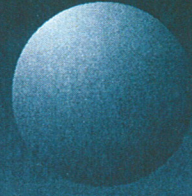


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From Reason to Subjectivity towards Spirituality

The human cycle moves in an upward spiral. Apparently, we seem to be going in circles. But in reality when a new step is taken forward, it takes going over the entire circle to complete the new issues raised by that step. Science and technology are one more step forward and we seem to be coming to the end of a circle, finding out that something is missing which has to be found. And then the new circle will begin and the spiral move further upwards.

We have come a long way from the Infrarational Age in history and are now well into the Age of Reason which has fostered individualism, objectivity, a scientific temper and so on. The reductionist method which has broken up a whole into parts whether the human being in society or the atom in matter and tried to prove the parts to be unconnected, has reached its peak. But the flaws are beginning to show up, both in theories as well as actuality. The Age of Reason with its objective analytical approach has been inadequate in allowing a full comprehension of anything. This has led to a search amongst some individuals and groups who are looking for more holistic interpretations of the truth. Research in subatomic physics has revolutionized our concepts of objectivity, subjectivity and relativity. The Newtonian mechanistic model is found to be inadequate and there has been a need to go even beyond Einstein. This search is reflected also in the softer social sciences like sociology, political science, economics etc. where the idea of the human being is undergoing several changes.

In society, there has been a restlessness which material progress has not been able to take care of. There is a search for something more, something deeper. Alternative lifestyles and expressions are mushrooming. There is a foraying into occult and spiritual areas in search of peace and the meaning of life. There is a need to break out of the existing rigid structures, there is a cry that the human being is not a machine and that he needs more flexible and plastic structures which would make room for a freer growth. Sometimes this takes the shape of outright rebellion of social norms. In short, there is a general feeling of dissatisfaction that we have not quite arrived where we ought to have.

The present seeking depicts a subjective turn by people who are looking for fulfilment outside the venues that the current social milieu provides for. Society has fallen far short of providing for all needs within a human being especially the subtler ones. The drive of turning society into an efficient machine has proved to be destructive on the social, ecological, psychological and other fronts. In the distant past too—

“Human society itself never seized on the discovery of the soul as a means for the discovery of the law of its own being or on a knowledge of the soul's true nature and need and its fulfilment as the right way of terrestrial perfection And a great sign too of this failure is when the individual is obliged to flee from society in order to find room for his spiritual growth.”

- Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, pp. 221-222.

If pursued consciously and discriminately, this subjective movement can eventually lead us towards a spiritualized society. And how do we recognise this movement and collaborate with what is true within it for there is bound to be a dangerous mixture at first of the false along with the true?

“These ideas are likely first to declare their trend in philosophy, in psychological thinking, in

the arts, poetry, painting, sculpture, music, in the main idea of ethics, in the application of subjective principles by thinkers to social questions, even perhaps, though this is a perilous effort, to politics and economics, that hard refractory earth matter which most resists all but a gross utilitarian treatment. There will be new unexpected departures of science or at least of research,—since to such a turn in its most fruitful seekings the orthodox still deny the name of science. Discoveries will be made that thin the walls between soul and matter; attempts there will be to extend exact knowledge into the psychological and psychic realms with a realisation of the truth that these have laws of their own which are other than physical, but not the less laws because they escape the external senses and are infinitely plastic and subtle. There will be a labour of religion to reject its past heavy weight of dead matter and revivify its strength in the fountains of the Spirit. These are sure signs, if not of the thing to be, at least of a great possibility of it, of an effort that will surely be made, another endeavour perhaps with a larger sweep and a better equipped intelligence capable not only of feeling but of understanding the Truth that is demanding to be heard.

“...A subjective age may stop very far short of spirituality for the subjective turn is only a first condition, not the thing itself, not the end of the Matter.”

- Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, pp.233-234.

And who will be the pioneers of this movement?

“Therefore the individuals who will help most the future of humanity in the new age will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being ... They will be comparatively indifferent to particular belief and form and leave men to resort to the beliefs and forms to which they are naturally drawn. They will only hold as essential the faith in this spiritual conversion, the attempt to live it out and whatever knowledge—the form of opinion into which it is thrown does not so much matter—can be converted into this living. They will especially not make the mistake of thinking that this change can be effected by machinery and outward institutions; they will know and never forget that it has to be lived out by each man inwardly or it can never be made a reality for the kind. They will adopt in its heart of meaning the inward view of the East which bids man seek the secret of his destiny and salvation within; but also they will accept, though with a different turn given to it, the importance which the West rightly attaches to life and to the making the best we know and can attain the general rule of all life. They will not make society a shadowy background to a few luminous spiritual figures or a rigidly fenced and earth-bound root for the growth of a comparatively rare and sterile flower of ascetic spirituality. They will not accept the theory that the many must necessarily remain for ever on the lower ranges of life and only a few climb into the free air and the light, but will start from the standpoint of the great spirits who have striven to regenerate the life of the earth and held that faith in spite of all previous failures.

