used mainly for:

- (a) introducing a subject;
- (b) stimulating interest in a subject;
- (c) presenting a panoramic view of the subject;

- (d) explaining general difficulties or hurdles which are commonly met by a large number of students in their work or studies,
- (e) creating a collective atmosphere with regard to certain pervasive ideas; and
- (f) initiating rapid and massive programmes of 'training'.

Similarly, the syllabus system will also undergo a radical change. A syllabus as a general panoramic view in the vision of the teacher and as a guideline for the student has a legitimate function, and this has to be preserved. But in the actual operation of the educational processes, there have to be what may be called 'evolutionary syllabi'. A syllabus should grow according to the needs of the inner growth of the student; and the student should be free to develop and weave the various elements of his work and studies into a complex harmonious whole.

It may be noted that it is in this setting of 'evolutionary syllabi' that we can truly fulfil the needs of multi-point entry system. Again, it may be noted that it is in this setting that we could have flexible programmes of work and studies suitable to different categories of students, and thus we can have a flexible pattern of education in a general framework which can cater to the needs not merely of a small percentage of students who may be ready and fit to reach the higher levels of academic education, but also of a large number of students who may remain in the educational system only for 4 years, 7 years or a little more. The central point is that the educational programme, whatever its duration, should aim at providing to the students a real base for three things:

- (i) art of self-learning and continuing education,
- (ii) art of noble life, and
- (iii) art of work.

Finally, in the proposed organization, the examination system will also undergo a radical change. Tests will be used mainly for:

- (a) stimulation,
- (b) providing opportunities to the students to think clearly and to formulate ideas adequately,
- (c) achieving precision, exactness and mastery of details,
- (d) arriving at a global view of the subjects or works in question,
- (e) self-evaluation, and
- (f) gaining self-confidence.

Tests will be woven into the learning process, the central thrust of which will be to develop among the students the noble qualities such as those of truthfulness, sincerity, cheerfulness, benevolence, right judgment, sacrifice, cooperation, and friendship.

Tests for placement in the employment market should be conducted by a National Testing Service, and they should be open to anyone who wants to take them. These tests should be related to specific jobs or employment opportunities or certain specific pursuits of studies and disciplines of knowledge and skill.

#### *V. What will be Expected of Students*

To learn the secret of self-education and to work hard so as to remain steadily on the road to self-perfection—this will be the student's constant endeavour.

To study and work widely and intensely, to study and work with joy and application, to study and work to grow and to remain perpetually youthful—this will be the content of his main work.

But to become a fearless hero-warrior in the quest of Truth, Harmony, and Liberty, and to surpass the limitations of his nature by an inner change and transformation—this will be regarded as the very heart of his work.

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*The very first step in reform must therefore be to revolutionise the whole aim and method of our education. We must accustom teachers to devote one-tenth of energy to the education of the active mental faculties while the passive and retaining faculty, which we call the memory, should occupy a recognised and well-defined but subordinate place and we must direct our school and university examinations to the testing of these active faculties and not of the memory. For this is an object which cannot be affected by the mere change or rearrangement of the curriculum. It is true that certain subjects are more apt to develop certain faculties than others; the power of accurate reasoning is powerfully assisted by Geometry, Logic and Political Economy; one of the most important results of languages is to refine and train the power of expression and nothing more enlarges the power of comparison and differentiation than an intelligent study of history. But no particular subject except language is essential, still less exclusively appropriate to any given faculty. There are types of intellect, for instance, which are constitutionally incapable of dealing with geometrical problems or even with the formal machinery of Logic, and are yet profound, brilliant and correct poisoners in other intellectual spheres. There is in fact hardly any subject, the sciences of calculation excepted, which in the hands of a capable teacher does not give room for the development of all the general faculties of the mind. The first of the present methods of teaching in favour of those which countries of Europe.*

*Sri Aurobindo  
Education—Intellectual*



# On the Importance of Original Thinking

*Sri Aurobindo*

We have had recently in India a great abundance of speculations on the real causes of that gradual decline and final arrest which Indian civilisation no less than European suffered during the Middle Ages. The arrest was neither so sudden as in Europe nor so complete; but its effect on our nation, like the undermining activity of a slow poison, was all the more profoundly destructive, pervasive, hard to remedy, difficult to expel. At a certain period we entered into a decline, splendid at first like a long and gorgeous sunset, afterwards more and more sombre, till the darkness closed in, and if our sky was strewn with stars of a great number and brilliance, it was only a vast decay, confusion and inertia that they lighted and emphasised with their rays. We have, most of us, our chosen explanation of this dolorous phenomenon. The patriot attributes our decline to the ravages of foreign invasion and the benumbing influences of foreign rule; the disciple of European materialism finds out the enemy, the evil, the fount and origin of all our ills, in our religion and its time honoured social self-expression. Such explanations, like most human thoughts, have their bright side of truth as well as their obscure side of error; but they are not, in any case, the result of impartial thinking. Man may be, as he has been defined, a reasoning animal, but it is necessary to add that he is, for the most part, a very badly reasoning animal. He does not ordinarily think for the sake of finding out the truth, but much more for the satisfaction of his mental preferences and emotional tendencies; his conclusions spring from his preferences, prejudices and passions; and his reasoning and logic paraded to justify them are only a specious process or a formal mask for his covert approach to an upshot previously necessitated by his heart or by his temperament. When we are awakened from our modern illusions, as we have been awakened from our mediaeval superstitions, we shall find that the intellectual conclusions of the rationalist for all their [.....] pomp & profuse apparatus of scrupulous enquiry were as much dogmas as those former dicta of Pope & theologian, which confessed without shame their simple basis in the negation of reason. Much more do all those current opinions demand scrutiny & modification, which express our personal view of things and rest patently on a partial and partisan view or have been justified by preferential selection of the few data that suited our foregone & desired conclusion. It is always best, therefore, to scrutinise very narrowly those bare, trenchant explanations which so easily satisfy the pugnacious animal in our intellects; when we have admitted that small part of the truth on which they seize, we should always look for the large part which they have missed. Especially is it right, when there are subjective

movements & causes of a considerable extent and complexity behind the phenomena we have to observe, to distrust facile, simple and rapid solutions.

The attitude of mankind towards originality of opinion is marked by a natural hesitation and inconsistency. Admired for its rarity, brilliancy and potency, yet in practice and for the same qualities it is more generally dreaded, ridiculed or feared. There is no doubt that it tends to disturb what is established. Therefore *tāmasic* men and *tāmasic* states of society take especial pains to discourage independence of opinion. Their watchword is authority. Few societies have been so *tāmasic*, so full of inertia and contentment in increasing narrowness as Indian society in later times; few have been so eager to preserve themselves in inertia. Few therefore have attached so great an importance to authority. Every detail of our life has been fixed for us by *Shāstra* and custom, every detail of our thought by Scripture and its commentators,—but much oftener by the commentators than by Scripture. Only in one field, that of individual spiritual experience, have we cherished the ancient freedom and originality out of which our past greatness sprang; it is from some new movement in this inexhaustible source that every fresh impulse and rejuvenated strength has arisen. Otherwise we should long ago have been in the grave where dead nations lie, with Greece and Rome of the Caesars, with Esarhaddon and the Chosroes. You will often hear it said that it was the forms of Hinduism which have given us so much national vitality. I think rather it was its spirit. I am inclined to give more credit for the secular miracle of our national survival to Shankara, Ramanuja, Nanak & Kabir, Guru Govind, Chaitanya, Ramdas & Tukaram than to Raghunandan and the Pandits of Nadiya & Bhatpara.

The result of this well-meaning bondage has been an increasing impoverishment of the Indian intellect, once the most gigantic and original in the world. Hence a certain incapacity, atrophy, impotence have marked our later activities even at their best. The most striking instance is our continued helplessness in the face of the new conditions and new knowledge imposed on us by recent European contact. We have tried to assimilate, we have tried to reject, we have tried to select; but we have not been able to do any of these things successfully. Successful assimilation depends on mastery; but we have not mastered European conditions and knowledge, rather we have been seized, subjected and enslaved by them. Successful rejection is possible only if we have intelligent possession of that which we wish to keep. Our rejection too must be an intelligent rejection; we must

reject because we have understood, not because we have failed to understand. But our Hinduism, our old culture are precisely the possessions we have cherished with the least intelligence; throughout the whole range of our life we do things without knowing why we do them, we believe things without knowing why we believe them, we assert things without knowing what right we have to assert them,—or, at most, it is because some book or some Brahmin enjoins it, because Shankara thinks it, or because someone has so interpreted something that he asserts to be a fundamental Scripture of our religion. Nothing is our own, nothing native to our intelligence, all is derived. As little have we understood the new knowledge; we have only understood what the Europeans want us to think about themselves and their modern civilisation. Our English culture—if culture it can be called—has increased tenfold the evil of our dependence instead of remedying it.

