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A flame of aspiration for dynamic truth

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## How Responsible is Today's Thinking Individual?

Today, it is more or less the State which regulates and plans the life of an individual depending on the path it has decided to follow for the betterment of the society and the individual, frequently subordinating the needs of one over the other. It has become a gigantic machinery run by politicians who do not necessarily represent the soul of a people or its aspiration. This leaves the burden of the progress of society on the shoulders of individuals who are concerned about social change but who may be a minority. And it is when this minority—often a class of thinkers—shirks their responsibility that lies with them, that a gulf is created between them and the rest of society which causes decline and degeneration of that society eventually. For, always, it is the individual who progresses and compels the collectivity to progress. On its own, the collectivity is inclined to stand still in its established order.

At present, the task of social reconstruction is so vast that we do not even know where to begin. This has led to pessimism. Critical analysis without solutions which are viable has generated widespread cynicism. The answer does not lie in creating a more efficient machinery for the State but to have a more conscious and plastic structure adaptable to the required change at every stage. We need to search for a higher ideal and to chart out the path step by step. In our search for quick-fix solutions, we are not allowing a long term solution to take shape which would be wide enough to co-relate all issues that face us today. Therefore, we see organisations and individuals devoted to a single cause who do not take into account the repercussions of other forces that would be working simultaneously of the solutions proposed and the wider implications on society. At every step, it would be wiser to review the goals in the light of a higher vision and only then move on. Thus can an organisation or an individual remain relevant to its times and, more so, to the future. In our desire to see instant results, we hasten to act, often sacrificing the prior thought needed which would give the necessary depth to the actions. Intellectualism and activism will not be divorced from each other if we have patience. Such a vision would go beyond the realm of ethics, morality and religion which base themselves on preconstructed formulae. But Truth demands a greater freedom which carries with it a greater responsibility. It is in spirituality alone that we can find a greater harmony.

“Spirituality respects the freedom of the human soul because it is itself fulfilled by freedom; and the deepest meaning of freedom is the power to expand and grow towards perfection by the law of one's own nature, *dharma*. This liberty it will give to all fundamental parts of the being. It will give that freedom to philosophy and science which ancient Indian religion gave,—freedom even to deny the spirit, if they will,—as a result of which philosophy and science never felt in ancient India any necessity of divorcing themselves from religion but grew rather into it and under its light. It will give the same freedom to man's seeking for political and social perfection and to all his other powers and aspirations. Only it will be vigilant to illuminate them so that they may grow into the light and law of the spirit, not by suppression and restriction, but by a self-searching self-controlled expansion and a many-sided finding of their greatest, highest and deepest potentialities. For all these are potentialities of the spirit.”

*Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle*

Now it is upto these thinkers and activists to attempt to give shape to the future of each society in a higher light instead of letting them stumble forward. How long will it be before we become desperate to find the Truth and follow it?

*Editor*

# Electron

Sri Aurobindo

The electron on which forms and worlds are built,  
Leaped into being, a particle of God.  
A spark from the eternal Energy spilt,  
It is the Infinite's blind minute abode.

In that small flaming chariot Shiva rides.  
The One devised innumerably to be;  
His oneness in invisible forms he hides,  
Time's tiny temples of eternity.

Atom and molecule in their unseen plan  
Buttress an edifice of strange onenesses,  
Crystal and plant, insect and beast and man,  
Man on whom the World-Unity shall seize,

Widening his soul-spark to an epiphany  
Of the timeless vastness of Infinity.

*Collected Poems*

# Conservation and Progress

*Sri Aurobindo*

Mankind thinks naturally in extremes or else reconciles by a patchwork and compromise. Whether he makes a fetish of moderation or surrenders himself to the enthusiasm of the single idea, the human being misses always truth of vision and the right pitch of action because instead of seeing, feeling and becoming in obedience to his nature like other animate existences he tries always to measure things by a standard he has set up in his intelligence. But it is the character of his intelligence that it finds it an easy task to distinguish and separate but is clumsy in combining. When it combines, it tends to artificialise and falsify. It feels at ease in pursuing a single idea to its logical consequences and in viewing things from a single standpoint; but to harmonise different ideas in action and to view the facts from different standpoints is contrary to its native impulse; therefore it does that badly, with an ill grace and without mastery. Oftenest it makes an incongruous patchwork rather than a harmony. The human mind is strong and swift in analysis; it synthesises with labour and imperfectly and does not feel at home in its synthesis. It divides, opposes and, placed between the oppositions it creates, becomes an eager partisan of one side or another; but to think wisely and impartially and with a certain totality is irksome and disgusting to the normal human being.

All human action as all human thought suffers from these disabilities. For it is seduced by a trenchant idea which it follows without proper attention to collateral issues, to necessary companion ideas, to the contrary forces in operation, or else it regards these merely as enemies, brands them as pure falsehood and evil and strives with more or less violence to crush them out of existence. Then it sees other ideas which it attempts to realise in turn, either adding them to its past notions and possessions or else rejecting these entirely for the new light; it makes a fresh war and a new clearance and denies its past work in the interest of a future attainment. But it has also its repentances, its returns, its recall and re-throning of banished gods and even of lifeless ghosts and phantoms to which it gives a temporary and false appearance of life. And on the way it has continually its doubts, scruples, hesitations, its pretentious assumptions of a sage moderation and a gradual and cautious advance. But human moderation is usually a wisecrack and a botcher; it sews a patch of new velvet on old fustian or of new fustian on old velvet and admires its deplorable handiwork. And its cautious advance means an accumulation of shams, fictions and dead conventions till the burden of falsehood becomes too great for life to bear and a violent revolution is necessary to deliver the soul of

humanity out of the immobilising ceremonies of the past. Such is the type of our progress; it is the advance of an ignorant and purblind but always light-attracted spirit, a being half-animal, half-god, stumbling forward through the bewildering jungle of its own errors.

This characteristic of human mentality shows itself in the opposition we create between conservation and progress. Nothing in the universe can really stand still because everything there is a mould of Time and the very essence of Time is change by a movement forward. It is true that the world's movement is not in a straight line; there are cycles, there are spirals; but still it circles, not round the same point always, but round an ever advancing centre, and therefore it never returns exactly upon its old path and never goes really backward. As for standing still, it is an impossibility, a delusion, a fiction. Only the spirit is stable; the soul and body of things are in eternal motion. And in this motion there are the three determining powers of the past, future and present,—the present a horizontal and constantly shifting line without breadth between a vast realised infinity that both holds back and impels and a vast unrealised infinity that both repels and attracts.

The past is both a drag and a force for progress. It is all that has created the present and a great part of the force that is creating the future. For the past is not dead; its forms are gone and had to go, otherwise the present would not have come into being; but its soul, its power, its essence lives veiled in the present and ever-accumulating, growing, deepening will live on in the future. Every human being holds in and behind him all the past of his own race, of humanity and of himself; these three things determine his starting-point and pursue him through his life's progress. It is in the force of this past, in the strength which its huge conservations give to him that he confronts the unilluminated abysses of the future and plunges forward into the depths of its unrealised infinities. But also it is a drag, partly because man afraid of the unknown clings to the old forms of which he is sure, the old foundations which feel so safe under his feet, the old props round which so many of his attachments and associations cast their tenacious tendrils, but also partly because the forces of the past keep their careful hold on him so as to restrain him in his uncertain course and prevent the progress from becoming a precipitation.

The future repels us even while it irresistibly attracts. The repulsion lies partly in our own natural recoil from the unknown, because every step into this unknown is a wager

between life and death; every decision we make may mean either the destruction or the greater fulfilment of what we now are, of the name and form to which we are attached. but also it lies in the future itself; for there, governing the future, there are not only powers which call us to fulfil them and attract us with an irresistible force but other powers which have to be conquered and do not desire to yield themselves. The future is a sphinx with two minds, an energy which offers itself and denies, gives itself and resists, seeks to enthrone us and seeks to slay. But the conquest has to be attempted, the wager has to be accepted. We have to face the future's offer of death as well as its offer of life, and it need not alarm us, for it is by constant death to our names and forms that we shall live most vitally in greater and newer forms and names. Go on we must; for if we do not, Time itself will force us forward in spite of our fancied immobility. And this is the most pitiable and dangerous movement of all. For what can be more pitiable than to be borne helplessly forward clinging to the old that disintegrates in spite of our efforts and shrieking frantically to the dead ghosts and dissolving fragments of the past to save us alive? And what can be more dangerous than to impose immobility on that which is in its nature mobile? This means an increasing and horrible rottenness; it means an attempt to persist on as a putrid and stinking corpse instead of a living and self-renewing energetic creature. The greatest spirits are therefore those who have no fear of the future, who accept its challenge and its wager; they have that sublime trust in the God or Power that guides the world, that high audacity of the human soul to wrestle with the infinite and realise the impossible, that wise and warrior confidence in its ultimate destiny which marks the Avatars and prophets and great innovators and renovators.

If we consider carefully we shall see that the past is indeed a huge force of conservation that is not immobile, that on the contrary offers itself as material for change and new realisation; that the present is the constant change and new actual realisation which the past desires and compels; and that the future is that force of new realisation not yet actual towards which the past was moving and for the sake of which it lived. Then we perceive that there is no real opposition between these three; we see that they are part of a single movement, a sort of Trinity of Vishnu-Brahma-Maheshwara fulfilling by an inseparable action the one Deity. Yet the human mind in its mania of division and opposition seems to set them at strife and ranges humanity into various camps, the partisans of the past, the partisans of the present, the partisans of the future, the partisans of all sorts of compromises between the three Forces. Nature makes good use of the struggle between these partisans and her method is necessary in our present state of passionate ignorance and egoistic obstinacy; but nonetheless it is from the point of view of a higher knowledge a pitifully ignorant struggle.

The partisans of the future call themselves the party of progress, the children of light and denounce the past as

ignorant, evil, a mass of errors and abuses; their view alone has the monopoly of the light, the truth, the good—a light, good and truth which will equally be denounced as error and evil by succeeding generations. The partisans of the present look with horror upon all progress as an impious and abominable plunge into error and evil and degeneration and ruin; for them the present is the culmination of humanity,—as previous "present" times were for all the preceding generations and as the future which they abhor will be for these unprogressive souls if they should then reincarnate; they will then defend it with the same passion and asperity against another future as they now attack it in the interest of the present. The partisans of the past are of two kinds. The first admit the defects of the present but support it in so far as it still cherishes the principles of the high, perfect, faultless, adorable past, that golden age of the race or community, and because even if somewhat degenerate, its forms are a bulwark against the impiety of progress; if they admit any change, it is in the direction of the past that they seek it. A second kind condemn the present root and branch as degenerate, hateful, horrible, vicious, accursed; they erect a past form as the hope of a humanity returning to the wisdom of its forefathers. And to such quarrels of children the intellectuals and the leaders of thought and faith lend the power of the specious or moving word and the striking idea and the emotional fervour or religious ardour which they conceive to be the very voice and light and force of Truth itself in its utter self-revelation.