“...(They) will consider nothing as alien to them, nothing as outside their scope. For every part of human life has to be taken up by the spiritual,—not only the intellectual, the aesthetic, the ethical, but the dynamic, the vital, the physical; therefore for none of these things or the activities that spring from them will they have contempt or aversion, however they may insist on a change of the spirit and a transmutation of the form.”

- Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, pp. 250-251.

Let us then begin this search wherever we are in whatever we are doing whoever we may be. It is this seeking after the realisation of the ideal that is important which we must not sacrifice at the altar of realism, in our narrow-minded search for immediate answers. For evolution is a long-drawn process and we need to have infinite patience while working for a change.

- Editor

Prayer

The Mother

Higher, ever higher! Let us never be satisfied with what is achieved; let us not stop at any realisation, let us march always onwards, ceaselessly, energetically, towards an ever completer manifestation, an ever higher and more total consciousness... Yesterday's victory must be only a stepping-stone to the victory of tomorrow, and the power of the day gone by a weakness beside the effectivity to come.

O Mother Divine, Thy march is triumphal and un-interrupted. He who unites with Thee in integral love journeys unceasingly towards ever vaster horizons, towards an ever completer realisation, leaping from peak to peak in the splendour of Thy light, to the conquest of the marvellous secrets of the Unknown and their integral manifestation.

O divine Victor, all the earth sings Thy praises, and all forces will obey Thee.

For the Lord has said: "the hour has come."

And all obstacles will be surmounted.

'Prayers and Meditations'

6 September, 1914

Civilisation and Barbarism

Sri Aurobindo

Once we have determined that this rule of perfect individuality and perfect reciprocity is the ideal law for the individual, the community and the race and that a perfect union and even oneness in a free diversity is its goal, we have to try to see more clearly what we mean when we say that self-realisation is the sense, secret or overt, of individual and of social development. As yet we have not to deal with the race, with mankind as a unity; the nation is still our largest compact and living unit. And it is best to begin with the individual, both because of his nature we have a completer and nearer knowledge and experience than of the aggregate soul and life and because the society or nation is, even in its greater complexity, a larger, a composite individual, the collective Man. What we find valid of the former is therefore likely to be valid in its general principle of the larger entity. Moreover, the development of the free individual is, we have said, the first condition for the development of the perfect society. From the individual, therefore, we have to start; he is our index and our foundation.

The Self of man is a thing hidden and occult; it is not his body, it is not his life, it is not,—even though he is in the scale of evolution the mental being, the Manu,—his mind. Therefore neither the fullness of his physical, nor of his vital, nor of his mental nature can be either the last term or the true standard of his self-realisation; they are means of manifestation, subordinate indications, foundations of his self-finding, values, practical currency of his self, what you will, but not the thing itself which he secretly is and is obscurely groping or trying overtly and self-consciously to become. Man has not possessed as a race this truth about himself, does not now possess it except in the vision and self-experience of the few in whose footsteps the race is unable to follow, though it may adore them as Avatars, seers, saints or prophets. For the Oversoul who is the master of our evolution, has his own large steps of Time, his own great eras, tracts of slow and courses of rapid expansion, which the strong, semi-divine individual may overleap, but not the still half-animal race. The course of evolution proceeding from the vegetable to the animal, from the animal to the man, starts in the latter from the subhuman; he has to take up into him the animal and even the mineral and vegetable: they constitute his physical nature, they

dominate his vitality, they have their hold upon his mentality. His proneness to many kinds of inertia, his readiness to vegetate, his attachment to the soil and clinging to his roots, to safe anchorage's of all kinds, and on the other hand his nomadic and predatory impulses, his blind servility to custom and the rule of the pack, his mob-movements and openness to subconscious suggestions from the group-soul, his subjection to the yoke of rage and fear, his need of punishment and reliance on punishment, his inability to think and act for himself, his incapacity for true freedom, his distrust of novelty, his slowness to seize intelligently and assimilate, his downward propensity and earthward gaze, his vital and physical subjection to his heredity, all these and more are his heritage from the subhuman origins of his life and body and physical mind. It is because of this heritage that he finds self-exceeding the most difficult of lessons and the most painful of endeavors. Yet it is by the exceeding of the lower self that Nature accomplishes the great strides of her evolutionary process. To learn by what he has been, but also to know and increase to what he can be, is the task that is set for the mental being.