More even than the other two processes successful selection requires the independent play of intellect. If we merely receive new ideas and institutions in the light in which they are presented to us, we shall, instead of selecting, imitate—blindly, foolishly and inappropriately. If we receive them in the light given by our previous knowledge, which was on so many points nil, we shall as blindly and foolishly reject. Selection demands that we should see things not as the foreigner sees them or as the orthodox Pandit sees them, but as they are in themselves. But we have selected at random, we have rejected at random, we have not known how to assimilate or choose. In the upshot we have merely suffered the European impact, overborne at points, crassly resisting at others, and, altogether, miserable, enslaved by our environments, able neither to perish nor to survive. We preserve indeed a certain ingenuity and subtlety; we can imitate with an appearance of brightness; we can play plausibly, even brilliantly with the minutiae of a subject; but we fail to think usefully, we fail to master the life and heart of things. Yet it is only by mastering the life and heart of things that we can hope, as a nation, to survive.

How shall we recover our lost intellectual freedom and elasticity? By reversing, for a time at least, the process by which we lost it, by liberating our minds in all subjects from the thralldom to authority. That is not what reformers and the Anglicised require of us. They ask us, indeed, to abandon authority, to revolt against custom and superstition, to have free and enlightened minds. But they mean by these sounding recommendations that we should renounce the authority of Sayana for the authority of Max Muller, the Monism of Shankara for the Monism of Haeckel, the written *Shāstra* for the unwritten law of European social opinion, the dogmatism of Brahmin Pandits for the dogmatism of European scientists, thinkers and scholars. Such a foolish exchange of servitude can receive the assent of no self-respecting mind. Let us break our chains, venerable as they are, but let it be in order to

be free,—in the name of truth, not in the name of Europe. It would be a poor bargain to exchange our old Indian illuminations, however dark they may have grown to us, for a derivative European enlightenment or replace the superstitions of popular Hinduism by the superstitions of materialistic Science.

Our first necessity, if India is to survive and do her appointed work in the world, is that the youth of India should learn to think,—to think on all subjects, to think independently, fruitfully, going to the heart of things, not stopped by their surface, free of prejudgments, shearing sophism and prejudice asunder as with a sharp sword, smiting down obscurantism of all kinds as with the mace of Bhima. Let our brains no longer, like European infants, be swathed with swaddling clothes; let them recover the free and unbound motion of the gods; let them have not only the minuteness but the wide mastery and sovereignty natural to the intellect of Bharata and easily recoverable by it if it once accustoms itself to feel its own power and be convinced of its own worth. If it cannot entirely shake off past shackles, let it at least arise like the infant Krishna bound to the win, and move forward dragging with it wain and all and shattering in its progress the twin trees, the twin obstacles to self-fulfilment, blind mediaeval prejudice and arrogant modern dogmatism. The old fixed foundations have been broken up, we are tossing in the waters of a great upheaval and change. It is no use clinging to the old ice-floes of the past, they will soon melt and leave their refugees struggling in perilous waters. It is no use landing ourselves in the infirm bog, neither sea nor good dry land, of a second-hand Europeanism. We shall only die there a miserable and unclean death. No, we must learn to swim and use that power to reach the good vessel of unchanging truth; we must land again on the eternal rock of ages.

Let us not, either, select at random, make a nameless hotchpotch and then triumphantly call it the assimilation of East and West. We must begin by accepting nothing on trust from any source whatsoever, by questioning everything and forming our own conclusions. We need not fear that we shall by that process cease to be Indians or fall into the danger of abandoning Hinduism. India can never cease to be India or Hinduism to be Hinduism, if we really think for ourselves. It is only if we allow Europe to think for us that India is in danger of becoming an ill-executed and foolish copy of Europe. We must not begin by becoming partisans but know before we take our line. Our first business as original thinkers will be to accept nothing, to question everything. That means to get rid of all unexamined opinions old or new, all mere habitual *sanskārās* in the mind, to have no preconceived judgments. *Anityah sarvasanskārah*, said the Buddha. I do not know that I quite agree. There are certain *sanskāras* that seem to me as eternal as

things can be. What is the Atman itself but an eternal and fundamental way of looking at things, the essentiality of all being in itself unknowable, *neti, neti*. Therefore the later Buddhists declared that the Atman itself did not exist and arrived at ultimate nothingness, a barren and foolish conclusion, since Nothingness itself is only a *sanskāra*. Nevertheless it is certain that the great mass of our habitual conceptions are not only temporary, but imperfect and misleading. We must escape from these imperfections and take our stand on that which is true and lasting. But in order to find out what in our conceptions is true and lasting, we must question all alike rigorously and impartially. The necessity of such a process not for India, but for all humanity has been recognised by leading European thinkers. It was what Carlyle meant when he spoke of swallowing all formulas. It was the process by which Goethe helped to reinvigorate European thinking. But in Europe the stream is running dry before it has reached its sea. Europe has for some time ceased to produce original thinkers, though it still produces original mechanicians. Science preserves her freedom of inquiry in details, in the mint and anise and cummin of the world's processes, but, bound hand & foot in the formulas of the past she is growing helpless for great ideas and sound generalisations. She sits contented with her treasures; she has combed all the pebbles on the seashore and examined the shoreward gulfs and bays; of the oceans beyond and their undiscovered continents she cries scornfully "They are a dream; there is nothing there but mists mistaken for land or a waste of the same waters that we have already here examined." Europe is becoming stereotyped and unprogressive; she is fruitful only of new and ever multiplying luxuries and of feverish, fiery & ineffective changes in her political and social machinery. China, Japan and the Mussulman States are sliding into a blind European imitativeness. In India alone there is self-contained, dormant, the energy and the invincible spiritual individuality which can yet arise and break her own and the world's fetters.

It is true that original thinking makes for original acting, and therefore a caution is necessary. We must be careful that our thinking is not only original but thorough before we even initiate action. To run away with an isolated original idea, or charmed with its newness and vigour, to ride it into the field of action is to make of ourselves cranks and eccentrics. This world, this society, these nations and their civilisations are not simple existences, but complex & intricate, the result of a great organic growth in many centuries, sometimes in many millenniums. We should not deal with them after snatching at a few hurried generalisations or in the gust and fury of a stiff fanaticism. We must first be sure that our new

thought is wide and strong winged enough, our thoughts large enough, our natures mighty enough to deal with those vastnesses. We must be careful, too, to comprehend what we destroy. And destroy we must not unless we have a greater and more perfect thing to put in the place even of a crumbling and mouldering antiquity. To tear down Hindu society in the spirit of the social reformers or European society in the spirit of the philosophical or unphilosophical Anarchists would be to destroy order and substitute a licentious confusion. If we carefully remember these cautions, there is no harm in original thinking even of the boldest and most merciless novelty. I may, for example, attach unsparingly the prevailing system of justice and punishment as extraordinarily senseless and evil, even if I have no new system ready-made to put in as its successor; but I must have no wish to destroy it, senseless & evil though it be, until our new system is ready. For it fills a place the vacancy of which the Spirit that uplifts & supports our human welfare, would greatly abhor. I may expose, too, the weaknesses and narrowness of an existing form of religion, even if I have no new & better form to preach of my own, but I must not so rage against those weaknesses as to destroy all religious faith and I should remember before the end of my criticism that even a bad religion is better than no religion,—that it is wiser to worship energy in my surroundings with the African savage than to be dead to all faith and all spirituality like the drunkards of a little knowledge—for even in that animal and unintelligent worship there is a spark of the divine fire which keeps humanity living, while the cultured imperial Roman or the luxurious modern wealth-gatherer and body worshipper drags his kind into a straight and well built road which is so broad only to lead more easily to a mighty perdition—*na ched ihavedin mahati vināshthih*. Otherwise there is no harm in spreading dissatisfaction with fetish worship or refusing praise to an ancient and cruel folly. We need not be troubled if our thinking is condemned as too radical or even as reckless & revolutionary,—for the success of revolutionary thought always means that Nature has need of one of her cataclysms; even otherwise, she will make of it whatever modified use is best for our present humanity. In thought as in deeds, to the thinking we have a right, the result belongs to the wise & active Power of God that stands over us & in us originating, cherishing, indefatigably dissolving and remoulding man and spirit in the progressive harmonies of His universe. Let us only strive that our light should be clear, diffused and steady, not either darkness or a narrow glare and merely violent lustre. And if we cannot compass that ideal, still it is better to think than to cease from thinking. For even out of darkness the day is born and lightning has its uses!