The true thinker can dispense with the éclat which attaches to the leader of partisans. He will strive to see this great divine movement as a whole, to know in its large lines the divine intention and goal in it without seeking to fix arbitrarily its details; he will strive to understand the greatness and profound meaning of the past without attaching himself to its forms, for he knows that forms must change and only the formless endures and that the past can never be repeated, but only its essence preserved, its power, its soul of good and its massed impulse towards a greater self-fulfilment; he will accept the actual realisations of the present as a stage and nothing more, keenly appreciating its defects, self-satisfied errors, presumptuous pretensions because these are the chief enemies of progress, but not ignoring the truth and good that it has gained; and he will sound the future to understand what the Divine in it is seeking to realise, not only at the present moment, not only in the next generation, but beyond, and for that he will speak, strive, if need be battle, since battle is the method still used by Nature in humanity, even when all the while he knows that there is more yet beyond beside which, when it comes to light, the truth he has seized will seem erroneous and limited. Therefore he will act without presumption and egoism, knowing that his own errors and those which he combats are alike necessary forces in that labour and movement of human life towards the growing Truth and Good by which there increases shadowily the figure of a far-off divine Ideal.

*The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings*

# Hindu-Muslim Unity

Mangesh Nadkarni

It seems best to begin by acknowledging that my attempt at writing this paper may well be an exemplification of the well-known adage from Alexander Pope which goes: fools rush in where angels fear to tread. For I am no specialist in modern Indian history or politics, nor do I have any special qualifications to be heard on this subject. Furthermore, I do realise that this is too convoluted an issue for anyone to be able to deal with it comprehensively, or even adequately in a brief paper. But I believe that even a little can help when it is offered with a sincere goodwill, and if this little is of any value, then those more competent can develop it further.

I do believe that Sri Aurobindo has left us some invaluable insights that can enable us to understand better the difficult and puzzling problem of Hindu-Muslim unity and thus help us in finding a lasting solution to the problem which has so far defied our political sagacity. As Sri Aurobindo predicted, in his August 15, 1947 message to the nation, the creation of Pakistan has not solved this problem but has only aggravated its virulence. Neither the Hindus nor the Muslims, whether in India or in Pakistan, have benefited from the partition.

The problem of coming to terms with Islam in its current phase is not unique to India but it occurs here in a particularly difficult and complex form because of our peculiar history and it seems to be our destiny to find a solution to it. Are we equal to this? As the Mother, Sri Aurobindo's collaborator, once said: "India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of modern mankind. India will be the land of its resurrection—the resurrection to a higher and truer life.... India represents all the terrestrial human difficulties and it is in India that there will be the cure." I too share this hope that I have taken up this issue in this paper.

Sri Aurobindo's writings on the Hindu-Muslim situation in India mostly belong to the period before 1910, when he was writing as a journalist for the *Bande Mātaram* and the *Karmayogin* under the stress of events developing from day to day. That was the time when the British administration was deliberately fanning Hindu-Muslim tensions in what is today Bangladesh and elsewhere in India, and Sri Aurobindo often attempted to expose these machinations. So it is not always easy to infer how exactly he would have reacted to the complexities of the current situation muddled by the disastrous developments of the last 80 years in the relationship between the communities. However, some of the major trends which were to gather

force during the subsequent decades were already perceptible during the first decade of the century and Sri Aurobindo has commented on some of them. These comments contain useful pointers to his thinking. And yet when talking about Sri Aurobindo one must remember that his perceptions of events and his entire thinking underwent a revolutionary transformation after he took up yoga seriously a couple of years before he came to Pondicherry.

Unfortunately, there is a further difficulty here. Whatever Sri Aurobindo might have to say on this problem is open to the charge of partisanship. Although Sri Aurobindo was primarily a mystic and a yogi with a global vision and is one of the greatest names in the spiritual annals of humanity, he came from a Hindu stock, and for that reason alone some people have looked upon him as the representative of the Hindu view. But to limit Sri Aurobindo to Hinduism is like characterising modern science and technology as purely Christian, since by and large they originated in the Christian countries. Besides, there have been some mischievous attempts in recent years to portray Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo as primarily Hindu nationalists, or champions of militant Hinduism. This is a travesty of truth. As for Hindu nationalism, Sri Aurobindo held that it was an anachronistic notion in the 20th century, and if these two great men were "militant" about anything, it was about spirituality as the universal religion of man, and not about any sectarian religion. In fact, Sri Aurobindo held that the time for religions was over, whatever their need and justification at a certain stage in human history. He believed that mankind was entering the age of universal spirituality. He has categorically declared that his Ashram and his teachings were not based on Hindu religion or culture or any religion or nationality, but on the Truth of the Divine which is the spiritual ideal behind all religions and on the truth of the supramental consciousness which is not known to any religion.

And yet it is always possible to cite out of context from the vast body of Sri Aurobindo's writings, or from his casual talks recorded from memory by his associates, or from his correspondence with his associates some remark or sentence which is critical of Muslims in India or of Islam. And in the opinion of the keepers of the nation's secular conscience that is enough to characterise him as a champion of militant Hindu nationalism. Strange indeed are the measures and criteria some of the leaders of public opinion in our country have evolved by which a person's

genuineness as a secularist is to be judged. He who hopes to be counted among the accredited secularists must hold Hindus and Muslims equally guilty in every instance of communal disturbance; he should hold Hinduism and Islam equal in everything, except that he is free to damn Hindu culture and Hindu scriptures, but he should say nothing critical about Islam either in India or anywhere else in the world. Finally, a secularist must make fun of all religions. Recently, the CPI(M) leader E.M.S. Namboodiripad has added a new twist of confusion to this notion of secularism.

For him a fundamentalist is one who subordinates all other issues to that of religion. Although it is not very clear what E.M.S. means by "subordinating all other issues to that of religion" (the press report in *The Hindu*: Monday, July 11, 1994), it would seem that according to this definition any one to whom religion is paramount in his life is a fundamentalist. Gandhiji for E.M.S. was a fundamentalist, and so was Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan. And if one took E.M.S. seriously we will have to brand even people like Dag Hammarskjöld (Ref. his *Markings*) and T.S. Eliot as fundamentalists since for both of them religion was paramount in their lives, and at the same time we will have to exonerate those who exploit religion for some political end from this charge because their ultimate objective is secular!

Sri Aurobindo makes a distinction between two aspects of religion—religion as spirituality, and as religionism. Sri Aurobindo rejects religionism or sectarianism in religion and he is an ardent advocate of spirituality as can be seen from the following:

"It is true in a sense that religion should be the dominant thing in life, its light and law, but religion as it should be and is in its inner nature, its fundamental law of being, a seeking after God, the cult of spirituality, the opening of the deepest life of the soul to the indwelling Godhead, the eternal Omnipresence. On the other hand, religion when it identifies itself only with a creed, a cult, a Church, a system of ceremonial forms, may well become a retarding force and there may therefore arise a necessity for the human spirit to reject its control over the varied activities of life."<sup>2</sup>

The failure to make this distinction is at the root of a lot of confused debate on these issues in this country. If espousing the cause of spirituality makes Sri Aurobindo a fundamentalist, then that would make Jesus Christ and Buddha too fundamentalists!

Religionism has not been the only perversion of true religion. There is another, against which too we must guard ourselves. This perversion sets in when religion tends to mean, as it has often done, something different and remote from earthly life, leading to ascetic

renunciation. The spirituality of which Sri Aurobindo has been the most articulate spokesman in our time respects the freedom of the human soul, because it is fulfilled by freedom; and the deepest meaning of freedom is the power to expand and grow towards perfection by the law of one's own nature. True spirituality gives freedom to philosophy and science, to man's seeking for political and social perfection and to all his other powers and terrestrial aspirations.

Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo exemplify best the spirit of liberalism which has created out of the medieval Hinduism a vibrant, modern Hinduism, more than willing to reaffirm what is basic to the Hindu faith—respect for all religions.

I will begin with a quotation which presents succinctly Sri Aurobindo's approach to the solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem. It is essentially a spiritual approach and I am convinced that there is no purely external, legal or diplomatic solution to this problem, although we may have to find the external means to give a practical shape to this inner spirit of Hindu-Muslim unity.

"Of one thing we may be certain, that Hindu-Mahomedan unity cannot be effected by political adjustments or Congress flatteries. It must be sought deeper down, in the heart and in the mind, for where the causes of disunion are, there the remedies must be sought. We shall do well in trying to solve the problem to remember that misunderstanding is the most fruitful cause of our differences, that love compels love and that strength conciliates the strong. We must try to remove the causes of misunderstanding by a better mutual knowledge and sympathy; we must extend the unfaltering love of the patriot to our Musalman brother, remembering always that in him too Narayana dwells and to him too our Mother has given a permanent place in her bosom; but we must cease to approach him falsely or flatter out of a selfish weakness and cowardice. We believe this to be the only practical way of dealing with the difficulty. As a political question the Hindu-Mahomedan problem does not interest us at all, as a national problem it is of supreme importance."<sup>3</sup>

I would like to submit that there is more wisdom in these few lines of Sri Aurobindo's than in all the discussions and deliberations that have been held on this subject during the last several decades. Let us highlight the main points of this agenda for bringing about the two communities closer:

- a) Hindu-Muslim unity cannot be achieved through sheer political cleverness or by flattering the Muslims.
- b) This unity can be achieved only through cleansing our hearts of prejudices and clearing our minds of the cobwebs of misunderstanding.
- c) We must extend to the Muslim brother the love of



the patriot remembering that Mother India has given him too a permanent place in her bosom.

- d) An attitude of weakness and cowardice on the part of the Hindus will never conciliate the Muslim brethren.
- e) The Hindu-Muslim problem is a national problem, like the problems of poverty or overpopulation in India; it is not a problem to be solved through political adjustments and horsetrading.

Sri Aurobindo was opposed right from the time of the Morley-Minto reforms to the deliberate attempts being made by the British regime to encourage the notion that Hindus and Muslims were two separate political units, having separate political, economic and cultural interests because he felt that this would preclude the growth of a single and indivisible Indian nation. He always maintained that as a political question the Hindu-Mohammedan problem did not interest him at all, but as a national problem he thought it to be of supreme importance. It is for this same reason that he was unhappy with Gandhiji's overzealousness about the Khilafat question: Gandhiji went on to declare that the Khilafat question was in his view more important than the urgent matter of independence. His attitude can be seen from this brief excerpt from one of his writings at that time: "I would gladly ask for postponement of Swaraj activity if thereby we could advance the interest of the Khilafat."<sup>4</sup> As the historian R.C. Majumdar wrote: "If a hundred million Muslims in India are encouraged to feel they should be more interested in the welfare of Turkey and other Muslim States outside India than that of India itself, they will hardly be able to feel that they are an integral unit of the Indian nation." This meant basically encouraging the pan-Islamic movement in India which cut at the very root of Indian nationality. R.C. Majumdar sums up Gandhiji's role in these words: "His anxiety for the Hindu-Muslim unity deserves all praise, but his was a sentimental approach." I am not interested here in discussing the related issues of how hard the British tried to create a wedge between the Hindus and Muslims or how Gandhiji in spite of his most honourable intentions failed in bringing the two communities together.