The time is passing away, permanently. let us hope for this cycle of civilisation, when the entire identification of the self with the body and the physical life was possible for the general consciousness of the race. That is the primary characteristic of complete barbarism. To take the body and the physical life as the one thing important, to judge manhood by the physical strength, development and prowess, to be at the mercy of the instincts which rise out of the physical inconscient, to despise knowledge as a weakness and inferiority or look on it as a peculiarity and no necessary part of the conception of manhood, this is the mentality of the barbarian. It tends to reappear in the human being in the atavistic period of boyhood,—when, be it noted, the development of the body is of the greatest importance,—but to the adult man in civilised humanity it is ceasing to be possible. For, in the first place, by the stress of modern life even the vital attitude of the race is changing. Man is ceasing to be so much of a physical and becoming much more of a vital and economic animal. Not that he excludes or is intended to exclude the body and its development or the right maintenance of and respect for the animal being and

its excellences from his idea of life; the excellence of the body, its health, its soundness, its vigour and harmonious development are necessary to a perfect manhood and are occupying attention in a better and more intelligent way than before. But the first rank in importance can no longer be given to the body, much less that entire predominance assigned to it in the mentality of the barbarian.

Moreover, although man has not yet really heard and understood the message of the sages, "know thyself", he has accepted the message of the thinker, "educate thyself", and, what is more, he has understood that the possession of education imposes on him the duty of imparting his knowledge to others. The idea of the necessity of general education means the recognition by the race that the mind and not the life and the body are the man and that without the development of the mind he does not possess his true manhood. The idea of education is still primarily that of intelligence and mental capacity and knowledge of the world and things, but secondarily also of moral training and, though as yet very imperfectly, of the development of the aesthetic faculties. The intelligent thinking being, moralised, controlling his instincts and emotions by his will and his reason, acquainted with all that he should know of the world and his past, capable of organising intelligently by that knowledge his social and economic life, ordering rightly his bodily habits and physical being, this is the conception that now governs civilised humanity. It is, in essence, a return to and a larger development of the old Hellenic ideal, with a greater stress on capacity and utility and a very diminished stress on beauty and refinement. We may suppose, however, that this is only a passing phase; the lost elements are bound to recover their importance as soon as the commercial period of modern progress has been over passed, and with that recovery, not yet in sight but inevitable, we shall have all the proper elements for the development of man as a mental being.

The old Hellenic or Graeco-Roman civilisation perished, among other reasons, because it only imperfectly generalised culture in its own society and was surrounded by huge masses of humanity who were still possessed by the barbarian habit of mind. Civilisation can never be safe so long as, confining the cultured mentality to a small minority, it nourishes in its bosom a tremendous mass of ignorance, a multitude, a proletariat. Either knowledge must enlarge itself from above or be always in danger of submergence by the ignorant night from below. Still more must it be unsafe, if it allows enormous numbers of men to exist outside its pale uninformed by its light, full of the natural vigour of the barbarian, who may at any moment seize upon the physical weapons of

the civilised without undergoing an intellectual transformation by their culture. The Graeco-Roman culture perished from within and from without, from without by the floods of Teutonic barbarism, from within by the loss of its vitality. It gave the proletariat some measure of comfort and amusement, but did not raise it into the light. When light came to the masses, it was from outside in the form of the Christian religion which arrived as an enemy of the old culture. Appealing to the poor, the oppressed and the ignorant, it sought to capture the soul and the ethical being, but cared little or not at all for the thinking mind, content that that should remain in darkness if the heart could be brought to feel religious truth. When the barbarians captured the Western world, it was in the same way content to Christianise them, but made it no part of its function to intellectualise. Distrustful even of the free play of intelligence, Christian ecclesiasticism and monasticism became anti-intellectual and it was left to the Arabs to reintroduce the beginnings of scientific and philosophical knowledge into a semi-barbarous Christendom and to the half pagan spirit of the Renaissance and a long struggle between religion and science to complete the return of a free intellectual culture in the re-emerging mind of Europe. Knowledge must be aggressive, if it wishes to survive and perpetuate itself; to leave an extensive ignorance either below or around it is to expose humanity to the perpetual danger of a barbaric relapse.