*Essays Divine and Human*

# The Future of The Family

*Kishor Gandhi*

*(In July 1960 the author had submitted a brief synopsis of his lectures on the subject of the Family to the Mother for approval before taking up for teaching it in the Sociology class of the Higher Course of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. In the synopsis he had mentioned that in the view of some of the contemporary social thinkers the modern Western family had now become so insecure that it was likely to break down in the near future. The mother while seeing the synopsis asked for information as to what he was going to say on this point and also remarked that in her view the breakdown of the family "was, and is still, an indispensable movement to bring humanity to a higher and broader realisation.")*

*The author prepared for the Mother's information a brief note on the recent developments in the modern family which were considered likely to bring about its breakdown, and also put some questions to her apropos of her above remark.*

*The Mother read the note and answered the questions. This note is given below followed by the author's questions and the Mother's answers.*

*Afterwards the author wrote an article to explain the Mother's remark from the standpoint of the higher evolution of humanity. Some points made in the brief note first submitted to the Mother are reiterated in this article for further elaboration. This article is placed after the questions and answers)*

(I)

## ***A Brief Note on the Modern Family***

Certain developments in modern times in the family system, especially in the Western European countries, have made it so very insecure that it has led some contemporary social thinkers to conclude that this system will in the near future disintegrate and disappear. These developments are briefly stated below.

The family system which prevailed in Western Europe until about the nineteenth century was the "extended" patriarchal system of the feudal times. It was entirely of an authoritarian type in which the male family head wielded almost complete authority in all matters and the woman was altogether subordinated to him. She had hardly any political, legal or property rights of her own and was mostly treated as a "minor" or a "ward". This authority of man over woman was supported by the Church and the State and the cultural traditions of the western society.

This patriarchal family was also an economic unit, owned and managed by the male family head. Besides the economic functions it also performed a large number of other functions—political, religious, educational, cultural, etc. It was thus a multi-functional group.

This system was subjected to the very powerful influences of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, which not only radically revolutionised the economic structure of the Western society but also transformed in a brief period the entire social order. These influences, combined with the new democratic trends of the modern age, swiftly undermined the authoritarian traditions in the State and the Church and also in the family system, with the result that the domination of the male family head over his wife and children was considerably decreased.

At present in a number of European countries women have almost equal social, political, legal and property rights as men. The same equalitarian trend is powerfully operating in all the other European and Asiatic nations where the woman's status still remains inferior to man's.

Also a large number of economic and other functions which the Western family used to perform before the modern period have now been taken over by other social agencies which perform them with greater efficiency and more economy. The factory, the school, the hospital, etc., have taken over the productive, educational and nursing functions formerly carried out within the family, and even the household functions like laundering, preserving and baking, and in some measure even cooking and cleaning, are now more and more passing out into the hands of specialised agencies outside the family.

One important result of the transfer of these functions has been the reduction of the size of the earlier "extended" family. The economic activities of the family no longer require the assistance of relatives and married children, hence there is no need for their staying in the household. This contraction in the family size is further increased by the widespread use of contraceptive devices. The use of these devices for prevention and reduction of children has considerably reduced the burden of parental functions in the modern family, and even this reduced burden is further lightened by the growth of various social agencies like the maternity hospital, the baby clinic, the creche, the kindergarden and the "baby-sitter".

The only functions that still remain with the small modern

urban family are the satisfaction of sex-impulse, the need for companionship, the desire for children and the provision of home comforts. It is on these functions that the continued existence of family depends. But it is becoming evident that even these functions are not satisfactorily fulfilled by the present family system. Several recent investigations have proved that there is widespread discord and unhappiness in the family, as attested by the increasing number of divorces, separations and desertions. Formerly the family was held together by several bonds, but now only a few bonds remain, and they too are subjected to such extreme strains that they might snap.

These developments have led some social thinkers to conclude that the modern family has hardly any important functions left to perform and therefore it will wither away in the future. They are afraid that it will break down and disappear as there is no justification left for its existence. All of them do not consider such a breakdown to be an undesirable thing. There are others, however, who believe that the functions that still remain with the family are sufficiently important and durable to prevent the family system from completely disintegrating in the future, and that it will survive in some modified form.

## (II)

### *The Mother's Answers to Questions on the Future of the Family.*

In reference to the view of some modern social thinkers expressing fear of the possible breakdown and disappearance of the family system, you have remarked that this breakdown "was, and is still, an indispensable movement to bring humanity to a higher and broader realisation."

This raises some important questions which I state below for your clarification:

1. *Do you consider this dissolution of the family system indispensable only for the few exceptional individuals who follow some high mental or spiritual ideal or also for the general humanity?*

"Yes only for the few exceptional individuals who follow some high mental or spiritual ideal."

2. *If you advocate a complete dissolution of the family system for the entire humanity, do you consider it advisable to happen even before the new process of birth by direct materialisation has been normalised on earth?*

"More liberty and plasticity in the system are advisable—Fixed rules are harmful to evolution."

3. *Do you also consider the abolition of the marriage system as equally indispensable as the abolition of the family system for the higher development of humanity? So long as the new process of birth has not been normalised, would not the present manner of sexual procreation continue? In that case, would not some form of marriage relationship be necessary?*

"Marriage will always take place, but legal ceremonies

must not be enforced, to avoid illegality."

4. *So long as the new process of birth has not been normalised and the children continue to be born through the present sexual process, is not the family life and its atmosphere best suited to their upbringing, especially in their early formative years? The other alternative is to provide for their care and upbringing through some other agency, like the state nurseries, as was advocated by some communist thinkers. But this view has not found many supporters, for it has been realised that the tender and affectionate care which the young children need could best be provided only in the intimate atmosphere of the family home by the parents. If this is true, then for the sake of the young children at least, would not the family be necessary until the new method of birth becomes possible and normal in the future?*

"Here also both things must be equally admitted and practised. There are many cases in which it would be a blessing for the baby to be separated from his parents.

"A minimum of rules

"A maximum of freedom.

"All possibilities must have equal scope for manifestation, then humanity will progress more rapidly."

21-7-1960

## (III)

### *The Family in the Future Evolution*

#### (1)

From the preceding brief survey of the developments in the family system in modern times, especially in Europe, it is quite evident that it has now reached a critically precarious situation where it is confronted with the poignant question of its destiny: Will it survive in the future evolution of humanity or will it break down and fade out of existence?

Before we attempt an answer to this question it is necessary to bear in mind that the critical situation in which the family finds itself at the present juncture is not confined to it only. It is a part or rather a symptom of the general evolutionary crisis with which humanity is now faced and which expresses itself in different ways in all the different spheres of its life. It is a crisis because all the old forms and values by which men have been living so far have now become meaningless and bankrupt, and an acute need is felt to break through them, to take a bold leap into the future and to recreate the whole life in the light of some new truth. Such critical periods come in the evolution of humanity after long centuries and are called by Sri Aurobindo the Hours of God. The whole destiny of mankind and, at the present juncture, even its very existence as a race, depends on how man faces and resolves this crisis. If he faces it with a clear perception of the significance of the issues involved and resolves them with unfaltering faith and courage, he will rise to a new stature of superhuman being. But if he fails to meet this challenge of evolutionary Nature due to blindness or short-

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Works of the Mother*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 14, p. 314.

sightedness or lack of faith and courage, he will not only not progress farther, nor will remain where he is, but will fall back and may even be annihilated as a race from the face of the earth.

It is in the context of this general evolutionary crisis that we have to consider the crisis of the present family system. What is happening in it now is not a phenomenon apart and unrelated to the other spheres of human life, but part of a general phenomenon manifesting itself everywhere. Only, in this sphere the crisis is not only acute as elsewhere, but also poignant because it touches the intimate personal relationship of man and woman. The whole future of man-woman relationship hangs on how this crisis in the modern family is resolved.

(2)

Thus to have a true understanding of the crisis in the modern family it is necessary first to realise the precise significance of the basic issues involved and then to consider them in the context of the general evolutionary crisis of humanity. This can only be done if we look behind the outward perplexing facts and embarrassing circumstances with which the modern family is besieged and try to gauge the meaning of the deeper factors involved; for the outward facts and circumstances are only symptoms of the inner malady.

What has happened to the family system in modern times is in essence a sufficiently clear phenomenon if we interpret truly the significance of the historical circumstances which have brought it to its present condition and landed it in its present dilemma. Till the beginning of the modern period the patriarchal family system which prevailed in the West was a multi-functional social unit, but the economic, political, religious, educational and some other functions which it used to perform are not the essential or intrinsic functions of the family; they are not its *raison d'être*. They were performed by the patriarchal family for various contingent reasons associated with its past historical development. As a result of the intense pressure of the swiftly accelerated pace of social evolution in modern times the family has been rapidly divested of these extraneous unessential functions and is now left only with its intrinsic essential functions. This is a common phenomenon affecting the development of all social institutions, and is the result of the process of increasing differentiation or specialisation of structures and functions which occurs not only in the evolution of society but in the evolution of the whole organic world. Due to the operation of this process the social evolution in its progression breaks up the integrated unity of the earlier simpler social institutions into increasingly diversified and differentiated specialised units, with the result that the original institutions are left only with their essential functions while the other contingent functions are taken over by newly developed specialised agencies which perform them more efficiently than the original institutions. This is the real explanation of the continuous and increasing differentiation of social forms and

functions which in modern times has given rise to innumerable new specialised institutions and associations in all spheres. The family too has been subjected to the inevitable operation of this process and as a result its earlier multi-functional integration is now broken up into a number of newly developed social agencies which have taken over most of its earlier functions. It is now left only with its minimum essential functions, the functions which it alone can adequately perform, which seem to be its *raison d'être*, and on which therefore its continued existence depends.