As we all know, the Hindu-Muslim problem has been rendered so very difficult because of the tormenting memories of our history. It is easy to whip up among the Hindus passions of revenge and hostility over the humiliation and oppression they are believed to have suffered according to history books during the long years of Muslim rule in India. From the Muslim side, it is equally easy to depict independence of India as a dispensation that gives the majority Hindu community all the power and prestige and reduces the Muslims to the status of a minority community at the mercy of the majority community. It has therefore been easy to whip up passions among Muslims at their allegedly fallen state by reminding them that not long ago they were the masters

of the Hindus. So the field in India has always been fertile for bigots and fanatics, whether Hindu or Muslim, to sow seeds of disharmony and conflict and to reap a rich harvest of communal strife, riots, bloodshed and destruction of innocent lives.

Then there is a further complication. The basis of Islam is a creed, and there is no salvation outside this creed. Because of this, a certain kind of sectarian universalism comes natural to it—those who profess the creed, no matter of what nation, race, or community belong to a universal Islamic Society, and those who do not accept this creed cannot be part of this Society. As in other religions, in Islam too there are highly evolved people who are capable of transcending this exclusiveness. But Islam in India and in most places outside India as well has not yet undergone the churning process of liberalisation. Hinduism underwent in India under the impact of the intellectual, rationalistic, cosmopolitan, mundane and humanistic thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. Modern Hinduism reflects the influence of such reformist movements as Brahma Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj, the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement, etc.

I do not want to give the impression that every Hindu is a shining example of this liberal spirit. Far from it. But the Hindu temper as a whole in the country is to a considerable extent influenced by this liberal spirit, and the spirit of tolerance of other religions is traditional to the Hindu ethos. Otherwise, following the examples of Pakistan and now also of Bangladesh, which do not complain of any Hindu-Muslim problem at all, India too could by now have eliminated this problem. But we have not done so, and therein lies the glory of this country. And so we continue to struggle with this problem. And yet it must be recognised that in very many Hindu minds there is a feeling that our Muslim brother is the "other", an alien—not one of us. I will take up this issue again presently.

To return to our main point: Swami Vivekananda had the greatness to say "The Mohammedan conquest of India came as a salvation to the downtrodden, to the poor. That is why one-fifth of our population have become Mohammedans."<sup>5</sup> This is what Swami Vivekananda was capable of saying nearly a hundred years ago to this fellowmen. In a letter he wrote to a Muslim friend of his, he once said:

"I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind. We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is

Oneness, so that each may choose that which suits him the best.

“For our own motherland, a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—Vedanta brain and Islamic body—is the only hope. I see in my mind’s eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islamic body.”<sup>6</sup>

In this, Swami Vivekananda embodies the spirit of modern Hinduism. To take another example, in his *Essays on the Gita*, written nearly 80 years ago, Sri Aurobindo had this to say about his attitude regarding scriptures such as the Veda, Upanishads and the Gita:

“First of all, there is undoubtedly a Truth one and eternal which we are seeking, from which all other truth derives, ....But precisely for that reason it cannot be shut up in a single trenchant formula, it is not likely to be found in its entirety or in all its bearings in any single philosophy or Scripture or uttered altogether and for ever by any one teacher, thinker, prophet or Avatar. ...Secondly, this Truth, though it is one and eternal, expresses itself in Time and through the mind of man; therefore every Scripture must necessarily contain two elements, one temporary, perishable, belonging to the ideas of the period and country in which it was produced, the other eternal and imperishable and applicable in all ages and countries.”<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, very little seems to have happened in the Islamic world in the way of reform movements to bring to it a comparative liberal spirit and to change the stamp of the temperament of its adherents. If anything, there has been among Islamic nations a fundamentalist revival which is opposed to any kind of reformist spirit. For instance, Bahaism in Iran which has given quite a different stamp to the temperament of its adherents as unfortunately proscribed in many Muslim countries, and in the country of its origin, Iran, it remains the object of severe persecution. Compare what Sri Aurobindo had to say about scriptures with this from a recent letter written by a leader of the Muslim community to the Editor, *Sunday* (10-16 July 1994): “The Muslim, by definition, believes in the Koran, every word of it, as the word of God. He has no right to pick and choose in the Koran. He accepts it in its entirety as the Last and Immutable Message of God to mankind and if he questions one word of it, he is outside the pale. Therefore he has no authority to change a word, a comma, or a full stop.” I don’t deny to anyone the right to hold such views, but the contrast between this and the views held by such leaders of the Indian Renaissance as Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo should not be lost sight of.

This fundamentalism may very well be a passing phase

during which Islam is establishing its own identity and gaining confidence in itself after years of suppression at the hands of Western imperialism and culture, and once this has been achieved, the Islamic religious mind may go on to breathe more freely and give a wider scope for the liberal spirit in it. There are signs that this phase in the development of Islam is already in progress in such countries as Turkey, Egypt and Indonesia. Within Islam in India too we see a tussle going on between the liberal elements and the extremist elements as in other religions. Our attempts should be to strengthen the hands of the liberal elements and not to pamper to the whims of the extremists for winning their votes. Nevertheless, it is not realism to ignore this growing hold of fundamentalism on Islam in India even today. The politicization of Islam has added fuel to the fire of fundamentalism.

Sri Aurobindo had a clear recognition of these singular difficulties and therefore he recognised that co-existence with a community such as Islam required a federal spirit, even wider than that which has made India the most tolerant country in the world to other religious faiths and modes of worship. There will have to be such a genuine spirit of federalism as would convince Muslims that it is not the goal of Hinduism either to destroy Islam or to absorb it within Hinduism. This would necessitate evolving a formula of national unity by expanding the old idea of federalism. Sri Aurobindo was very clear on this issue so many decades ago, for he said:

“The Mahomedan, the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Christian in India will not have to cease to be Mahomedan, Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian, in any sense of the term, for uniting into one great and puissant Indian Nation. Devotion to one’s own ideals and institutions with tolerance and respect for the ideals and institutions of other sections of the community, and an ardent love and affection for the common civic life and ideal of all,—these are what must be cultivated by us now, for the building up of the real Indian Nation.”<sup>8</sup>

The broad humanist Hinduism which is based on the heritage of Vedanta expounded not only by Sri Aurobindo but also by Swami Vivekananda, and by academic philosophers such as Dr. Radhakrishnan and Dr. Dasgupta, it will be granted by all, is the Hinduism which has this spirit of genuine federalism. In the very first chapter of his *Essays on the Gita*, Sri Aurobindo had the audacity to ask his readers not to be limited by the Gita, or for that matter by any scripture of the past:

“We are not called upon to be orthodox Vedantins of any of the three schools or Tantrics or adhere to one of the theistic religions of the past or to entrench ourselves within the four corners of the teaching of the Gita. That would be to limit ourselves and to attempt to create our spiritual life out of the being, knowledge and nature of others, of the men of the past, instead of building it out of our own being and

potentialities. We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future.”<sup>9</sup>

Or consider the following from Swami Vivekananda:

“I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the Crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhist Temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and his law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of every one.

“Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvellous book—these spiritual revelations of the world, the Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them”<sup>10</sup>

This was the spirit which inspired the Indian Renaissance, and if this spirit is recognised and encouraged, those belonging to the minority religions should have no reason to feel threatened by the dominant Hindu community. But unfortunately, there has been a tendency in the country to dismiss all this as another version of Hindu revivalism! The leftist, secularist intellectuals in the country have taken great delight in condemning this spirit of Indian Renaissance as empty sentimentalism. The secularist wisdom in this matter decrees either that all scriptures are old wives' tales, or that the Christian should stick to his Bible, the Muslim to his Koran and their Hindu to his Gita! Furthermore, it should also be understood that there is bound to be within the fold of such a credal religion as Islam a fairly strong element which regards the intolerance of other religions as the mark of a true believer. Dogmatism and fanaticism are not the exclusive bane of any particular religion. The blind obedience to an authority, whether that of a text, or of a person, or of some set rules, and the waning of the inner spirit of religion, its spiritual core, are blights that can affect the followers of any religion. But tolerance of other religions has never been claimed as basic to Islam, at least in India except among the Sufis, whose influence is negligible on the opinion-makers among the Islamic leadership. As Sri Aurobindo is reported to have once said in an informal chat with his disciples: “You can live amiably with a religion whose principle is toleration. But how is it possible to live peacefully with a religion whose principle is I will not tolerate you? How are you going to have unity with these people?”

If such a religion finds itself in the position of a minority, it can easily develop a persecution complex. Then the more fanatic followers of this religion will find various means of exploiting their minority status to blackmail the majority community. On several occasions in India we have failed to make a distinction between the moral and

political blackmailing tactics of a few hooligans and the genuine aspirations for social and economic justice of the silent majority in our Muslim population. The vote arithmetic on which our democracy is based has even encouraged these hooligans. Giving in to the blackmailing tactics of such groups is dangerous to both the communities. A sentimental approach or one which is overtly moralistic only adds fuel to this conflict situation. A firm and impartial handling of conflicts arising out of this mindset is as important for our political health and stability as safeguarding the identity of the minority religions. Otherwise, there will be a backlash from the majority groups which will feel justified in using the force of their strength to teach the trouble-makers a lesson. We have often reached such flashpoints of communal tension in India by not being honest and straight about these problems and by taking a diplomatic attitude and resorting to political conciliation in such situations. A purely opportunistic and political approach in such a situation is bound to aggravate it.

As I have observed above, the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India has been particularly sharp for various historical reasons. What actions or policies pursued by the majority Hindu community can be legitimately interpreted as threatening to the identity of Muslims in India, and when any direct or indirect retaliation by the Muslims can be regarded as a legitimate way of expressing a real grievance and when it is a mere blackmailing tactic—these are difficult judgments to make. No purely rational or external or legalistic way can ever be devised to settle these questions. The only answer to this problem is for both the communities to understand each other better and move closer spiritually. If that has to happen, we must encourage within the country the liberal spirit of the kind which was the inspiration behind the Indian Renaissance. Only on a spiritual basis can Hindu-Muslim unity be realised. But unfortunately, as I said earlier, spirituality is today either a misunderstood or an ill-understood concept in India.

I feel that India has not yet been able to find a lasting solution to the Hindu-Muslim problem because Hinduism has not yet been able to discover the spiritual strength needed to do this. I referred earlier in this paper to the feeling in very many Hindu minds that the Muslim is for some reason an alien. For the most part this feeling is no more than a subtle mental reservation which is in a dormant state most of the time, but it can be provoked and awakened, and it can colour his perception of things happening around him. This feeling, however subtle it may be, is a sign of weakness because at its source you will find that it is born either of an irrational fear or of a feeling of superiority, both vis-a-vis other religions, and particularly Islam. This might well be the last vestige of the religious ego, the bane of all religions. Hinduism must acquire the strength to reject this weakness. To expect

the Hindu to totally rid himself even of this feeling of reservation about Muslims is in one sense asking too much of him, living as he does surrounded by countries which swear by Islamic fundamentalism. But he will have to prove himself equal to this difficult challenge. It is not going to be easy, but as the Mother, Sri Aurobindo's collaborator, once hinted, it seems to be the destiny of India to try and find a solution to this most difficult problem.