The modern world does not leave room for a repetition of the danger in the old form or on the old scale. Science is there to prevent it. It has equipped culture with the means of self-perpetuation. It has armed the civilised races with weapons of organisation and aggression and self-defence which cannot be successfully utilised by any barbarous people, unless it ceases to be uncivilised and acquires the knowledge which Science alone can give. It has learned too that ignorance is an enemy it cannot afford to despise and has set out to remove it wherever it is found. The ideal of general education, at least to the extent of some information of the mind and the training of capacity, owes to it, if not its birth, at last much of its practical possibility. It has propagated itself everywhere with an irresistible force and driven the desire for increasing knowledge into the mentality of three continents. It has made general education the indispensable condition of national strength and efficiency and therefore imposed the desire of it not only on every free people, but on every nation that desires to be free and to survive, so that the universalisation of knowledge and intellectual activity in the human race is now only a question of Time; for it is only certain political and economic obstacles that stand in its way and these the thought and tendencies of the age are already labouring to overcome. And, in sum, Science has already

enlarged for good the intellectual horizons of the race and raised, sharpened and intensified powerfully the general intellectual capacity of mankind.

It is true that the first tendencies of Science have been materialistic and its indubitable triumphs have been confined to the knowledge of the physical universe and the body and the physical life. But this materialism is a very different thing from the old identification of the self with the body. Whatever its apparent tendencies, it has been really an assertion of man the mental being and of the supremacy of intelligence. Science in its very nature is knowledge, is intellectuality, and its whole work has been that of the Mind turning its gaze upon its vital and physical frame and environment to know and conquer and dominate Life and Matter. The scientist is Man the thinker mastering the forces of material Nature by knowing them. Life and Matter are after all our standing-ground, our lower basis and to know their processes and their own proper possibilities and the opportunities they give to the human being is part of the knowledge necessary for transcending them. Life and the body have to be exceeded, but they have also to be utilised and perfected. Neither the laws nor the possibilities of physical Nature can be entirely known unless we know also the laws and possibilities of supraphysical Nature; therefore the development of new and the recovery of old mental and psychic sciences have to follow upon the perfection of our physical knowledge, and that new era is already beginning to open upon us. But the perfection of the physical sciences was a prior necessity and had to be the first field for the training of the mind of man in his new endeavour to know Nature and possess his world.

Even in its negative work the materialism of Science had a task to perform which will be useful in the end to the human mind in its exceeding of materialism. But Science in its heyday of triumphant Materialism despised and cast aside Philosophy; its predominance discouraged by its positive and pragmatic turn the spirit of poetry and art and pushed them from their position of leadership in the front of culture; poetry entered into an era of decline and decadence, adopted the form and rhythm of a versified prose and lost its appeal and the support of all but a very limited audience, painting followed the curve of Cubist extravagance and espoused monstrosities of shape and suggestion; the ideal receded and visible matter of fact was enthroned in its place and encouraged an ugly realism and utilitarianism; in its war against religious obscurantism Science almost succeeded in slaying religion and the religious spirit. But philosophy had become too much a thing of abstractions, a seeking for abstract truths in a world of ideas and words rather than what it should be, a discovery of the real reality of things

by which human existence can learn its law and aim and the principle of its perfection. Poetry and art had become too much cultured pursuits to be ranked among the elegances and ornaments of life, concerned with beauty of words and forms and imaginations, rather than a concrete seeing and significant presentation of truth and beauty and of the living idea and the secret divinity in things concealed by the sensible appearances of the universe. Religion itself had become fixed in dogmas and ceremonies, sects and churches and had lost for the most part, except for a few individuals, direct contact with the living founts of spirituality. A period of negation was necessary. They had to be driven back and in upon themselves, nearer to their own eternal sources. Now that the stress of negation is past and they are raising their heads, we see them seeking for their own truth, reviving by virtue of a return upon themselves and a new self-discovery. They have learned or are learning from the example of Science that Truth is the secret of life and power and that by finding the truth proper to themselves they must become the ministers of human existence.

But if Science has thus prepared us for an age of wider and deeper culture and if in spite of and even partly by its materialism it has rendered impossible the return of the true materialism, that of the barbarian mentality, it has encouraged more or less indirectly both by its attitude to life and its discoveries another kind of barbarism,—for it can be called by no other name,—that of the industrial, the commercial, the economic age which is now progressing to its culmination and its close. This economic barbarism is essentially that of the vital man who mistakes the vital being for the self and accepts its satisfaction as the first aim of life. The characteristic of Life is desire and the instinct of possession. Just as the physical barbarian makes the excellence of the body and the development of physical force, health and prowess his standard and aim, so the vitalistic or economic barbarian makes the satisfaction of wants and desires and the accumulation of possessions his standard and aim. His ideal man is not the cultured or noble or thoughtful or moral or religious, but the successful man. To arrive, to succeed, to produce, to accumulate, to possess is his existence. The accumulation of wealth and more wealth, the adding of possessions to possessions, opulence, show, pleasure, a cumbrous inartistic luxury, a plethora of conveniences, life devoid of beauty and nobility, religion vulgarised or coldly formalised, politics and government turned into a trade and profession, enjoyment itself made a business, this is commercialism. To the natural unredeemed economic man beauty is a thing otiose or a nuisance, art and poetry a frivolity or an ostentation and a means of