Not only is the modern family now left with its bare essential functions but even these functions are increasingly subjected to a searching test in the present critical evolutionary situation. The family is now more and more pressed to prove the value of the few functions that remain with it for the future life of man. It successfully proves their survival-value then only will it pass the evolutionary test and will have a secure place in man's future life. Otherwise the relentless pressure of evolutionary Nature will slowly dissolve or swiftly destroy it and make it a relic of the past. The future historian will treat it as a transitional social form which had its temporary utility at a certain stage of man's evolution in his past imperfect development but which had to be discarded in his evolution towards a higher perfection.

What are the essential functions which are now left with the modern family? As mentioned before, the main functions which the family now performs and which it alone can perform are the fulfilment of four basic human needs and desires; the need for the satisfaction of the sex-impulse, the need for companionship, the desire for children and the desire for home comforts and security.

So the whole issue of the future of the family turns upon this question: Will these needs and desires have any place in the future evolution of man? If they will have a place in it, then the family will survive in some form or other. But if they will have no place in it because he will outgrow and discard them, then the family will have no chance of survival. It will break down and disappear because it will have outlived its utility and will have no function left to perform in the future.

(3)

The answer to the question whether the needs which the present family system fulfils will have a place in the future life of man or not depends upon our conception of man's future evolution. Different thinkers hold different views regarding the nature, the significance and the goal of human evolution and they explain the present evolutionary crisis according to the view they hold.

In Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's view the essential aim of human evolution through all its successive cycles is the evolution of human consciousness from the primitive physical level to the highest level of the spiritual and the gnostic consciousness. Man

begins his career on earth as an infrarational being, living individually and socially in his physical and vital consciousness engrossed in the satisfaction of his physical and vital needs and desires. This, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the initial stage of barbarism. It is followed by the stage of culture in which man awakens to the mental life, lives predominantly in his mental consciousness, pursues mental aims and tries to mould his individual and social life in the light of the high intellectual, ethical and aesthetical ideals. This again is followed by the stage of the Spirit in which man transcends his mental consciousness, emerges as a spiritual being and moulds his individual and communal existence according to the truths of the Spirit. But the transition from one stage of human evolution to a higher one is not accomplished smoothly in a straight line; it proceeds by a cyclic movement in which the final leap is always marked by an acute tension and crisis created by the conflict between the resistance of the old established forces that try to persist and the pressure of the new truth that seeks to emerge. It is only if, after however long a struggle, the pressure of the new truth succeeds in breaking the resistance of the old forces, that man rises to a new evolutionary stage and lives on a higher level of consciousness, recreating his existence in the light and power of a greater truth.

According to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, humanity at the present juncture of its development has reached such a crisis which is the cause of the extreme tension which the modern man feels in his life and consciousness. This tension is created by the conflict between the present vital-mental consciousness by which the modern man is still governed and the new spiritual consciousness that is now pressing to emerge. The dilemma of the modern man is that though his life is still so much dominated by the desires and passions of his vital consciousness that they have made even his mental ideals their servants and instruments, yet he finds no longer any lasting satisfaction in this life; he is haunted by a deep-seated sense of frustration, an increasing restlessness and a burning void at the core of his life. He is not able to shake off the grip of his vital self and its insistent demands, but neither does he feel any real satisfaction in it. Blindly he is seeking for something which will bring him deliverance from the restless turmoil and the intolerable tension of his present way of life, something which will give him abiding peace and harmony and unflinching joy and satisfaction. It is this dilemma that confronts the modern man in all spheres of his individual and social existence and the only true solution of it is for him to realise that it is a reflection in him of the evolutionary crisis which can only be resolved if he understands that the present vital-mental consciousness which is still the governing centre of his life is no longer sufficient and the call of evolutionary Nature on him is to rise to the higher spiritual consciousness and new-create his being and life in the truth of the Spirit.

(4)

According to Sri Aurobindo, the entire structure of human society has originated from and is maintained and governed

by the vital life-power in man which is indeed the primary power of life, "the base of our existence upon earth... that which the others take as their starting-point and their foundation."<sup>1</sup> The principle and aim of this vital life-power is "to be, to assert its existence, to increase, to expand, to possess and to enjoy: its native terms are growth of being, pleasure and power."<sup>2</sup> It is "moved by two equally powerful impulses, one of individualistic self-assertion, the other of collective self-assertion; it works by strife, but also by mutual assistance and united effort; it uses two diverse convergent forms of action, two motives which seem to be contradictory but are in fact always coexistent, competitive endeavour and co-operative endeavour. It is from this character of the dynamism of life that the whole structure of human society has come into being, and it is upon the sustained and vigorous action of this dynamism that the continuance, energy and growth of all human societies depends."<sup>3</sup>

This vital life-power which has created and which sustains the whole human social structure has also created and sustains all the institutions and forms of social life and governs them with its basic instincts of power and pleasure and its motive-impulses of individualistic competition and collectivistic co-operation. The family also like all the other social institutions is, according to Sri Aurobindo, a creation of man's vital nature. It exists for the satisfaction of man's vital instincts and is governed by the basic instincts and motive-impulses of the vital life-power in him. Though both the competitive and co-operative impulses are always co-existent in family life, as in all social life, the competitive individualistic impulse is from the psychological viewpoint naturally primary and determines the initial character of the family. As Sri Aurobindo puts it :

"The primary impulse of life is individualistic and makes family, social and national life a means for the greater satisfaction of the vital individual. In the family the individual seeks for the satisfaction of his vital instinct of possession, as well as for the joy of companionship, and for the fulfilment of his other vital instinct of self-reproduction. His gains are the possession of wife, servants, house, wealth, estates, the reproduction of much of himself in the body and mind of his progeny and the prolongation of his activities, gains and possessions in the life of his children; incidentally he enjoys the vital and physical pleasures and the more mental pleasures of emotion and affection to which the domestic life gives scope"<sup>4</sup>

The second basic impulse of the vital life-power, the collectivist or the co-operative, modifies the operation of the primary individualistic tendency in the family but does not alter its fundamental vital egoistic character. As Sri Aurobindo explains:

<sup>1</sup> *The Human Cycle*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 15, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

“For this growing collectivist or co-operative tendency embodies the second instinct of the vital or practical being in man. It shows itself first in the family ideal by which the individual subordinates himself and finds his vital satisfaction and practical account, not in his own predominant individuality, but in the life of a larger vital ego. This ideal played a great part in the old aristocratic views of life; it was there in the ancient Indian idea of the *kula* and the *kuladharmā*, and in later India it was at the root of the joint-family system which made the strong economic base of mediaeval Hinduism. It has taken its grossest Vaishya form in the ideal of the British domestic Philistine, the idea of the human individual born here to follow a trade or profession, to marry and procreate a family, to earn his living, to succeed reasonably if not to amass an efficient or ostentatious wealth, to enjoy for a space and then die, thus having done the whole business for which he came into the body and performed all his essential duty in life,— for this apparently was the end unto which man with all his divine possibilities was born! But whatever form it may take, however this grossness may be refined or toned down, whatever ethical or religious conceptions may be superadded, always the family is an essentially practical, vitalistic and economic creation. It is simply a larger vital ego, a more complex vital organism that takes up the individual and englobes him in a more effective competitive and co-operative life unit.”<sup>1</sup>

The vital egoistic life of man is, no doubt, influenced by the higher mental idealistic values and aspirations, but they remain as yet only influences which at best succeed only in elevating and refining it to a very limited degree but are not able to change its fundamental character, with the result that the whole social structure and all its forms and institutions remain till the present day vitalistic in their essential nature and are governed by the vital egoistic impulses and motives. The family, too, in spite of all the finer and nobler idealistic elements that partially and occasionally enter into the relations of its members, still retains fundamentally its vitalistic character. This is true not only of its past developments but also of its present condition. Not only the functions which it had been performing in the past and which it has now lost were essentially vital egoistic in their origin and development, but even the few functions that are now left with it are equally and in fact more of the same character.

And since, in Sri Aurobindo's view, man in his future evolution will have to outgrow his vital egoistic nature, the family, along with all other social institutions of man created for the satisfaction of this vital nature, must also break down and disappear. If, however, he still clings on to the family relationships, they will not only retard but may even altogether prevent his higher spiritual evolution

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 150-51

because they will keep him enslaved to the instincts and cravings of his vital nature, the liberation from which is an indispensable necessity of all spiritual endeavour.