It must be realised that Islam came to India as a foreign body imported into the country and it affected Hinduism in many different ways. Unlike the previous waves of invasion that merged and were lost in the general life and consciousness of India, Islam maintained its integrity and in turn infused India with a semitic tone. The impact of Islam on India was psychologically cataclysmic; India could not just go back to being what she was before. It is not the question of tolerating and accommodating other religions that we are talking about here, Hinduism has an enviable record on that. It is not even the question of racial and cultural blending which has taken place in many parts of the world. What India faces today is the problem of spiritual fusion with other religions, particularly with Islam, and of achieving unity among religions on a vast scale.

Islam proved to be a great challenge to Hinduism because the latter had lost the strength and dynamism it once possessed, and Islam is rightly contemptuous of all weakness. Like Islam, Hinduism too during the Vedic times had the zeal to conquer "the world for God" but this was an altogether different notion of conquering the world. Intolerance towards the followers of other religions or trying to convert them to one's own religion was no part of this Vedic sense of conquering the world for God. In the Vedic ideal, it meant bringing perfection not only to the human soul but also to the instruments of the soul, to the human body, which is constantly plagued by disease and the threat of dissolution, to the life-energies which are tormented by the vagaries of desire and the frustrations they cause, and to the mind which is constantly troubled by doubt and disillusionment. This Vedic ideal includes in it the mastery and the perfection of the external world. This emphasis on perfection of the whole of life, not just the soul, will make Hinduism dynamic and world-affirming. One of the weaknesses of Hinduism during the last millennium has been its excessive world-negating stance; it tends to take for granted that this world is meant to be given up, since it is *jada, mithyā*, the field of incurable ignorance. So what happens to the external manifestations and institutions of our lives and our religion is not important. This is the way, unfortunately, our scriptures have been interpreted during the last thousand years and this has created some kind of debilitating block in the very psyche of the Hindu community.

But there can be another interpretation of the Vedas and at least some of our major Upanishads as can be seen in Sri Aurobindo's writings on them. It is that this creation is a manifestation of the Divine Being, not an evil or falsehood in itself but something which becomes meaningful as the consciousness of man evolves. There must therefore be a way to overcome the evil in the world today. This would mean that we should accept the world but be fully committed to the elimination of whatever is imperfect in it, and thus fulfil the purpose of life. In other words, the concept that this world can be changed and made the dwelling place of the Divine or of the Supreme perfection has to be the new emphasis of Hinduism today. Only a return to such a dynamic, world-affirming Hinduism will ever be able to conciliate Islam and win its respect. To negate the world is to admit that it does not belong to God. One can never conciliate Islam on the basis of such weakness.

As I said earlier, Sri Aurobindo did not think that there was any purely political or external solution to the Hindu-Muslim problem. Since he held that unity must first be realised within before it can manifest without, he firmly believed that the best approach to fostering the unity between the two communities was still the spiritual approach. He said :

"If we are to create a common sentiment, it can only be by awakening in their hearts the sentiments of common brotherhood with their Hindu fellowmen. To do this we must first nourish the sentiment ourselves. A political show or talk of brotherhood will not serve, for it will ring false to the ear of feeling; and no true unity can be effected by insincere professions ... By the natural conversion of brotherly feeling into love and service the gulf which is yawning wider and wider between the two communities may be bridged. It cannot be done by diplomacy, it cannot be done by logic, it can only be done by the appeal of heart to heart" <sup>11</sup>

The time has come to implement these guidelines that Sri Aurobindo has laid down during the early years of the century now that we are the masters of our own political destiny. We should ask ourselves what measures we have taken to bring Muslims into the mainstream of our national life by attending to the real problems they have been facing, namely the problems of housing, education and job opportunities. We should refuse to give in to the temptation of exploiting them as communal vote banks, because that is a sure way of marginalising them.

In my discussion here I have deliberately avoided mentioning the current conflict between the ideologies of the so-called secularists and the so-called champions of Hindu nationalism. In my view these so-called secularists are motivated by genuine humanitarian considerations but in practice they seem to be perpetuating



a mix of the political and sentimental approaches which have so far proved disastrous. From political platforms we preach that religion should be kept out of politics, but how do we keep religion out of politics as long as we can not eschew the temptation of depending on religious vote-banks? That is the surest way of politicising religion and politicising religion is the easiest way of getting caught in the vicious grip of fundamentalism, and fundamentalism is a game at which many can play; we should not look surprised when we find that Hindus can be made to play it as zealously as any other religious group in the country.

Regarding the ideology of the so-called champions of Hindu nationalism, it is possible to infer what Sri Aurobindo's reactions to their ideology would have been from the comments he made a long time ago (*Karmayogin*, Nov.6, 1909) on the ideology of a group called the Hindu Sabha, which was started in Bengal in the first decade of this century. Sri Aurobindo said in his article that if this Hindu Sabha stood for a new spiritual impulse based on Vedanta, the essential oneness of man, the lofty ideals of brotherhood, freedom, equality, and a recognition of the great mission and mighty future of the Hindu spiritual ideals and disciplines and of the Indian race, then it would be serving a great objective. If, on the other hand, it is inspired by motives of rivalry against the Mohammedan intransigence and by a desire to put the mass and force of a united Hinduism against the intensity of Muslim self-assertion, then it has to be regarded a retrogressive movement and must be rejected. Sri Aurobindo was categorical that Hindu nationalism had probably a meaning in the times of Shivaji and Ramdas, probably it was both possible and necessary at that time, but in present-day India such an ideology had no place. Under modern conditions, there was room only for an Indian nationalism.<sup>12</sup>

What lessons can we then draw from this analysis of the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity in Sri Aurobindo's light?

- a) Hindu-Muslim unity can not be achieved through political cleverness, or by flattering the Muslims. It can be achieved only by cleansing our hearts of prejudices and our minds of misunderstandings.
- b) The Hindu must extend to the Muslim brother the love of the patriot realising that Mother India has given him too a permanent place in her bosom. Nothing should be done which would threaten the identity of the various religious minorities of India.
- c) The temptation of exploiting the Muslim community purely as a vote-bank must be given up. The real economic, social and educational interests of this community should be addressed so that the community does not feel marginalised.
- d) The problems created by religious fundamentalism should not be papered over; we should learn to make a clear distinction between the real interest of a community and the attempts it can make to

exploit its minority status. Thuggery and hooliganism must be severely dealt with, no matter in what community it is found. The liberal elements within Islam should be encouraged.

- e) It should be remembered that by weakness and cowardice one can never conciliate Islam. Hinduism should be more dynamic and world-affirming and revive its commitment to the ideal of making our terrestrial life perfect. More clearly and decisively than ever before, Hinduism should rise above mere religiosity and reveal its true nature as a spiritual culture; only then will it be able to fulfil its historic mission of showing to the world how to fuse spiritually with other religions on a vast scale.

I can think of no better way of concluding this paper than by quoting a part of Sri Aurobindo's message of 15 August 1947:

"India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom....; But the old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that the Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as for ever settled or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. The partition of the country must go,—it is to be hoped by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, the division must and will go. For without it the destiny of India might be seriously impaired and even frustrated. But that must not be."<sup>13</sup>

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- 9 *SABCL*, Vol.13, p. 8
- 10 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati Memorial Edition, Vol.2, p. 374
- 11 *Sri Aurobindo and the New Thought in Indian Politics* by Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, p. 295
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# Time and Space

*K. Balasubramaniam*

No time has witnessed so much interest in the subject of Time and Space as the present century. After the advent and proliferation of Space Technology, Scientists are leaving no stone unturned to unravel the mysteries of Space, Time and Causation. Witness the spate of theories propounded—each upsetting the cosmological apple cart—purporting to bring us nearer to the Truth. Yet we cannot say that we have a comprehensive and comprehensible solution to the cosmological conundrum. Instead of lamenting that the scientific merry-go-round has not taken us very far, we can look for other ways and means to fill the void left by Science. We have to leave "respectable" Science and take recourse to metaphysical thought which while supplying comfortable "solutions" may not convince the logical diehards, who reject *a priori* the claim of metaphysics to fill the lacunae that exists and will exist between scientific theories and the ultimate Truth. Sri Aurobindo is hitting the nail hard on its head when he observes—"But in physics you are in the very domain of the mechanical law where process is everything and the driving consciousness has chosen to conceal itself with the greatest thoroughness—so that "scientifically speaking", it does not exist there. One can discover it there only by occultism and yoga, but the methods of occult science and of yoga are not measurable or followable by the means of physical science—so the gulf remains still in existence. It may be bridged one day, but the physicist is not likely to be the bridge-builder, so it is no use asking him to try what is beyond his province." So Sri Aurobindo pre-empted the role for scientists in the complete solution of Time, Space and the cosmological riddle and points to the necessity of Metaphysics stepping in to light up the dark nooks and corners of the Time-Space-Causation edifice. We will reinforce our argument to rope in metaphysics where physics is ostensibly helpless with the following words of Sri Aurobindo. "Certainly, no metaphysics can be admissible which does not take count of the standards and undoubted results of Science; but until experimental analysis has solved the whole mystery of the Universe, not by speculation through logic (a method stolen from metaphysics with which Science has no business) but by experimental proof and hypotheses checked and confirmed by experimental proof, leaving no phenomenon unaccounted for and no fact ignored, —until then no metaphysics must reign where analytic experiment leaves a void."<sup>2</sup> Armed with this sanction, let us see how far we can succeed in linking up the physical and supraphysical truths in one holistic view.

Let us start at the very beginning, with "matter". Of course,

Science has come a long way in the understanding of matter. Science has discovered that matter and energy are convertible. The one step needed from energy to "consciousness" is yet to be taken by Science. Let us see what our ancients knew about matter. It has been held that matter as we see, feel, touch etc. has behind it subtler states or "sources" of which it is a condensation in our three dimensional world. These, they called "Tanmantras". Sri Aurobindo says, "*Tanmantra* is only the basis of matter. In the Sankhya, the basis is *pradhāna* (of *prakṛti*) out of which come Buddhi and everything else. In the Vedānta it is spiritual substance out of which all comes."<sup>3</sup> The five forms of matter (the *panca mahā bhūtas*) or elements: space, air, fire, water and earth have behind them the corresponding Tanmantras. In fact, it is the spiritual substance *sat* which is the root cause of matter as we know it. Is matter *jada* or inanimate? Sri Aurobindo says, "Matter is *jada* only in appearance. As even modern Science admits, Matter is energy in action, and as we know in India, energy is force of consciousness in action."<sup>4</sup>

The two terms "Energy" and "Consciousness" as introduced by Sri Aurobindo are not easy terms to explain. As pointed out earlier, Science has established the energy-matter equation ( $E=mc^2$ ) and thus has pushed the doors a little wider for the next equation to be established, namely that of consciousness-energy. Then and only then the link will be complete leading to the "true" understanding of matter as a form of Spirit or Consciousness. But this is not going to be achieved by the physical sciences, for as Sri Aurobindo says, "Physical Science must necessarily to its own first view be materialistic, because so long as it deals with the physical, it has for its own truth's sake to be physical both in its standpoint and method; it must interpret the material universe first in the language and tokens of the material Brahman, because these are its primary and its general terms and all others come second, subsequently, are a special syllabary. To follow a self-indulgent course from the beginning would lead at once towards fancies and falsities. Initially, science is justified in resenting any call on it to indulge in another kind of imagination and intuition."<sup>5</sup> This is at once a vindication of Science, however limited it may be, and a painful exposure of its pitiful limitations vis-a-vis the ultimate Truth.