advertisement. His idea of civilisation is comfort, his idea of morals social respectability, his idea of politics the encouragement of industry, the opening of markets, exploitation and trade following the flag, his idea of religion at best a pietistic formalism or the satisfaction of certain vitalistic emotions. He values education for its utility in fitting a man for success in a competitive or it may be, a socialised industrial existence, science for the useful inventions and knowledge, the comforts, conveniences, machinery of production with which it arms him, its power for organisation, regulation, stimulus to production. The opulent plutocrat and the successful mammoth capitalist and organiser of industry are the supermen of the commercial age and the true, if often occult rulers of its society.

The essential barbarism of all this is its pursuit of vital success, satisfaction, productiveness, accumulation, possession, enjoyment, comfort, convenience for their own sake. The vital part of the being is an element in

the integral human existence as much as the physical part; it has its place but must not exceed its place. A full and well-appointed life is desirable for man living in society, but on condition that it is also a true and beautiful life. Neither the life nor the body exists for their own sake, but as vehicle and instrument of a good higher than their own. They must be subordinated to the superior needs of the mental being, chastened and purified by a greater law of truth, good and beauty before they can take their proper place in the integrality of human perfection. Therefore in a commercial age with its ideal, vulgar and barbarous, of success, vitalistic satisfaction, productiveness and possession the soul of man may linger a while for certain gains and experiences, but cannot permanently rest. If it persisted too long, Life would become clogged and perish of its own plethora or burst in its straining to a gross expansion. Like the too massive Titan it will collapse by its own mass, *mole ruet sua*.

'The Human Cycle'

But in a civilised society there is still the distinction between the partially, crudely, conventionally civilised and the cultured. It would seem therefore that the mere participation in the ordinary benefits of civilisation is not enough to raise a man into the mental life proper; a farther development, a higher elevation is needed. The last generation drew emphatically the distinction between the cultured man and the Philistine and got a fairly clear idea of what was meant by it. Roughly, the Philistine was for them the man who lives outwardly the civilized life, possesses all its paraphernalia, has and mouths the current stock of opinions, prejudices, conventions, sentiments, but is impervious to ideas, exercises no free intelligence, is innocent of beauty and art, vulgarises everything that he touches, religion, ethics, literature, life. The Philistine is in fact the modern civilised barbarian; he is often the half-civilised physical and vital barbarian by his unintelligent attachment to the life of the body, the life of the vital needs and impulses and the ideal of the merely domestic and economic human animal; but essentially and commonly he is the mental barbarian, the average sensational man. That is to say, his mental life is that of the lower substratum of the mind, the life of the senses, the life of the sensations, the life of the emotions, the life of practical conduct the first status of the mental being. In all these he may be very active, very vigorous, but he does not govern them by a higher light or seek to uplift them to a freer and nobler eminence; rather he pulls the higher faculties down to the level of his senses, his sensations, his unenlightened and unchastened emotions, his gross utilitarian practicality. His aesthetic side is little developed; either he cares nothing for beauty or has the crudest aesthetic tastes which help to lower and vulgarise the general standard of aesthetic creation and the aesthetic sense. He is often strong about morals, far more particular usually about moral conduct than the man of culture, but his moral being is as crude and undeveloped as the rest of him; it is conventional, unchastened, unintelligent, a mass of likes and dislikes, prejudices and current opinions, attachment to social conventions and respectabilities and an obscure dislike—rooted in the mind of sensations and not in the intelligence—of any open defiance or departure from the generally accepted standard of conduct. His ethical bent is a habit of the sense-mind; it is the morality of the average sensational man. He has a reason and the appearance of an intelligent will, but they are not his own, they are part of the group-mind, received from his environment; or so far as they are his own, merely a practical, sensational, emotional reason and will, a mechanical repetition of habitual notions and rules of conduct, not a play of real thought and intelligent determination. His use of them no more makes him a developed mental being than the daily movement to and from his place of business makes the average Londoner a developed physical being or his quotidian contributions to the economic life of the country make the bank-clerk a developed economic man. He is not mentally active, but mentally reactive,—a very different matter.