(5)

It is to this indispensable necessity that the Mother draws pointed attention when she says:

“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 woman 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.”<sup>1</sup>

These slaveries of man and woman in their mutual relationship are precisely the vital desires and needs for the satisfaction of which the modern family still retains its existence; they are in fact the only functions which it now performs and which have remained with it after all other functions which it used to perform in the past have fallen away from it. These functions still remain with it because man and woman in their present state are still centrally dominated by their vital nature and live mostly for the satisfaction of their vital needs and desires.

But the imperative need for the future evolution of humanity is that it must liberate itself from all the slaveries and attachments of the vital ego, and break all the chains that keep it tied down to its lower vital nature and prevent its ascension to the higher spiritual nature. In this liberation from its lower vital egoistic nature all the social institutions which it has created in the past and which still persist in the present will inevitably break down and disappear because there will be no necessity or justification left for their existence. It is for this reason that the Mother remarked that the breakdown of the family “was, and is still, an indispensable movement to bring humanity to a higher and broader realisation.”

<sup>1</sup> *The Problem of Woman*, Bulletin of Physical Education, Vol. VII, No. 2, April 1955, pp. 45 and 47.



This remark of the Mother clearly means that the family and all the domestic relationships of which it is constituted—the relationships of husband and wife, of parents and children, etc.— will have no place in the future evolution of humanity because they are intrinsically vital-egoistic relationships which will have no place in the higher spiritual life. And the remark also means that those who seek or aspire for that higher life cannot arrive at it if they do not break the family ties. So the breakdown of family will not be only a result of a man's rising to the higher spiritual consciousness; it is also an essential prerequisite of his rising to that consciousness; it is not only a consequence of the spiritual realisation but a condition of the spiritual path. The spiritual realisation that is the goal of the future evolution can only be attained by man after a long and arduous endeavour and it is an indispensable necessity of this endeavour that he should make himself free of all family ties. Otherwise they would prove to be formidable hindrances on his way; they would be powerful drags constantly pulling him down from the steep ascent towards his goal and may even altogether prevent him from reaching that goal.

This, in essence, is the view of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother about the future of the family and all family relationships, stated in trenchant terms.

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Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, however, say that though humanity has at present arrived at a critical situation, it is only a few individuals who realise that it is an evolutionary crisis and the only way to resolve

it is to break the present limitations of human consciousness and rise to a higher spiritual stature of being. The common mass of humanity and even most of the modern thinkers have no true understanding of this situation and of the right way of dealing with it.

And even the few individuals who have the true understanding of it have not always the requisite capacity to undertake the spiritual endeavour and work it out effectively in their life. It is only some exceptional individuals who have the adequate capacity to meet the demand of the evolutionary Nature, who have the intrepid courage and resolute faith to accept its challenge and to answer the present call of the Hour of God. They are those in whom the evolutionary nisus is intensely concentrated and through whom evolutionary Nature will work out the crucial transition from the present humanity to the New Race of Supermen. They are the pioneers of the New Age, the true elite, the vanguard of humanity in this supremely creative endeavour. They are the "exceptional souls", as the Mother calls them, her true children wherever they may be. The whole future of mankind depends upon them.

In the view of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the complete breakdown of the family and all family relations is an indispensable condition only for these exceptional individuals and not for the general mass of humanity which feels no urgent call for the spiritual life even at this crucial hour.

*'Social Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo  
and the New Age'.*

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*It must be remembered that Indian social life has subordinated almost entirely the individual to the family. Men and women do not marry according to their free will; their marriages are mostly arranged for them while they are still children. Not only so, but the mould of society has been long of an almost iron fixity putting each individual in his place and expecting him to conform to it. You speak of issues and a courageous solution, but in this life there are no problems and issues and no call for a solution—a courageous solution is only possible where there is freedom of the personal will; but where the only solution (if one remains in this life) is submission to the family will, there can be nothing of the kind. It is a secure life and can be happy if one accommodates oneself to it and has no unusual aspirations beyond it or is fortunate in one's environment; but it has no remedy for or escape from incompatibilities or any kind of individual frustration; it leaves little room for initiative or free movement or any individualism. The only outlet for the individual is his inner spiritual or religious life and the recognised escape is the abandonment of the samsar, the family life, by some kind of Sannyasa. The Sannyasi, the Vaishnava Vairagi or the Brahmachari are free; they are dead to the family and can live according to the dictates of the inner spirit. Only if they enter into an order or Ashram, they have to abide by the rules of the order, but that is their own choice. Society recognised this door of escape from itself; religion sanctioned the idea that distaste for the social or worldly life was a legitimate ground for taking up that of the recluse or religious wanderer. But this was mainly for men; women, except in old times among the Buddhists who had their convents and in later times among the Vaishnavas, had little chance of such an escape unless a very strong spiritual impulse drove them which would take no denial. As for the wife and children left behind by the Sannyasi, there was little difficulty, for the joint family was there to take up or rather to continue their maintenance.*

*Sri Aurobindo  
Letters on Yoga, Cent Ed Vol 23*

# Revivalism and Secularism

*K.D.Sethna*

Again and again in current Indian politics feelings have run high about the issue of the Secular State and the question has sprung to the fore: Should our country, with its huge Hindu majority, be revivalist or, because of its multi-communal character, secular?

If we are to see straight, the confusion which hangs round the terms "revivalism" and "secularism" must be cleared. People who call themselves progressive look upon all revivalist tendencies as if they were the plague: they understand these tendencies to be pure and unadulterated communalism. Intolerant Hindu sectarianism on the rampage is their notion of whoever seems to be a revivalist. It must be admitted that there is a good number of Hindu bigots and we cannot sufficiently emphasise their harmfulness. But two things must be kept in view when we condemn them. Most of these bigots are a reaction to the fanaticism that was the father of the Muslim League and therefore the progenitor of Pakistan. They are the unnatural consequences of a most unnatural phenomenon and are to a large extent a sort of defence mechanism against a menace that has kept on growing. To discourage them is indeed our duty, but if our stand is not equally strong against the root cause of their upsurge we fail to be realists. To expect that no section of the Hindu community would indulge in reprisals for acts of injustice and brutality committed against Hindus in Pakistan is simply to be ignorant of human nature; the way to avoid retaliation is not merely to preach Gandhism to the masses or to punish those who take the law into their own hands but to add to all genuinely preventive or deterrent measures an attempt to stop the occasions of provocation. The second point to bear in mind about the Hindu sectarians is that in a perverse manner they suggest a truth which should never be neglected. Let us explain this seeming paradox.

### *The Hindu Sectarians and Essential Hinduism*

We catch the key to the paradox the moment we fix our eyes searchingly on the credo of the Hindu sectarians: "India is the land of Hinduism and the Muslims are Hinduism's enemies and must be kept under Hindu domination." The perversity here is, of course, the undemocratic idea of domination of one community by another. To discriminate between communities within a country is to sow the seeds of Hitlerism. The fullest equality not only on constitutional paper but also in living practice must be there. Some perversity can be read too in the belief that the Muslims are Hinduism's enemies. Although unfortunately an anti-Hindu virus has been working in the Muslim community owing to the

machinations of fanatics and especially since Jinnah brought forward the two-nation theory and caused the sanguinary commotion that culminated in Pakistan, one cannot tar all Muslims with the same brush. Out of the three and a half crores residing in India many see clearly the folly of the country's partition and wish to cultivate friendly relations with the Hindus amongst whom they live. The mere fact that the Muslim religion does not see eye to eye with the Hindu religion in several doctrinal matters need not be taken as any direct antagonism between communities. But a great truth is enshrined in the statement that India is the land of Hinduism. If we forget this truth and seem to create a country with all psychological and metaphysical and spiritual colour of Hinduism wiped off, we shall seriously thwart India's growth and make the nation either a mediocrity or a monstrosity instead of a light to the whole world.

Let us, however, hasten to declare that by Hinduism we do not mean the present form of the caste system or the old marriage laws or any specific orthodox convention. The giving of central place to cow-preservation as if the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita boiled down to abstention from cow-slaughter is also far from our meaning. If there are sound arguments in favour of sparing every cow, we may certainly practise cow-protection—and in any case we should cease from the cruelty of yoking bullocks to two-wheeled carts that throw extra pressure on the poor animals' necks—a cruelty which strangely enough is seldom noticed by cow-worshippers. But it is ridiculous to put cow-protection at the very centre of Hinduism; a man may go on protecting cows all his life and yet be a most deplorable Hindu if the far greater elements of the Hindu religion are neglected as perhaps more often than not they are.