Granting that it is energy or more precisely "Chit-Shakti", Consciousness-Energy or force of Consciousness in action which is the creator of matter and the physical universe, how does this come about? The seers, Rishis of

India did not see the physical universe in isolation, but one in a spectrum of Universes or planes of Consciousness, "Lokas" of subtler and subtler substances right from the world of Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) to that of the gross material world. All these have been brought out by "Energy which is fundamentally one in all planes, only taking more and more dense forms...". What is the role of Energy in precipitating matter? Agni (Fire) is the agent who is supposed to have brought out the different states of matter.

So much for matter. But we have not yet touched Time and Space which along with matter form the trio around which "Life" as we know revolves. It may be a truism to say that matter exists in space. But the existence of matter in space, especially the existence of our physical universe in space has thrown up profound problems in the realms of Science, Metaphysics and Philosophy. A plethora of questions await satisfactory answers. What is Time? Does time precede Space? We may not be able to answer all these questions fully but some honest attempt can be made. Science alone cannot give and has not given satisfactory answers to these questions, circumscribed as it is by its penchant for "material" proof for everything. Nevertheless, we can get some useful ideas from Science.

To being with, one can understand the relativity of time, the past, the present and the future which is a common experience. But are the past, the present and the future the same for everyone? Does it depend on spatial, psychological or spiritual dispositions of the person? Suppose you are in an airplane, watching a train on the ground. To the people on the train, the station they have just left is the past, the bridge they are about to cross is the future. But you are seeing them all at the same moment. Your now is the past, present and future of the people in the train. In the foregoing example, not only the relativity of time is established but also the inalienable link between Time and motion. Time flows. It is an important ingredient or a partner of space. This flow can be measured and hence in scientific parlance can be called a "dimension" and hence the Time-Space continuum or the fourth dimension.

One can argue that time is a psychological phenomenon, for the sense of time undergoes drastic changes, it contracts or dilates depending upon the psychological states of the person. One feels that time passes slowly when one is bored or that it flies when one is in a state of euphoria or even that it is annihilated if sufficiently absorbed in doing something with absolute concentration. Einstein's relativity theory speaks of time dilatation, that is, time slowing down when objects move with a speed close to that of light. Is there something beyond Time? A timeless state can be posited as indeed it is in metaphysical thought backed up by spiritual experience. But this timeless state can be supracosmic as well as cosmic. The whole cosmic

movement, (not only the physical cosmos, but also the entire gamut of manifested universes, physical or occult) is the "dance of Shiva" which is taking place in the Eternal consciousness. This movement is without beginning and without end and is taking place in the Timeless Eternal Consciousness which includes (immanent) and transcends it as an eternal witness (transcendent), viewing the whole movement in an eternal now. If all the energies and with that all the cosmic manifestation be withdrawn (Pralaya) then there is a timeless awareness, not deploying itself in Time and Space, the absolute static Brahman. So, one can envisage Time both as finite and infinite, temporal and eternal. "Time and Space are not limited, they are infinite—they are the terms of an extension of consciousness in which things take place or are arranged in a certain relation, succession, order. There are again different orders of Time and Space; that too depends on the consciousness. The Eternal is extended in Time and Space, but he is also beyond all Time and Space. Timelessness and Time are two terms of the eternal existence. The Spaceless Eternal is not one indivisible infinity of Space, there is in it no near or far, no here or there—the Timeless Eternal is not measurable by years or hours or aeons, the experience of it has been described as the eternal moment. But for the mind this state cannot be described except by negatives,—one has to go beyond and realise it."<sup>6</sup>

Having talked of Time-Space continuum, we can now turn our attention to the proper understanding of Space. "A purely physical Space might be regarded as in itself a property of Matter; but Matter is a creation of Energy in movement. Space therefore in the material world could be either a fundamental self-extension of material Energy or its self-formed existence-field, its representation of the Inconscient Infinity in which it is acting, a figure in which it accommodates the formulas and movements of its own action and self-creation."<sup>7</sup> It can be safely said that space is coeval with cosmos—what we call our teleological cosmos. If we suppose that there was Chaos out of which our Cosmos has emerged as an ordered extension, this Chaos could not have existed in the original Spaceless Infinite Reality which is a harmony of elements in status and hence ordered. Chaos as a precursor of Cosmos, is a mid-term between balance and order in status and balance and order in dynamics. This can support the case of an evolutionary Cosmos which is engaging the attention of the modern cosmologists. But again a caution has to be sounded that we should not rest content with the physical Cosmos alone but include all the subtler or occult worlds behind our Physical Cosmos. There is a dim awareness even among scientists that the physical space is not the beginning and end and that there may be other spaces and other times. The mystery of the "Bermuda Triangle", an area in the Atlantic ocean where innumerable ships and planes have disappeared without a trace, is believed by some to be due to a Space-Time "Wrinkle". It is argued

that this area is full of magnetic anomalies which create sudden vortices in the ocean and suck up ships etc., but there are others who contend that these objects have been forced to enter another Space-Time continuum because of the "Wrinkle". Once a series of Space-Time continua is accepted, the entry into and exit from these dimensions other than our Space-Time can be envisaged. According to the seer vision of Sri Aurobindo, evolution presupposes involution of consciousness resulting in a series of "Lokas", worlds of planes of consciousness and "continuity" of these planes inevitably entails contact. The nature of this contact is beyond our scope here. Suffice it to say that Seers or Rishis could switch their consciousness from plane to plane both in ascent (becoming successively aware of the gross material plane, the vital plane, the mental plane etc., upto the plane of Sat-Chit-Anand) and descent (the reverse movement and coming down from the plane of Sat-Chit-Ananda to the gross material plane offering proof of that. Whether the physical body can also participate in this leap from one plane to another is not yet established satisfactorily, though accounts of such feats are not lacking in Puranic, occult and other traditions of India. Sri Aurobindo observes, "What is space after all but an extension of conscious being in which Consciousness-Force builds its own surroundings? In the subtle physical plane there are, not one but many layers of consciousness and each moves in its own being, that is to say, in its own space. I have said that each subtle plane is a conglomeration of a series of worlds. Each space may at any point meet, penetrate or coincide with another; accordingly at one point of meeting or coincidence there might be several subtle objects occupying what we might rather arbitrarily call the same space, and yet they may not be in any actual relation with each other. If there is a relation created, it is the multiple consciousness of the seer in which the meeting place becomes apparent and creates it.

"On the other hand, there may be a relation between objects in different regions of space correlated to each other as in the case of the gross physical object and its subtle counterpart. There you can more easily reason of relations between one space and another."<sup>8</sup>

"Inter Spatial Travel" may be ridiculed as a vain chimera, but in view of what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have attempted, i.e., transforming and divinising matter by opening the material consciousness to the supramental, we will probably see its snowballing effect in the future and one may expect the material evolution coming up with bodies which can accomplish this feat. The occult phenomenon of materialisation and dematerialisation which Science hesitates to accept as fact, is fairly well-known in many countries. It is quite logical to suppose that matter can be resolved into energy and can emerge as matter anywhere either in the same Space-Time continuum or in a different Space-Time continuum. That scores of science fiction writers use this in describing inter-stellar

or inter-galactic travels in space testifies to the fact that the transition from science fiction to scientific fact is not far off. Just like Space travel, Time travel is also engaging the attention of serious scientists. Can one go back in Time? It is generally accepted that there is nothing in the laws of physics that says that time can not go backward. Einstein's equations of motion work equally well mathematically, when the direction of time is reversed. J. Richard Gott, now a theorist at the Princeton University, has come up with a theory that travel into the past might, in principle, be accomplished even if it may not be practical. Interested readers may refer to the exciting article which had appeared in May 20, 1991 issue to Time, written by Mr. Michael D. Lemonick. Lemonick writes that a California Institute of Technology physicist, Mr. Kip Thorne and his colleagues have constituted their own theoretical time machine which involves "travel through a wormhole, a bizarre object that physicists believe might exist at the core of black hole. Under the infinite density and gravity at the black hole's centre, space could be so profoundly warped that a tunnel would form, far narrower than a subatomic particle, that might reach to some distant part of the universe. Anything entering the tunnel would appear instantly at the other end and under special circumstances would essentially travel into the past."<sup>9</sup> But as reported by Lemonick, Gott has a simpler idea than that of Thorne. Gott propounds the idea of "Cosmic Strings" which are "energy fields of the very early universe, shortly after the big bang". He theorises that if a space ship flying at nearly the speed of light loops around the cosmic strings moving past each other at nearly the speed of light, it will travel back in time.

Time and Space still bristle with lots of problems for scientists though Indian Metaphysics has presented bold formulations for the logical mind. These compact formulations have been backed by spiritual experiences. The future may witness a happy handshake between Science and Metaphysics, one offering facts painstakingly arrived at by "scientific" methods and the other offering spiritual techniques or processes as assiduously cultivated, refined and tested as any "scientific" methodology. The reconciliation can come only when the present mental consciousness is transformed into a supramental consciousness which will comprehend the global movements of Consciousness-Energy in its manifold formulations in all planes down to the minutiae of its intricate working in each plane. Sri Aurobindo brilliantly puts forth the radically different working of the supramental consciousness: "The supramental consciousness, on the other hand, is founded upon the supreme consciousness of the timeless Infinite, but has too the secret of the deployment of the infinite Energy in time. It can either take its station in the time consciousness and keep the timeless infinite as its background of supreme and original being from which it receives all its organising knowledge, will and action, or it can, centred in its essential being, live in the timeless but live too in a manifestation in time which it feels and sees as infinite and as the same Infinite, and can bring out, sustain and develop in the one what



it holds supernally in the other. Its time consciousness therefore will be different from that of the mental being, not swept helplessly on the stream of the moments and clutching at each moment as a stay and a swiftly disappearing standpoint, but founded first on its eternal identity beyond the changes of time, secondly on a simultaneous eternity of Time in which past, present and future exist together for ever in the self-knowledge and self-power of the Eternal, thirdly in a total view of the three times as one movement singly and indivisibly seen even in their succession of stages, periods, cycles, last—and that only in the instrumental consciousness—in the step-by-step evolution of the moments. It will therefore have the knowledge of the three times, *trikāladrsti*—held of old to be a supreme sign of the seer and the Rishi,—not as an abnormal power, but as its normal way of time knowledge.”<sup>10</sup>

Hard-line scientists may dismiss the "metaphysical filling in" of the holes in scientific discoveries as an inept attempt by pseudo

scientists to intrude into their inviolable realm of facts but the increasing tribe of scientists of the ilk of Fritjof Capra may well sound the death knell for scientific snobbery. We end this article in the hope that Science has begun its fledgling steps in its march towards "Super-science" or "Yoga" which truly holds the key to the ultimate solution of the Time-Space-Causation problem.