Sri Aurobindo
'The Human Cycle'

The Role Of The Contemporary Teacher

Kireet Joshi

It will now be clear that the role of the contemporary teacher has essentially to do with something which is exceptionally subtle and complex. The role of the teacher has always been basically psychological in character, but the dimensions that come to the view of the contemporary teacher are much more difficult to deal with. It may be said that the role of the teacher is not merely to promote the quest of the knowledge of man and the universe, and the sciences and arts of their inter-relationships. It is not also merely to build the bridges between the past and the future. These tasks are indeed important and they are entailed by the perennial objectives of education. But what is so new and so imperatively pressing is that the role of the contemporary teacher is increasingly getting focussed on the theme of changing human nature and that, too, on an integral scale. In brief, what we are demanding from the contemporary teacher is to inspire a change in the impulses of the pupil's growing personality so as to foster harmonious blending of knowledge, power, love and skills that are relevant to the promotion of peace, co-operation and integrality.

In order to bring out the implications of this role, we need to analyse those assumptions of the teaching-learning process which are directly related to deeper psychological dimensions and operations. We shall refer to three most important of these assumptions.

The first assumption is that teaching must be relevant to the needs of the learner. The needs of the learner are varied and complex. There are felt needs and there are real needs which are not yet felt. There are needs of individual growth, and there are needs resulting from the social reality of which the learner is a part and in the context of which the learner will be called upon to work and produce results so that the wheels of social progress are kept in motion. There is also a process of the growth of needs, some of which develop spontaneously and harmoniously, while some others are induced, not infrequently, by artificial means resulting in temporary or permanent injury to both the learner and the society. How to deal with this complex domain of the learner's needs is one of the first tasks of the teacher. No rules can be laid down or prescribed. For this domain demands of the teacher a good deal of observation of the learners, a sound and sympathetic knowledge of psychology, and

practical insight and tact. The task is at once easy and difficult depending upon the natural or acquired capacity of the teacher to relate contents and methods of learning to the felt needs of the learner. Much will also depend upon the facility with which the teacher is able to consult the learner in his growth, and to enthuse him to make the necessary effort to bridge the gulf between what is desired and what is desirable.

The second assumption is that teaching should provide learning experience to the learner. Sometimes, the stress laid on learning experience is so exclusive that the role of teaching is reduced almost to vanishing-point. At the other extreme, learning experience is conceived to be so overwhelmingly dependent upon teaching that the teaching-learning process is reduced to a process of spoon-feeding. These extreme positions, however, bring out the complexity and subtlety involved in the interaction between the teacher and the learner.

There is no doubt that the greater the preparedness and motivation of the learner, the greater will be the intensity of the learning experience. The minimum that is required of the learner is curiosity. But the teacher can play a major role in intensifying the initial curiosity and in developing in the learner a sense of wonder which is not only a great propeller of learning but also a constant flower and glow of learning. It is true that sincere dedication on the part of the learner is the golden key to learning, but here, again, the teacher can play a major role in kindling the inmost spirit of the learner which is the unfailing source of sincere dedication.

It is also necessary to note that every learner has certain innate reflexes, impulses, drives and tendencies, and the teacher can uplift them and help the learner in transmuting reflexes into organized perceptions and acts of behaviour; innate impulses and drives into wise and skilful pursuits of ends and means, and innate tendencies into a harmonious and integrated personality. In fact, it is this process of transmutation that is the heart of learning experience, and it is this experience that gives to the learner the art of learning to learn and learning to be.

The third assumption of teaching is that it accelerates the learning process. Here, again, the role of the teacher

is complex and difficult. In general terms, it can be said that the teacher is an accelerator of human progress. But in his day-to-day work, the teacher realizes that different students or different categories of students have different rates of progress and that it would be unwise to impose the same degree of acceleration on all the students uniformly. To vary the rhythm of progress in accordance with the requirements of the learner is one of the most delicate tasks of the teacher.

More than ever, the role of the contemporary teacher will be to uplift the knowledge and effort of the learner by suggestion, example and influence. His task will be not to impose but to suggest and inspire. He will respect the psychological combination of the tendencies of the learners, and he will endeavour to improve them not by hurting or crushing the force of these tendencies but by refining them, by recombining them and by training them to achieve their maximum possible excellence. At the heart of his dealing with learners, the teacher will aim at leading them from near to far and from the known to the unknown by providing to them the required exercise of thought, imagination and experience. And, in doing so, the teacher will share his experiences with learners, and interweave his own development with their development.