Hinduism means essentially to live in constant sense, ultimately rising to continual realisation, of the Divine Being, infinite and eternal, from whom emanates this universe and who dwells within it as well as beyond it as its single yet multifarious Self and Sovereign. Hinduism implies essentially the progressive irradiation of one's whole life down to the most physical movements by the Divine Being's supra-intellectual Consciousness and Delight. Not only inner but outer, not only static and peaceful but dynamic and creative regeneration in terms of that Consciousness and that Delight is the aim and goal of Hinduism. A direct all-round run towards supra-intellectual experience—a concrete mystical and Yogi trend of the widest order—is therefore the final definition

of being a Hindu. The phrase "widest order" has importance, for it distinguishes the ideal Hindu God-knower and God-lover from the ideal mystics of other religions in two ways: most religions draw a line between spiritual and secular and feel that God is the business of certain parts of our being and not the be-all and end-all of our entire life, and most religions confine themselves to a particular splendid formula of the deified and fight shy of certain sides of mystical experience—Christianity, for instance, of the pantheistic realisation or the realisation of absolute union between God and man, and Islam not only of these realisations but also of the God with form as well as of the incarnate Godhead, the Avatar. Of course, there are some lines of Christian mysticism that escape here and there from these limits just as the Sufi developments of Islam do, but this is so because overtly or covertly the influence of Hinduism has been felt by them. Hence to be a Hindu, as distinguished from a Christian or Muslim or Jew or Zoroastrian or even Buddhist is to be steeped in the tradition of a spirituality which while admitting of various kinds of contact and communion with the Infinite Eternal and so granting the validity of various approaches according to temperament, holds the vision of an experience combining all approaches and all contacts and communions and is able to include and allow every sort of religious experience in even an exclusive form precisely because it holds that wide and comprehensive vision and keeps it at the back of all the differing experiences so that there is mutual understanding among them and a deep tolerance.

#### *The Necessity of Progressive Revivalism*

Of Hinduism, thus defined, India is the land and all that is finest and grandest in our history has sprung from it. Not to put the utmost stress possible on this Hinduism is to castrate spiritually a people that has had the unique distinction of being one of the very few who have kept a living continuity with the hoary past and survived unimpoverished in cultural vitality. Try to take away or relegate to the background the wonderful Hindu spirituality and you do your best to render India utterly impotent as a truly cultural force. That spirituality is the greatest historical fact in our country and it is the very core of India. It is also something that opens up the profoundest possibilities of human growth and provides the power for the next step in evolution—the change from mind to what Sri Aurobindo calls supermind as our established and effective status of consciousness. Unless a single Self in all creatures becomes a concrete experience, unless a derivation of every being from the one Divine Creative Person is inherent part of our life-sense, there can be no genuine brotherhood and harmony on earth. Other modes and means of promoting equality and peace are mere patching-up devices, temporary and restricted expedients or at best half-way houses to the basic spiritual unity-in-diversity. If we have any ideal before us of human perfection, individual and collective, the large and liberal

and all-permeating Hinduism of which we have spoken is the world's prime necessity. Not for a moment must we forget or ignore the fact that India by the fundamentals of her Hinduism is the brightest hope of the earth's future.

To be a revivalist of this vastly transformative power is the duty of every Indian. And if secularism is the enemy of that power, then we must fight secularism tooth and nail. Such secularism is no authentic foe of the communalist mind but a destroyer of India and a destroyer too of the only foundation on which non-communalism can be built with any lasting security. There is a tendency in officialdom to refrain from giving encouragement to anything which breathes markedly of Hinduism. Moral maxims from the Hindu scriptures are culled because they bear a resemblance to ethical aphorisms from other relations, but an openly religious and spiritual song like *Bande Mātaram*—a cry of obeisance to the divine creative Power that is mother of the world and that is visioned as the ultimate being of the National Soul of India the God-intoxicated country—is made to play second fiddle to a much inferior though by no means crude national anthem which never inspired any heroism or sacrifice as the other constantly did during the course of our struggle for freedom. That *Bande Mātaram* should ever have been challenged on the ground that it was too Hindu and not secular enough for a country where there were some millions of Muslims is a sad symptom of national decadence. Perhaps a still sadder one is the lukewarm apologia put up for it at times—namely that the Goddess invoked should not worry anybody since nobody now believes in the reality of such a being and she can be taken as a harmless poetic metaphor for the motherland. Heaven save us from this kind of secularism! Secularism should mean nothing more than that every citizen of India is free to follow his beliefs, religious or non-religious, and has equal civic rights and that no discrimination will be made against him in any sphere because of his particular creed. It must never signify that India will not be regarded any longer as basically the land of Hinduism and that Hinduism in its essentials will not be allowed to mould increasingly the life of the three hundred million people who have inherited it from the most glorious spiritual past any country can claim.

Here we may enter a *caveat*. Revivalism in so far as essential Hindu spirituality with its myriad-aspected realisation of both inner and outer truth is revived is a progressive force. But it should keep clear of sticking to past achievements and declaring that the *ultima thule* has been reached. New discoveries of the Supreme Spirit's hidden powers are always possible—or at least novel developments of known powers in order to carry further the transformative urge in man and bring it into tune with contemporary modern needs. Surely, it cannot be said that even India has completely found the secret of life's transformation. An immense inner enlightenment is not

enough: The outer mind has to be more than merely purified and made plastic to the inner truth, the outer vitality has to be more than merely inspired by the inner dynamism, the outer physicality has to be more than made a mere medium of the inner stability—they have themselves to grow divine by the direct descent of some perfect counterpart of not only our selfhood but also our instrumental nature. Towards whatever spiritual discipline that would effect this complete change in us we have to move, for the whole many-sidedness of past Hinduism has no meaning if it bars an extension of the spiritual new-birth. Revivalism should never be a magnificent stagnancy.

#### *Hinduism and Foreign Cultural Influences*

The point about stagnancy holds also in the matter of foreign cultural influences. We should refrain from shutting our doors to the wide world. Hinduism is the very opposite of a hermetically sealed culture, just as it is the reverse of a rigidly uniform religion. Not only is it many strained, it is also remarkably assimilative and is even on the alert to draw new tones and rhythms into its harmonising organism. To think that by whittling our life down to indigenous products, whether material or psychological, we shall advance most the spirit of Hinduism is a capital error. Of course, our growth has always to be from within outwards, but our "within" need not be a fenced-off secrecy. There can be an Indian "within" that assimilates the essence of all cultural movements of the world, puts itself in connection with the time-spirit and is significantly modern without sacrificing any creative characteristic of its own. In fact, if Hinduism is to grow more powerful it should welcome the play of the whole world's thought and activity, enlarge its own scope of earth-knowledge, give to every department of human effort its true Godward drive and by a spiritual intuitiveness lead it to its finest fulfilment, so that at the same time Hinduism may be in the midst of living history and in vibrant touch with mankind as a whole and impart to the contemporary universe the typically Hindu light and colour which are of the deep divine Self of selves.

Amplitude, multiplicity, variety to the utmost on a basis of absolute unity-penetration of the entire world and absorption too of the world in its entirety—these are Hinduism's natural modes of being. And if these modes are not to be vitiated it is necessary to consider as a vital portion of our national life the English language. We may regard Hindi with a fostering care, we may try to spread it more and more, but let us not commit the blunder of attempting to cut out or atrophy what is now a natural organ of our culture-body and what to our good fortune is the vividest medium of the developing world-mind. When people all over the globe are wishing to make English more and more a part of their education we should not be foolish enough to diminish its actual established

presence in our culture. English is now as much a language of India as any of the indigenous tongues. If it is not as well spoken by many of those who employ it as Tamil is by the South Indians or Hindi by the northerners, it is spoken by the south and the north, the west and the east of our sub-continent in a unifying nation-conscious manner as no Indian language is spoken. It is the language by which the political unity of our country has been historically formed, it is the language in which our whole battle for freedom has been fought, it is the language with which we have put India on the map of the world, it is the language of our best journalism and our rarest literature—Nehru has fashioned of it a gleaming mirror of his idealistic personality, Gandhi has effectively used it for straight thrusts of moral force, Radhakrishnan has achieved through it a striking lucidity of versatile intellectual exposition, R.K. Narayan has made by its help the novelist's art a rare blend of the simple and the subtle, Sarojini Naidu has been enchantingly lyrical in it, Tagore has given with it to his *Gitanjali*, an immortal poignancy, Vivekananda has forged from it a thrilling clarion of the Vedanta calling both the East and the West to God-knowledge, Sri Aurobindo has turned through it philosophy into a magnificent marshalling of spiritual truths and of mystical realisations and poetry into a mighty image of the Eternal, "mountain-lined, crowded with deep prophetic grotts."

Mention of Sri Aurobindo spotlights English as undeniably integral to our growth in greatness. For, if a unique spirituality is the core of India, then the fact that our greatest spiritual figure today creates in the medium of English as if English were his mother-tongue is profoundly significant. It sets the seal on the extraordinary capacity of English to transmit by its highly developed plasticity, its multi-suggestive quickness and its packed power the presence of the Infinite that is India's special source of life abounding. This is not to deny the spiritual potentialities of our indigenous tongues. This is only to affirm the important role English is meant to play in our culture. To minimise that role is to fall far short of a truly enlightened revivalism.