Gavesanā—1992

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*You are reasoning on the analogy of your own very cabined and limited sense-consciousness and its rather clumsy relations with the happenings in material space. What is space after all but an extension of conscious being in which Consciousness- Force builds its own surroundings? In the subtle physical plane there are, not one, but many layers of consciousness and each moves in its own being, that is to say, in its own space. I have said that each subtle plane is a conglomeration or series of worlds. Each space may at any point meet, penetrate or coincide with another; accordingly at one point of meeting or coincidence there might be several subtle objects occupying what we might rather arbitrarily call the same space. and yet they may not be in any actual relation with each other. If there is a relation created, it is the multiple consciousness of the seer in which the meeting place becomes apparent that creates it.*

*On the other hand, there may be a relation between objects in different regions of space correlated to each other as in the case of the gross physical object and its subtle counterpart. There you can more easily reason of relations between one space and another.*



*Time and Space are not limited, they are infinite—they are the terms of an extension of consciousness in which things take place or are arranged in a certain relation, succession, order. There are again different orders of Time and Space; that too depends on the consciousness. The Eternal is extended in Time and Space, but he is also beyond all Time and Space. Timelessness and Time are two terms of the eternal existence. The Spaceless Eternal is not one indivisible infinity of Space, there is in it no near or far, no here or there—the Timeless Eternal is not measurable by years or hours or aeons, the experience of it has been described as the eternal moment. But for the mind this state cannot be described except by negatives,—one has to go beyond and to realise it.*



*The objection is founded on human three dimensional ideas of space and division in space, which are again founded upon the limited nature of the human senses. To some beings space is one dimensional, to others two dimensional, to others three dimensional—but there are other dimensions also. It is well recognised in metaphysics that the Infinite can be in a point and not only in extension of space—just as there is an eternity of extension in Time but also an Eternity which is independent of Time so that it can be felt in the moment—one has not to think of millions and millions of years in order to realise it. So too the rigid distinction of One against Many, a One that cannot be many or of an All that is made up by addition and not self-existent are crude mental notions of the outer finite mind that cannot be applied to the Infinite. If the All were of this material and unspiritual character, tied down to a primary arithmetic and geometry, the realisation of the universe in oneself, of the all in each and each in all, of the universe in the Bindu would be impossible. Your Xs are evidently innocent of the elements of metaphysical thinking or they would not make such objections.*

Sri Aurobindo Letters on Yoga

# French Culture and India

K. D. Sethna

The Indian Government's plan to let the French Settlements enjoy, even when they are a part of the larger Indian subcontinent, a degree of cultural and linguistic autonomy is a wise one. It reflects the enlightened international outlook of Jawaharlal Nehru. The same outlook that has led him to keep India within the Commonwealth without abrogating her independence, has recognised the French cultural influence as an enriching value worthy to play its part in the free future that is modern India's in a world of increasing internationalism.

England and France—these are the two countries whose cultures we should do well to assimilate by means of our naturally synthesising and multiform genius. England gives us on the one hand a practical dynamic expansive life-instinct which can serve profitably to re-stimulate what was ours in the days of our past greatness—namely, a deep creative life-intuition flexibly functioning to give birth to a richness of varied and complex, adventurous and even fantastic-seeming forms of existence which yet carry a certain stability and self-balance by being rooted in a spontaneous organic energy. On the other hand, England gives us a language of extremely subtle poetic possibilities in which our innate mysticism of soul can most fittingly express itself and from which we can convey quickening colour and tone to our comparatively undeveloped vernaculars.

France comes with other gifts. There is, to begin with, her gift of prose as distinguished from poetry. English prose can be very great, but at its most characteristic it flourishes rather as a beautiful suburb of the poetic metropolis: it is poetry in a less intense medium, it has not its own typical self and movement. Poetry sings visions and enraptures; prose converses and expounds and pleases, its power is persuasion and its progression has a controlled order and an accurate sober effectiveness. Not that it lacks fire and speed, but its glow is steady and tastefully tempered, its run is a vigorous continuity. There have been English prose-writers who did not want in the clarity, the justice, the care, the firmness and the ease that constitute prose and art distinct from poetry which comes with a flashing flooding force; but only French culture provides us with this art in its most perfect as well as most cumulative form. It is a valuable art, since what is best said by way of pointed and animated conversation cannot be replaced, however sublime the substitute offered. So, French prose cannot but be a cultural asset if the mind of modern India is to be adequate in expression of a certain quality of keen and serious thought or quick and

defined feeling—a quality requiring a humane and natural manner.

Behind this prose there is the whole French civilisation. France brings, at her truest, a clear-seeing accurately organising idea-force and a considerably warm, liberty-loving, graciously and forcefully radiant sentiment. Here is a supple logic putting delicately discerned parts together to make a precise systematic whole, aided by a happy feeling for form which is an artistic eagerness at once to fashion total harmony and to keep unbarred the contours of individual entities. Ordered ensemble and sharp individuality in a brilliant combination—there we have the essence of the French genius. To resist standardisation or mass-reproduction and to make everything sparkle with a definite outline free of irrelevance and still to join all things to one another in a neat pattern which avoids waste and discloses their interrelation in a lucid crystalline loveliness—this is the French genius' ruling passion. In other words we may say that what the French genius attempts is a reasoned and tasteful, vivid and diversified integration.

But integration, we may note further, does not consist for the French genius in only combining system and individuality in a brilliant way. It consists in also bringing together the physical and the intellectual. The body with its senses, the mind with its conceptions—these are not, for the French, contrasting modes of living, opposed means of the *joie de vivre*. They are a single two-toned design and delight, complementaries and not contradictories. Hence, in general, so little dryness or abstractness in the French intellect and such a widespread intellectual flavour in the commonest walks of French life.

The things of the mind are not limited to a small group; even the sailor and the barman and the *concierge* will surprise you with intelligent interest in literature or science or the fine arts. As a charming instance of the general appreciation of serious literature in France, F. L. Lucas remembers the case of one Laurent, called "Coco", accused of burglary in April, 1905, who proved an alibi because: "*Juste à cette heure-là je me trouvais chez un marchand de vin de la Rue de Tracy et je discutais avec un camarade au sujet de la mère de Britannicus dans la tragédie de Racine.*" This discussion at a wine-merchant's on a *personnage* out of a classic drama in verse was proved to have lasted three-quarters of an hour. "No doubt," remarks Lucas, "burglars in England *might* discuss the character of Hamlet in a public-house; but no magistrate would believe it."

And, just as the *apache*, the *restaurateur* or the chorusgirl may talk with some *esprit* about Claudel, Camus, Picasso or perhaps even de Broglie, and, we may add, just as the window-dressers of the Faubourg Saint Honoré seem to bring to everyday objects the art of a Chardin composing with devoted care a still life, so also in their turn the *littérateurs*, the artists, the scientists live not like specialists but as men with broad sympathies and with an interest in day-to-day mundane occupations, men who are no bunglers in physical things but are aware of their niceties. It is difficult to come across, anywhere else in the world, the easy friendship between mind and body which is found where France is most French—that is, in Paris—and in those sections of Paris where, as Charles Morgan tells us, the foreigner's influence is least felt—the Rue Bonaparte, the square of St. Germain des Prés, the Ile St. Louis, the neighbourhood of Notre Dame.

No doubt, here is not the mystical harmonisation of all the terms of existence so as to lift each to its divine counterpart. But here is what can afford to the urge towards that harmonisation a fine cooperating zest, even as the French bent for a bright ordering of details without diminishing each detail's clear-cut uniqueness can be finely helpful to the balanced splendour of divine unity and divine diversity that, together with the ascent of earth to heaven and the descent of heaven to earth, is the complete aim of the spiritual consciousness.

When we go back to the Vedas, the early Upanishads and in later times the Bhagavad Gita, we discover a large synthesising movement careful of all aspects and forces of existence. Owing to various circumstances this movement got broken up and the Indian genius began to satisfy its hunger for the absolute by seeking keen separate culminations and carrying each trend to its farthest solitary limit, instead of by questing for an all-round inter-related perfection keyed to the highest spiritual yet orchestrating all the instruments of being. It is integration in this exalted sense that the Indian genius must ever toil for; it is integration of this kind that is most native to it; and to achieve it we must draw inspiration from our own spiritual depths and surcharge with their quality our outer life. But to help create in our outer life a response to those depths we might interfuse with our own spiritual temper the turns of the French genius, for we have to a considerable extent allowed important powers of our own to withdraw into the background and, in the modern *milieu*, these turns can go far both to resuscitate and enrich them.

Of course, the French genius can degenerate into the sceptical, the superficial and the sensual, just as the English can become crudely commercial or deviously opportunist at one extreme and, at the other, lose itself in a labyrinth of fancy or in a conceptual muddle. But this does not detract from their intrinsic worth. We

must do our best to absorb their positive virtues. The English language promises to remain a living force in India and therefore the virtues of the culture of England are not likely to vanish from amongst us. But the centres of French culture are small—in fact, a few towns—and its peculiar essence is likely to be elusive unless we are studious to capture it.

After the Merger in 1954, a local non-governmental association was formed in Pondicherry: the Friends of French Language and Culture. Also, with the willing cooperation of the Indian Government which had already accepted the continuance of French Colleges, France founded, with Dr. Filliozat, an eminent orientalist, as Director, a French Institute in the same town. These have been hopeful signs. But surely the most effective means of capturing for our country the essence of French Culture is to give full support to the idea mooted some years ago that Pondicherry should be converted into a University town, a cultural meeting-place between India and France consciously organised around the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education which was initiated in 1951 and is fast flowering now. This Centre draws its inspiration from the creative genius of Sri Aurobindo, a master of East-West synthesis, as well as from that of his co-worker, the Mother, who, appealing for a double nationality, declared at the time of the Merger: "I am French by birth and early education, I am Indian by choice and predilection. In my consciousness there is no antagonism between the two, on the contrary they combine very well and complete one another. I know also that I can be of service to both equally, for my only aim in life is to give a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's great teaching and in his teaching he reveals that all the nations are essentially one and meant to express the Divine Unity upon earth through an organised and harmonious diversity." From a cultural meeting-place such as Pondicherry can become, a great impetus would be gained by the new India which is arising today, an India true to her own nature and fulfilling it but also embracing and absorbing all that is best in the world and developing an international entity out of herself.

By developing such an entity she will extend her own spiritual influence in the world. France will not fail to respond to her. The French consciousness is not lacking in the capacity to answer the mystical call. A certain side of it is mystically perceptive, the side which turns with instinctive enthusiasm to the figure of Jeanne d'Arc and does not feel alien to Pascal with his "reasons of the heart that Reason does not know" and his *Pensées* that all Europe has hailed as one of the most penetrating spiritual apologies produced by the West, the side which in the modern age has found expression in that exquisite search for the essence within the appearance, the single within

the many, the infinite in each finite—the Symbolism of Mallarmé and his heirs. It would be difficult to surpass in any poetry of our day the sublime profundity of insight in that line of Mallarmé's on the dead Poe:

Tel qu'en Lui-même enfin l'éternité le change,  
(At last to Himself he is changed by eternity)  
or the rapturous visionariness that uplifts us in Rimbaud's  
Million d'oiseaux d'or, ô future Vigueur!  
(Million of golden birds, O Vigour to come!)