The teacher will not underrate the importance of the development of any particular aspect of personality. For all aspects are important, and even when one is not competent in regard to any particular aspect of the totality of personality, there should not be an attitude of negligence or derogation towards that domain. There is, for instance, a tendency among many to look down upon physical education and to advocate the training of the mind in preference to the training of the body. In a balanced view, however, the training both of the mind and of the body is necessary. A healthy mind in a healthy body is the ancient advice of the wise. A good teacher will always encourage the learners to participate in a methodical and well-designed programme of physical education. It is true that sometimes, physical is looked upon as a mere pastime and a matter of recreation rather than as a discipline closely related to the perfection of human personality. A good teacher will therefore promote the right conception of physical education and will lay a special emphasis on it so that the learners are encouraged to develop health, strength, agility, grace and beauty by means of disciplined practice of any preferred system of physical education. A good teacher respects the ideal of sportsmanship and encourages the qualities that are associated with sportsmanship, such as courage, hardihood, initiative, steadiness of will, rapid decision and action, good humour, self-control, fair play, equal acceptance of victory or defeat, loyal acceptance of the decisions of the referee, and habit of team work.

Development of personality and, particularly, the process of change and integration of personality, cannot truly or adequately be effected without the pursuit of values. For as we have noted earlier, corresponding to each faculty or capacity of personality there are values, and children, right from early stages, manifest their urge towards values through admiration and aspiration. Very often educators do not recognize these manifestations, and, in due course, for want of encouragement and recognition, they become diminished and even begin to be wiped out. It is therefore very important that educators observe children deeply and sympathetically, feel themselves vibrant with children's aspirations and encourage them.

His most important quality that should be focussed upon is sincerity. It is the one quality which, if rightly cultivated, will necessarily enable the child to realize whatever aim he comes to conceive and pursue in his life. And around this central quality, we may conceive of certain groups of qualities that come into play at various stages of the psychological development of the child. There is, for instance, a trinity of qualities of heroism, endurance and sacrifice, which are essential for the lasting victory of the good and the right. There is also a trinity of cheerfulness, cooperation and gratitude, which are, we might say, the secret of all right relationships. Another trinity of qualities that can be mentioned is that of purity, patience and perseverance, which is indispensable in surmounting any weakness or limitation of our nature. And, finally, we may note the trinity of calm, profundity and intensity, which open the doors to an ever-progressive search of perfection.

It is sometimes suggested that value-oriented education is relevant only to the primary and secondary stages, but not beyond. For, it is argued, children by the time they complete secondary education would have already formed their basic attitudes and traits of personality, and nothing more needs specially to be done in that direction at the higher levels of education. But this argument misses the point that the important element in value-oriented development of personality is the development of learner's free will and of his free and rational acceptance of the value-system and directions of the growth of personality. And this development can rightly be done only at the higher level of education, when the learner has developed a will of his own to some extent and when he has basic intellectual and moral and aesthetic sensibilities enabling him to examine the basic values and aims of life.

It is often asked if the role of the teacher includes anything more than that of teaching. At higher levels of education, it is universally recognized that the tasks of research and extension should also be included in the role of the teacher. At the school level, the task of extension is being gradually recognized, particularly, in the wake of the realization of the

close connection between education and development. In this context, the role of the teacher as community teacher must also be recognized. And, we might suggest that, while research as understood in the technical sense of the term may not be included in the role of the school teacher, progressive updating his knowledge and skill must be included.

The role of the teacher in the context of the goal of education for all, of life-long education and of learning society needs to be emphasized. The teacher will reject the view that only a few should climb to the heights of knowledge, culture and development while the rest should remain for ever on lower ranges of development. Following the cry of the greatest leaders of mankind who have striven to regenerate the life of the earth, the teacher will help spread knowledge not merely for a few but for all, and he will emphasize the programme of universalization of elementary education, of adult and continuing education, and indeed of the learning society corresponding to the needs of multi-faceted development, the teacher will promote education in every sphere of

developmental activity. He will also help forging links between formal and non-formal education, and assist in a wide variety of educational programmes which can be made available to growing number of students of all ages.

The most significant symbol of learning is the child; and the learning society will acknowledge the sovereignty of the child. It will hold the child in the center of its attention, and will bestow upon it the supreme care that it needs. It will organize all activities in such a way that they become vehicles of the education of the child. Just as the child always looks to the future, even so the learning society will constantly strive to build the paths of the future. Just as the child will grow increasingly into vigorous and dynamic youth, even so the learning society will continue to mature into unfading youth. To actualize such a learning society is the responsibility of all thinking members of the society, but increasingly and progressively it may come to be regarded as the over-arching responsibility of the contemporary teacher.