A revivalism enlightened and progressive, free from superficial orthodox restraints and insularities, moving out from a richened inward centre is our burning need, rather than a neutral secularism ignoring the deep foundation which the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity must seek if they are to become living and spontaneous facts. This revivalism does not imply the entry of terms like *Brahman*, *Atman* and *Ishwara* into our Constitution: It has in that respect no quarrel with the Secular State. But it does imply the resurgence and the furtherance within us of the profound sense India once had of man's origin from the Eternal, his oneness with the Infinite and his destiny of a Life Divine.

*The Indian Spirit and the World's Future*

# Art And Yoga

*The Mother*

*Is it possible for a Yogi to become an artist or can an artist be a Yogi? What is the relation of Art to Yoga?*

The two are not so antagonistic as you seem to think. There is nothing to prevent a Yogi from being an artist or an artist from being a Yogi. But when you are in Yoga, there is a profound change in the values of things, of Art as of everything else; you begin to look at Art from a very different standpoint. It is no longer the one supreme all-engrossing thing for you, no longer an end in itself. Art is a means, not an end; it is a means of expression. And the artist then ceases too to believe that the whole world turns round what he is doing or that his work is the most important thing that has ever been done. His personality counts no longer; he is an agent, a channel, his art a means of expressing his relations with the Divine. He uses it for that purpose as he might have used any other means that were part of the powers of his nature.

*But does an artist feel at all any impulse to create once he takes up Yoga?*

Why should he not have the impulse? He can express his relation with the Divine in the way of his art, exactly as he would in any other. If you want art to be the true and highest art, it must be the expression of a divine world brought down into this material world. All true artists have some feeling of this kind, some sense that they are intermediaries between a higher world and this physical existence. If you consider it in this light, Art is not very different from Yoga. But most often the artist has only an indefinite feeling, he has not the knowledge. Still, I knew some who had it; they worked consciously at their art with the knowledge. In their creation they did not put forward their personality as the most important factor; they considered their work as an offering to the Divine, they tried to express by it their relation with the Divine.

This was the avowed function of Art in the Middle Ages. The 'primitive' painters, the builders of cathedrals in Mediaeval Europe had no other conception of art. In India all her architecture, her sculpture, her painting have proceeded from this source and were inspired by this ideal. The songs of Mirabai and the music of Thyagaraja, the poetic literature built up by her devotees, saints and Rishis rank among the world's greatest artistic possessions.

*But does the work of an artist improve if he does Yoga?*

The discipline of Art has at its centre the same principle

as the discipline of Yoga. In both the aim is to become more and more conscious; in both you have to learn to see and feel something that is beyond the ordinary vision and feeling, to go within and bring out from there deeper things. Painters have to follow a discipline for the growth of the consciousness of their eyes, which in itself is almost a Yoga. If they are true artists and try to see beyond and use their art for the expression of the inner world, they grow in consciousness by this concentration, which is not other than the consciousness given by Yoga. Why then should not Yogic consciousness be a help to artistic creation? I have known some who had very little training and skill and yet through Yoga acquired a fine capacity in writing and painting. Two examples I can cite to you. One was a girl who had no education whatever; she was a dancer and danced tolerably well. After she took up Yoga, she danced only for friends; but her dancing attained a depth of expression and beauty which was not there before. And although she was not educated, she began to write wonderful things; for she had vision and expressed them in the most beautiful language. But there were ups and downs in her Yoga, and when she was in a good condition, she wrote beautifully, but otherwise was quite dull and stupid and uncreative. The second case is that of a boy who had studied art, but only just a little. The son of a diplomat, he had been trained for the diplomatic career; but he lived in luxury and his studies did not go far. Yet as soon as he took up Yoga, he began to produce inspired drawings which carried the expression of an inner knowledge and were symbolic in character; in the end he became a great artist.

*Why are artists generally irregular in their conduct and loose in character?*

When they are so, it is because they live usually in the vital plane, and the vital part in them is extremely sensitive to the forces of that world and receives from it all kinds of impressions and impulsions over which they have no controlling power. And often too they are very free in their minds and do not believe in the petty social conventions and moralities that govern the life of ordinary people. They do not feel bound by the customary rules of conduct and have not yet found an inner law that would replace them. As there is nothing to check the movements of their desire-being, they lead easily a life of liberty or license. But this does not happen with all. I lived ten years among artists and found many of them to be bourgeois to the core; they were married and settled, good fathers, good husbands, and lived up to the most strict moral ideas of what should and what should not be done.

There is one way in which Yoga may stop the artist's productive impulse. If the origin of his art is in the vital world, once he becomes a Yogi he will lose his inspiration or, rather, the source from which his inspiration used to come will inspire him no more, for them the vital world appears in its true light; it puts on its true value, and that value is very relative. Most of those who call themselves artists draw their inspiration from the vital world only; and it carries in it no high or great significance. But when a true artist, one who looks for his creative source to a higher world, turns to Yoga, he will find that his inspiration becomes more direct and powerful and his expression clearer and deeper. Of those who possess a true value the power of Yoga will increase the value, but from one who has only some false appearance of art even that appearance will vanish or else lose its appeal. To one earnest in Yoga, the first simple truth that strikes his opening vision is that what he does is a very relative thing in comparison with the universal manifestation, the universal movement. But an artist is usually vain and looks on himself as a highly important personage, a kind of demigod in the human world. Many artists say that if they did not believe what they do to be of a supreme importance, they would not be able to do it. But I have known some whose inspiration was from a higher world and yet they did not believe that what they did was of so immense an importance. That is nearer the spirit of true art. If a man is truly led to express himself in art, it is the way the Divine has chosen to manifest in him, and then by Yoga his art will gain and not lose. But there is all the question: is the artist appointed by the Divine or self-appointed?

*But if one does Yoga can he rise to such heights as Shakespeare or Shelley? There has been no such instance.*

Why not? The Mahabharata and Ramayana are certainly not inferior to anything created by Shakespeare or any other poet, and they are said to have been the work of men who were Rishis and had done Yogic tapasya. The Gita which, like the Upanishads, ranks at once among the greatest literary and the greatest spiritual works, was not written by one who had no experience of Yoga. And where is the inferiority to your Milton and Shelley in the famous poems written whether in India or Persia or else where by men known to be saints, Sufis, devotees? And, then, do you know all the Yogis and their work? Among the poets and creators can you say who were or who were not in conscious touch with the Divine? There are some who are not officially Yogis, they are not gurus and have no disciples; the world does not know what they do; they are not anxious for fame and do not attract to themselves the attention of men; but they have the higher consciousness, are in touch with a Divine Power, and when they create they create from there. The best paintings in India and much of the best statuary and architecture were done by

Buddhist monks who passed their lives in spiritual contemplation and practice; they did supreme artistic work, but did not care to leave their names to posterity. The chief reason why Yogis are not usually known by their art is that they do not consider their art-expression as the most important part of their life and do not put so much time and energy into it as a mere artist. And what they do does not always reach the public. How many there are who have done great things and not published them to the world.

*Have Yogis done greater dramas than Shakespeare?*

Drama is not the highest of the arts. Someone has said that drama is greater than any other art and art is greater than life. But it is not quite like that. The mistake of the artist is to believe that artistic production is something that stands by itself and for itself, independent of the rest of the world. Art as understood by these artists is like a mushroom on the wide soil of life, something casual and external, not something intimate to life; it does not reach and touch the deep and abiding realities, it does not become an intrinsic and inseparable part of existence. True art is intended to express the beautiful, but in close intimacy with the universal movement. The greatest nations and the most cultured races have always considered art as a part of life and made it subservient to life. Art was like that in Japan in its best moments; it was like that in all the best moments in the history of art. But most artists are like parasites growing on the margin of life; they do not seem to know that art should be the expression of the Divine in life and through life. In everything, everything, in all relations truth must be brought out in its all-embracing rhythm and every movement of life should be an expression of beauty and harmony. Skill is not art, talent is not art. Art is a living harmony and beauty that must be expressed in all the movements of existence. This manifestation of beauty and harmony is part of the Divine realisation upon earth, perhaps even its greatest part.

For from the supramental point of view beauty and harmony are as important as any other expression of the Divine. But they should not be isolated, set up apart from all other relations, taken out from the ensemble; they should be one with the expression of life as a whole. People have the habit of saying "Oh, it is an artist!" As if an artist should not be a man among other men but must be an extraordinary being belonging to a class by itself, and his art too something extraordinary and apart, not to be confused with the other ordinary things of the world. The maxim, "Art for art's sake", tries to impress and emphasise as a truth the same error. It is the same mistake as when men place in the middle of their drawing-rooms a framed picture that has nothing to do either with the furniture or the walls, but is put there only because it is an "object of art".

True art is a whole and an ensemble; it is one and of one

piece with life. You see something of this intimate wholeness in ancient Greece and ancient Egypt; for there pictures and statues and all objects of art were made and arranged as part of the architectural plan of a building, each detail a portion of the whole. It is like that in Japan, or at least it was so till the other day before the invasion of a utilitarian and practical modernism. A Japanese house is a wonderful artistic whole; always the right thing is there in the right place, nothing wrongly set, nothing too much, nothing too little. Everything is just as it needed to be, and the house itself blends marvellously with the surrounding nature. In India, too, painting and sculpture and architecture were one integral beauty, one single movement of adoration of the Divine.