What is, in several respects, the modern opposite of Symbolism à la Mallarmé by a stress not on the secret and unifying, universal and eternal essence but on the concrete and separate, individual and time-fissured existence—Existentialism à la Sartre may itself be traced to a perversely orientated pressure of the mystically inclined side of the French temperament. For this is not an atheism that is happy in its denials: it is an atheism avowedly torn by *angoisse* at the unending nothingness, *néant*, which it feels to be the fundamental fact against which the feverish little dramas of conscious life are futilely played out, an atheism unable to get over the calamity of its conviction that there is no God. It even luxuriates in that calamity, keeping it ever keen: the existentialists, as Jolivet has discerned, are intoxicated with the void and worship it because the void is as if not a non-existence but a paradoxical negative existence, a *nihil tremendum et fascinans*, inducing at once a strange death-wish and by reaction an intense leap inward into self-subjectivity, into utterly individual isolation. Born of such a leap is the disbelief of Sartrean Existentialism in any blind and iron fate ruling us by some inherent human or cosmic nature whose expressions we may be: each man is a unique activity, possessed of an ineradicable freedom from the tyranny of type, faced with an unescapable responsibility of choice, called to a valorous creativeness fighting the *nausée* which is felt on realising the meaninglessness, the absurdity of brute fact, the given world into which one is thrown without knowing why and incapable of saying no. And each man's free and constant self-creation should move towards "personal engagement" in a collective pursuit of values whose justification cannot be found in any scientific or philosophical formula. Sartrean Existentialism, inspiring the youths in chequered shirts and the girls with straight uncurled hair who used to flock to the Café de Flore, seeks, in misguided theory and often aberrant practice to transcend the limitations of both the merely "natural" and the purely "rational".

The rival Existentialist school to Sartre's—that of Marcel—is not atheistic at all and is rather the complement of Symbolism than its opposite. Although Sartre is more in vogue because the French postwar psychology is shot through with a feeling of world-

tragedy, Marcel has perhaps deeper roots in the soil of French history, connecting up as he does with the Christian tradition without being really committed to it. It was after his philosophy had been developed in most of its characteristics that he entered the Roman Catholic Church and its true ties are with all mystical aspiration in general that is founded on what he calls "the Mystery of Being". To this Mystery he brings a concrete approach—by music, art, drama, literature, poetry and by a philosophy of action which accepts exterior life with its myriad contacts yet springs, as he says, from a recollected interior life in communion with the supreme Ground and Source of all things, an all-enveloping secret Presence in which man is not a bundle of "functions" to be described by psychologists, sociologists and scientists nor by his Government, profession or trade union, but partakes of sheer ultimate Being, a world "metaproblématique". Marcel, we may remark, has here an affinity with that earlier French philosopher who has profoundly influenced modern thought—Bergson—by his analysis of the time-experience and his clarification of what he termed "intuition", the supra-intellectual in-feeling of the very flow of life. Marcel and Bergson are two of the most powerful factors tending the contemporary French mind in the direction of the basic Indian method of experiencing Reality. Together with Bergson's *Introduction à la Métaphysique* which kindled a new vision for a whole generation by its few pages of concentrated yet self-revelatory subtlety, Marcel's short treatise *Positions et Approches Concrètes du Mystère Ontologique* has been a luminously seminal document for European thinkers in the first half of the twentieth century.

In the second half the most significant event so far for Europe's thought has been the publication of *Le Phénomène humain (The Phenomenon of Man)* by the Jesuit palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who too was once influenced by Bergson. The book is physics and biology argued out along lines prompted by poetic and religious intuition in a language at the same time precise and wide-suggestion'd. Teilhard begins with one main insight: whatever manifests in the physical world must be there at the very base of things, although the manifestation takes place at certain "critical thresholds" of development. Just as the increase of mass with motion, which is detected at high speeds, is taken to be always there and just as the radioactive break-down of atoms, which is seen in particular heavy elements, is accepted to be omnipresent, so also life and mind, which show themselves at specific stages of material organisation, must be supposed to lie at the root of the cosmos. A "Within" of consciousness in some form or other has to be posited for the physical "Without" of Nature everywhere. Panpsychism is inevitable to consistent scientific thought. A progressive outbreak of the Within occurs



at certain points of evolution when there is an "involution"<sup>1</sup> or turning-in of material existence upon itself, a concentration or convergence of energies. Thus a threshold is crossed from Pre-life to Life, from Life to Mind. And when this happens a new earth-layer is formed, first a "biosphere" and then a "noosphere". The next layer is now in the making: the scientific age of rapid communication and spread-out of culture leads towards a unification of the human consciousness, a coming together of the psychological ends of the earth, a convergence of manifold mentality. A total earth-consciousness will develop and out of it a superhuman universality of awareness, which Teilhard names Omega Point. He discerns, in the heart of human aspiration and idealism, what he terms "Resonance to the All"—and he concludes that the All which will be realised as Omega Point is secretly a Reality already, a divine Alpha Point, a hidden Godhead urging and organising evolution, a Being who is the core of each soul, a Super-person in whom every person can attain his utter fulfilment. Teilhard therefore builds a Pan-en-theism upon his Panpsychism and describes evolutionary history as the unfoldment of the "Cosmic Christ". The French sense of the free individual flowering within and through an ordered and ordering Whole seems discover here its sublimest religio-scientific expression.

So much for what directly or indirectly has prepared conditions for a response from France to India's spiritual genius. But, the most sensitive temperament in Europe, the French race in even its older brand of atheism than the Sartrean, the scepticism which, unlike Sartre's chafing against science and intellectuality, is based on the "natural" and the "rational", is not quite closed to the haunting ambiance of the ideal around the actual, no matter how firmly the intellect may refuse to admit any religious tinge in the strange sense of loss that is often felt in the midst of the most tangible fullness of physical preoccupation or achievement. Has not the agnostic Anatole France, ironical about the aspirations of the all-too-human, pitiful of blind pieties, shown also the irony of the negativist attitude, the piercing pitiableness of the denying posture, when he penned that sentence of delicate inexplicable nostalgia: "*Ce que la vie a de meilleur, c'est l'idée qu'elle nous donne de je ne sais quoi qui n'est point en elle*"? A sentence, we may observe, that is typical also of the beautiful directness of French prose in even the glimmers it gives of the far and the faint, a combination of the subtle with the simple and straightforward, a fearless use of the almost colloquial without sacrificing euphony. Paul Bloomfield remarks that this sentence is as mellifluous in French as it would be awkward in English if translated word for word; and we may add that the soul of its liquid elegance as well as of its pellucid poign-

ancy would be a little missing even in the finest free English rendering: "The best in life is the idea it gives us of a something that is not in it."

To return to our point: a certain side of the French consciousness is not wanting in mystical perception. But the emphatic and open mystical turn cannot come readily to the French consciousness, and when it does come it frequently gets grooved in conventional religiousness and deviates from its true goal. The genius of France, on the idealistic plane, is usually what the Mother once described in warning that country against a violation of her *swadharama* by becoming utilitarian, calculating, mercantile: "France meant generosity of sentiment, newness and boldness of ideas and chivalry in action. It was that France which commanded the respect and admiration of all: it is by these virtues that she dominated the world." Yes, hers is not automatically the emphatic and open mystical turn. Of course, these virtues can help to prepare her, but her mystical tendencies will not acquire a steady right direction in general unless a greater natural force of mysticism comes to her aid. Only a movement like Indian spirituality's, at once illumined and elemental, free from narrowness and obscurantism without losing intensity, can bring about such a turn in its purity sooner or later in at least a marked nucleus of progressive minds. And all the more can it do so in its Aurobindonian version as a Yoga which embraces life in all its dynamism, endeavours to transform rather than reject any part of it and makes for the evolution of a supramental divine man in an ideal society on earth—a Yoga including yet transcending the ancient Indian realisations of the Vedanta and other paths as well as carrying in an ampler and completer spiritual Super-science what Teilhard the Roman Catholic scientist has glimpsed with the French *esprit* in him at its most brilliantly penetrating.

Yes, France can answer India's call. However, there must be the proper conditions. If the erstwhile French India becomes a cultural meeting-place and if India takes as much as possible into herself the best that France can show, the answer will be all the more intimate and strong. And once there is the answer from France, all Europe will echo it in the course of time. For, France is still the vital core of European civilisation. Hence, both from the standpoint of helping out in the cause of the Divine some of our receded powers and from the standpoint of accomplishing as widely as we can the mission of mysticism that is India's, it is desirable to promote a Franco-Indian culture.

*The Vision and Work of Sri Aurobindo*

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- 1 This is an Aurobindonian term but obviously it does not bear the same meaning, just as Lloyd-Morgan's identical term in his philosophy of "Emergent Evolution" differ also.

# On Dreams

*The Mother*

At first sight one might think that the subject of dreams is an altogether secondary one; this activity generally seems to have very little importance compared to the activity of our waking state.

However, if we examine the question a little more closely, we shall see that this is not at all the case.

To begin with, we should remember that more than one third of our existence is spent in sleeping and that, consequently, the time devoted to physical sleep well deserves our attention.

I say physical sleep, for it would be wrong to think that our whole being sleeps when our bodies are asleep.

A study based on certain experiments conducted according to the strictest scientific methods, was published some twenty years ago by Dr. Vaschid in a book entitled "Sleep and Dreams".

The doctors who carried out these experiments were led to the conclusion that mental activity never really ceases; and it is this activity which is more or less confusedly transcribed in our brains by what we know as dreams. Thus, whether we are aware of it or not, we always dream.

Certainly, it is possible to suppress this activity completely and to have a total, dreamless sleep; but to be able in this way to immerse our mental being in a repose similar to the repose of our physical being, we must have achieved a perfect control over it, and this is not an easy thing to do.

In most cases, this activity is even heightened, because, as the body is asleep, the internal faculties are no longer focused on or used by the physical life.

It is some times said that in a man's sleep his true nature is revealed.

Indeed, it often happens that the sensory being, which throughout the whole day has been subjected to the control of the active will, reacts all the more violently during the night when this constraint is no longer effective.

All the desires that have been repressed without being dissolved—and this dissociation can only be obtained after much sound and wide-ranging analysis—seek satisfaction while the will is dormant.

And since desires are true dynamic centres of formation, they tend to organise, within and around us, the combination of circumstances that is most favourable to their satisfaction.

In this way the fruit of many efforts made by our conscious thought during the day can be destroyed in a few hours at night.

This is one of the main causes of the resistance which our will for progress often encounters within us, of the difficulties which sometimes appear insurmountable to us and which we are unable to explain, because our goodwill seems so integral to us.