There has been in this sense a great degeneration since then in the world. From the time of Victoria and in France from the Second Empire we have entered into a period of decadence. The habit has grown of hanging up in rooms pictures that have no meaning for the surrounding objects; any picture, any artistic object could now be put anywhere and it would make small difference. Art now is meant to show skill and cleverness and talent, not to embody some integral expression of harmony and beauty in a home.

But latterly there has come about a revolt against this lapse into bourgeois taste. The reaction was so violent that it looked like a complete aberration and art seemed about to sink down into the absurd. Slowly, however, out of the chaos something has emerged, something more rational, more logical, more coherent to which can once more be given the name of art, an art renovated and perhaps, or let us hope so, regenerated.

Art is nothing less in its fundamental truth than the aspect of beauty of the Divine manifestation. Perhaps, looking from this standpoint, there will be found very few true artists; but still there are some and these can very well be considered as Yogis. For like a Yogi an artist goes into deep contemplation to await and receive his inspiration. To create something truly beautiful, he has first to see it within, to realise it as a whole in his inner consciousness; only when so found, seen, held within, can he execute it outwardly; he creates according to this greater inner vision. This too is a kind of yogic discipline, for by it he enters into intimate communion with the inner worlds. A man like Leonardo da Vinci was a Yogi and nothing else. And he was, if not the greatest, at least one of the greatest painters, — although his art did not stop at painting alone.

Music too is an essentially spiritual art and has always been associated with religious feeling and an inner life. But, here too, we have turned it into something independent and self-sufficient, a mushroom art, such as is operatic music. Most of the artistic productions we come across are of this kind and at best interesting from the point of view of technique. I do not say that even operatic

music cannot be used as a medium of a higher art expression; for whatever the form, it can be made to serve a deeper purpose. All depends on the thing itself, on how it is used, on what is behind it. There is nothing that cannot be used for the Divine purpose— just as anything can pretend to be the Divine and yet be of the mushroom species.

Among the great modern musicians there have been several whose consciousness, when they created, came into touch with a higher consciousness. Cesar Franck played on the organ as one inspired; he had an opening into the psychic life and he was conscious of it and to a great extent expressed it. Beethoven, when he composed the Ninth Symphony, had the vision of an opening into a higher world and of the descent of a higher world into this earthly plane. Wagner had strong and powerful intimations of the occult world; he had the instinct of occultism and the sense of the occult and through it he received his greatest inspirations. But he worked mainly on the vital level and his mind came in constantly to interfere and mechanised his inspiration. His work for the greater part is too mixed, too often obscure and heavy, although powerful. But when he could cross the vital and the mental levels and reach a higher world, some of the glimpses he had were of an exceptional beauty, as in Parsifal, in some parts of Tristan and Iseult and most in its last great Act.

Look again at what the modern have made of the dance; compare it with what the dance once was. The dance was once one of the highest expressions of the inner life; it was associated with religion and it was an important limb in sacred ceremony, in the celebration of festivals, in the adoration of the Divine. In some countries it reached a very high degree of beauty and an extraordinary perfection. In Japan they kept up the tradition of the dance as a part of the religious life and, because the strict sense of beauty and art is a natural possession of the Japanese, they did not allow it to degenerate into something of lesser significance and smaller purpose. It was the same in India. It is true that in our days there have been attempts to resuscitate the ancient Greek and other dances; but the religious sense is missing in all such resurrections and they look more like rhythmic gymnastics than dance.

Today Russian dances are famous, but they are expressions of the vital world and there is even something terribly vital in them. Like all that comes to us from that world, they may be very attractive or very repulsive, but always they stand for themselves and not for the expression of the higher life. The very mysticism of the Russians is of a vital order. As technicians of the dance they are marvellous; but technique is only an instrument. If your instrument is good, so much the better, but so long as it is not surrendered to the Divine, however fine it may be, it is empty of the highest and cannot serve a divine purpose. The difficulty is that most of those who become artists

believe that they stand on their own legs and have no need to turn to the Divine. It is a great pity; for in the divine manifestation skill is as useful an element as anything else. Skill is one part of the divine fabric, only it must know how to subordinate itself to greater things.

There is a domain far above the mind which we could call the world of Harmony and, if you can reach there, you will find the root of all harmony that has been manifested in whatever form upon earth. For instance, there is a certain line of music consisting of a few supreme notes, that was behind the productions of two artists who came one after another—one a concerto of Bach, another a concerto of Beethoven. The two are not alike on paper and differ to the outward ear, but in their essence they are the same vibration of consciousness, one wave of significant harmony touched both these artists. Beethoven caught a larger part, but in him it was more mixed with the inventions and interpolations of his mind; Bach received less,

but what he seized of it was purer. The vibration was that of the victorious emergence of consciousness, consciousness tearing itself out of the womb of unconsciousness in a triumphant uprising and birth.

If by Yoga you are capable of reaching this source of all art, then you are master, if you will, of all the arts. Those that may have gone there before, found it perhaps happier, more pleasant or full of a rapturous ease to remain and enjoy the Beauty and the Delight that are there, not manifesting it, not embodying it upon earth. But this abstention is not all the earth the truth nor the true truth of Yoga; it is rather a deformation, a diminution of the dynamic freedom of Yoga by the more negative spirit of *Sannyasa* the will of the Divine is to manifest, not to remain altogether withdrawn in inactivity and an absolute silence; if the Divine Consciousness were really an inaction of unmanifesting bliss, there would never have been any creation.

*Questions and Answers*  
1929-31

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*The spirit and motive of Indian painting are in their centre of conception and shaping force of sight identical with the inspiring vision of Indian sculpture. All Indian art is a throwing out of a certain profound self-vision formed by a going within to find out the secret significance of form and appearance, a discovery of the subject in one's deeper self, the giving of soul-form to that vision and a remoulding of the material and natural shape to express the psychic truth of it with the greatest possible purity and power of outline and the greatest possible concentrated rhythmic unity of significance in all the parts of an indivisible artistic whole. Take whatever masterpiece of Indian painting and we shall find these conditions aimed at and brought out into a triumphant beauty of suggestion and execution. The only difference from the other arts comes from the turn natural and inevitable to its own kind of aesthesis, from the moved and indulgent dwelling on what one might call the mobilities of the soul rather than on its static eternities, on the casting out of self into the grace and movement of psychic and vital life (subject always to the reserve and restraint necessary to all art) rather than on the holding back of life in the stabilities of the self and its eternal qualities and principles, guna and tattva. This distinction is of the very essence of the difference between the work given to the sculptor and the painter, a difference imposed on them by the natural scope, turn, possibility of their instrument and medium. The sculptor must express always in static form; the idea of the spirit is cut out for him in mass and line, significant in the stability of its insistence, and he can lighten the weight of this insistence but not get rid of it or away from it; for him eternity seizes hold of time in its shapes and arrests it in the monumental spirit of stone or bronze. The painter on the contrary lavishes his soul in colour and there is a liquidity in the form, a fluent grace of subtlety in the line he uses which imposes on him a more mobile and emotional way of self-expression. The more he gives us of the colour and changing form and emotion of the life of the soul, the more his work glows with beauty, masters the inner aesthetic sense and opens it to the thing his art better gives us than any other; the delight of the motion of the self out into a spiritually sensuous joy of beautiful shapes and the coloured radiance of existence. Painting is naturally the most sensuous of the arts, and the highest greatness open to the painter is to spiritualise this sensuous appeal by making the most vivid outward beauty a revelation of subtle spiritual emotion so that the soul and the sense are at harmony in the deepest and finest richness of both and united in their satisfied consonant expression of the inner significance of things and life. There is less of the austerity of Tapasya in his way of working, a less severely restrained expression of eternal things and of the fundamental truths behind the forms of things, but there is in compensation a moved wealth of psychic or warmth of vital suggestion, a lavish delight of the beauty of the play of the eternal in the moments of time and there the artist arrests it for us and makes moments of the life of the soul reflected in form of man or creature or incident or scene or Nature full of a permanent and opulent significance to our spiritual vision. The art of the painter justifies visually to the spirit the search of the sense for delight by making it its own search for the pure intensities of meaning of the universal beauty it has revealed or hidden in creation; the indulgence of the eye's desire in perfection of form and colour becomes an enlightenment of the inner being through the power of a certain spiritually aesthetic Ananda.*

Sri Aurobindo  
*The Foundations of Indian Culture*



# One day

*Sri Aurobindo*

## THE LITTLE MORE

One day, and all the half-dead is done,  
One day, and all the unborn begun;  
A little path and the great goal,  
A touch that brings the divine whole.

Hill after hill was climbed and now,  
Behold, the last tremendous brow  
And the great rock that none has trod:  
A step, and all is sky and God.