We must therefore learn to know our dreams, and first of all to distinguish between them, for they are very varied in nature and quality. In the course of one night we may often have several dreams which belong to different categories, depending on the depth of our sleep.

As a general rule, each individual has a period of the night that is more favourable for dreams, during which his activity is more fertile, more intellectual, and the mental circumstances of the environment in which he moves are more interesting.

The great majority of dreams have no other value than that of a purely mechanical and uncontrolled activity of the physical brain, in which certain cells continue to function during sleep as generators of sensory images and impressions conforming to the pictures received from outside.

These dreams are nearly always caused by purely physical circumstances—state of health, digestion, position in bed, etc.

With a little self-observation and a few precautions, it is easy to avoid this type of dream, which is as useless as it is tiring, by eliminating its physical causes.

There are also other dreams which are nothing but futile manifestations of the erratic activities of certain mental faculties, which associate ideas, conversations and memories that come together at random.

Such dreams are already more significant, for these erratic activities reveal to us the confusion that prevails in our mental being as soon as it is no longer subject to the

control of our will, and show us that this being is still not organised or ordered within us, that it is not mature enough to have an autonomous life.

Almost the same in form to these but more important in their consequences, are the dreams which I mentioned just now, those which arise from the inner being seeking revenge when it is freed for a moment from the constraint that we impose upon it. These dreams often enable us to perceive tendencies, inclinations, impulses, desires of which we were not conscious so long as our will to realise our ideal kept them concealed in some obscure recess of our being.

You will easily understand that rather than letting them live on unknown to us, it is better to bring them boldly and courageously to the light, so as to force them to leave us for ever.

We should therefore observe our dreams attentively; they are often useful instructors who can give us a powerful help on our way towards self-conquest.

No one knows himself well who does not know the unconfined activities of his nights, and no man can call himself his own master unless he has the perfect consciousness and mastery of the numerous actions he performs during his physical sleep.

But dreams are not merely the malignant informers of our weaknesses or the malicious destroyers of our daily effort for progress.

Although there are dreams which we should contend with or transform, there are others which should on the contrary be cultivated as precious auxiliaries in our work within and around us.

There can be no doubt that from many points of view our subconscious knows more that our habitual consciousness.

Who has not had the experience of a metaphysical, moral or practical problem with which we grapple in vain in the evening, and whose solution, impossible to find then, appears clearly and accurately in the morning on waking?

The mental inquiry had been going on throughout the period of sleep and the internal faculties, freed from all material activity, were able to concentrate solely on the subject of their interest.

Very often, the work itself remains unconscious; only the result is perceived.

But at other times, by means of a dream, we participate in

all the mental activity in its smallest details. Only the cerebral transcription of this activity is often so childish that we normally pay no attention to it.

From this point of view, it is interesting to note that there is nearly always a considerable disparity between what our mental activity is in fact and the way in which we perceive it, and especially the way in which we remain conscious of it. In its own medium, this activity produces vibrations which are transmitted by repercussion to the cellular system of our organic brain, but in our sleeping brain, the subtle vibrations of the suprasensible domain can affect only a very limited number of cells; the inertia of most of the organic supports of the cerebral phenomenon reduces the number of active elements, impoverishes the mental synthesis and makes it unfit to transcribe the activity of the internal states, except into images which are most often vague and inadequate.

To make this disparity more tangible to you, I shall give you an example, one among many, which has come to my knowledge.

Recently, a writer was preoccupied with a half-written chapter which he was unable to finish.

His mind, particularly interested in this work of composition, continued the chapter during the night, and the more it phrased and rephrased the ideas making up the various paragraphs, it became aware that these ideas were not expressed in the most rational order and that the paragraphs had to be rearranged.

All this work was transcribed in the consciousness of our writer in the following dream: he was in his study with several armchairs which he had just brought there and was arranging and rearranging them in the room, until he found the most suitable place for each one.

In the knowledge that certain people may have had of such inadequate transcriptions, we can find the origin of the popular beliefs, the "dream-books" which are the delight of so many simple souls.

But it is easy to understand that this clumsy transcription has a particular form for each individual; each one makes his own distortion.

Consequently, an excessive generalisation of certain interpretations which may have been quite correct for the person applying them to his own case, merely gives rise to vulgar and foolish superstitions.

It is as if the writer we have just mentioned were to impart as a great secret to his friends and acquaintances that every time they saw themselves arranging armchairs in a dream, it was a sign that the next day

they would at some moment reverse the order of the paragraphs in a book.

The cerebral transcription of the activities of the night is sometimes warped to such an extent that phenomena are perceived as the opposite of what they really are.

For example, when you have a bad thought against someone and when this bad thought, left to itself, gathers full force during the night, you dream that the person in question is beating you, is doing you some bad turn, or even wounding you or trying to kill you.

Moreover, as a general rule, we should take great intellectual precautions before interpreting a dream, and above all, we should review exhaustively all the subjective explanations before we assign to it the value of an objective reality.

However, especially in those who have unlearned the habit of always directing their thoughts towards themselves, there are cases where we can observe events outside ourselves, events which are not the reflection of our personal mental constructions. And if we know how to translate into intellectual language the more or less inadequate images into which the brain has translated these events, we can learn many things that our too limited physical faculties do not allow us to perceive.

Some people, by a special culture and training, are even able to become and remain conscious of the deeper activities of their inner being, independently of their own cerebral transcription, and thus to evoke them and know them in the waking state with the full range of their faculties.

Many interesting observations could be made on this topic, but perhaps it is better to allow each one to experience for himself the many possibilities which lie within man's reach in a field of activity which he too often leaves undeveloped.

Uncultivated lands produce weeds. We do not want any weeds in ourselves, so let us cultivate the vast field of our nights.

You must not think that this can be in the least harmful to the depth of your sleep and the efficacy of a repose which is not only indispensable but beneficial. On the contrary, there are many people whose nights are more tiring than their days, for reasons which often elude them; they should become conscious of these reasons so that their will can begin to act on them and remove their effects, that is, to put a stop to these activities which in such cases are nearly always useless and even harmful.

If our night has enabled us to gain some new knowl-

edge—the solution of a problem, a contact of our inner being with some centre of life or light, or even the accomplishment of some useful task—we shall always wake up with a feeling of strength and well-being.

The hours that are wasted in doing nothing good or useful are the most tiring.

But how can we cultivate this field of action, how can we become conscious of our nocturnal activities?

We shall find the way to do so very broadly outlined in a passage from a book devoted to the study of our inner life: "The same discipline of concentration which enables man not to remain a stranger to the inner activities of the waking state also provides him with a way to escape from his ignorance of the even richer activities of the various states of sleep.

"These activities usually leave behind them only a few rare and confused memories.

"However, it is noteworthy that a chance circumstance, an impression received, a word pronounced, is sometimes enough to bring suddenly back to the consciousness a whole long dream of which we had no recollection a moment before.

"We can infer from this simple fact that the conscious activity has taken only a very minor part in the phenomena of the sleeping state, since in the normal state of things they would have remained lost for ever in the subconscious memory.

"In this domain, the practice of concentration should therefore focus both on the special faculty of memory and on the participation of the consciousness in the activities of the sleeping state.

"Someone who wishes to recover the memory of a forgotten dream should first of all focus his attention on the vague impressions which the dream may have left behind it and in this way follow its indistinct trace as far as possible.

"This regular exercise will enable him to go further every day towards the obscure retreat of the subconscious where these forgotten phenomena of sleep take refuge, and thus trace out an easily followed path between these two domains of consciousness.

"One useful remark to be made from this point of view is that the absence of memories is very often due to the abruptness of the return to the waking consciousness. (The waking should not be too abrupt.)

"As a matter of fact, at that moment, the new activities



breaking into the field of consciousness force out everything that is unfamiliar to them and add to the difficulty of the subsequent work of concentration needed to recall the things which have been expelled in this way. On the other hand, this work will be made easier whenever certain mental and even physical precautions are observed for a quiet transition from one state to another. (If possible, do not make any abrupt movements in bed at the time of waking.)

“However, this special training of the faculty of memory can only transform into conscious phenomena in the waking state the phenomena which have already been made conscious, even if only fleetingly, during sleep. For where there is no consciousness, there can be no memory.

“Consequently, in the second place, we must work to extend the participation of the consciousness to a greater number of activities in the sleeping state.

“The daily habit of reviewing with interest the various

dreams of the night, whose traces will gradually become transformed into precise memories, as well as the habit of noting them down on waking, will be found most helpful from this point of view.

“By these habits, the mental faculties will be led to adapt their mechanism to phenomena of this kind and to exercise on them their attention, their curiosity and power of analysis.

“A kind of intellectualisation of our dreams will then occur, with the double result of making the conscious activities intervene more and more closely in the play of the formerly disorganised activities of the sleeping state, and of progressively increasing their scope by making them more and more rational and instructive.

“Dreams will then take on the nature of precise visions and sometimes of revelations, and useful knowledge of a whole important order of things will be gained.”

*Words of Long Ago*  
25 March 1912

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*To sleep well one must learn how to sleep.*

*If one is physically very tired, it is better not to go to sleep immediately, otherwise one falls into the unconscious. If one is very tired, one must stretch out on the bed, relax, loosen all the nerves one after another until one becomes like a rumpled cloth in one's bed, as though one had neither bones nor muscles. When one has done that, the same thing must be done in the mind. Relax, do not concentrate on any idea or try to solve a problem or ruminate on impressions, sensations or emotions you had during the day. All that must be allowed to drop off quietly; one gives oneself up, one is indeed like a rag. When you have succeeded in doing this, there is always a little flame, there—that flame never goes out and you become conscious of it when you have managed this relaxation. And all of a sudden this little flame rises slowly into an aspiration for the divine life, the truth, the consciousness of the Divine, the union with the inner being, it goes higher and higher, it rises, rises, like that, very gently. Then everything gathers there, and if at that moment you fall asleep, you have the best sleep you could possibly have, I guarantee that if you do this carefully, you are sure to sleep, and also sure that instead of falling into a dark hole you will sleep in light, and when you get up in the morning you will be fresh, fit, content, happy and full of energy for the day.*

*The Mother Mother's Collected Works, Vol 4*



*The quality of sleep is much more important than its quantity. In order to have a truly effective rest and relaxation during sleep, it is good as a rule to drink something before going to bed, a cup of milk or soup or fruit-juice, for instance. Light food brings a quiet sleep. One should, however, abstain from all copious meals, for then the sleep becomes agitated and is disturbed by nightmares, or else is dense, heavy and dulling. But the most important thing of all is to make the mind clear, to quieten the emotions and calm the effervescence of desires and the preoccupations which accompany them. If before retiring to bed one has talked a lot or had a lively discussion; if one has read an exciting or intensely interesting book, one should rest a little without sleeping in order to quieten the mental activity, so that the brain does not engage in disorderly movements while the other parts of the body alone are asleep. Those who practise meditation will do well to concentrate for a few minutes on a lofty and restful idea, in an aspiration towards a higher and vaster consciousness. Their sleep will benefit greatly from this and they will largely be spared the risk of falling into unconsciousness while they sleep.*

*The Mother Mother's Collected Works, Vol 12*