'A Philosophy of the Role of the Contemporary Teacher'

A very remarkable feature of modern training which has been subjected in India to a reductio ad absurdum is the practice of teaching by snippets. A subject is taught a little at a time, in conjunction with a host of others, with the result that what might be well learnt in a single year is badly learned in seven and the boy goes out ill-equipped, served with imperfect parcels of knowledge, master of none of the great departments of human knowledge. The system of education adopted by the National Council, an amphibious and two-natured creation, attempts to heighten this practice of teaching by snippets at the bottom and the middle and suddenly change it to a grandiose specialism at the top. This is to base the triangle on its apex and hope that it will stand.

The old system was to teach one or two subjects well and thoroughly and then proceed to others; and certainly it was a more rational system than the modern. If it did not impart so much varied information, it built up a deeper, nobler and more real culture. Much of the shallowness, discursive lightness and fickle mutability of the average modern mind is due to the vicious principle of teaching by snippets. The one defect that can be alleged against the old system was that the subject earliest learned might fade from the mind of the student while he was mastering his later studies. But the excellent training given to the memory by the ancients obviated the incidence of this defect. In the future education we need not bind ourselves either by the ancient or the modern system, but select only the most perfect and rapid means of mastering knowledge.

In defence of the modern system it is alleged that the attention of children is easily tired and cannot be subjected to the strain of long application to a single subject. The frequent change of subject gives rest to the mind. The question naturally arises: are the children of modern times then so different from the ancients, and, if so, have we not made them so by discouraging prolonged concentration? A very young child cannot, indeed, apply himself; but a very young child is unfit for school teaching of any kind. A child of seven or eight, and that is the earliest permissible age for the commencement of any regular kind of study, is capable of a good deal of concentration if he is interested. Interest is, after all, the basis of concentration. We make his lessons supremely uninteresting and repellent to the child, a harsh compulsion the basis of teaching and then complain of his restless inattention! The substitution of a natural self-education by the child for the present unnatural system will remove this objection of inability. A child, like a man, if he is interested, much prefers to get to the end of its subject rather than leave it unfinished. To lead him on step by step, interesting and absorbing him in each as it comes, until he has mastered his subject is the true art of teaching.

Sri Aurobindo

'A System of National Education'

Pacifism and the Indian Spirit

K. D. Sethna

The ideal of peace is felt by every Indian to be as old as India herself and ingrained in her immemorial culture: one of our best known scriptural phrases is the ancient Vedic message, *sarva janah sukhino bhavantu*, "let all people live in happiness through peace." But "peace" is a veritable proteus of a word. There can be a dead peace as well as a living one. Was it not said by Tacitus about the conquest of Germany by the Romans: *Solitudinem faciunt et pacem appellant*, "They make a solitude and call it peace"? Nor is it necessary to put a country to the sword in order to create the peace that is dead. If a country is either efficiently emasculated or ruthlessly regimented, we have a certain passivity or uniformity of mind, together with an absence of physical agitation, which has the appearance of peace but is really a state of death in disguise. For, there can be no peace that contradicts Cicero's definition: "liberty in tranquillity". Even the peace that can prevail among free peoples may not yet be a living one in the true sense of the word: it may be merely a temporary lull in which war is found to be inexpedient and a co-operative opportunism has play. Or else an open conflict may be absent and still a selfish feud on the ideological level go on and a self-interested economic throat-cutting continue. Surely this is not the peace meant by sincere pacifists the world over and implied by the old phrase from the Rig-Veda.

Should Pacifism Preclude War?

Dr. Rajendra Prasad once defined peace as "goodwill in action". A fair working definition, we may grant but also a bit of a platitude likely to be pretty impotent unless we go beyond the purely ideative plane. For, active goodwill, as commonly conceived, cannot exist by itself and cannot persist for long. Man, as he ordinarily functions, is a mixture of the rational, the infra-rational, and the supra-rational. He tries to order his life according to his intelligence, but constantly the tiger and the ape in him break out, laying waste the neat and glittering tracts of his reasoning mind, and when there is not this reversal to animality there is often a sudden reaching forth towards something grand and godlike, some power more wide than the intellect, and "a light that never was on sea or land" upsets his reasoned arrangements of attitude and gesture, so that he behaves with a splendid strangeness which sets at nought his virtues no less than his vices, his

philosophies as well as his fantasies. Goodwill in action is the voice of man's reason in its ethical aspect; but if reason is only the middle term between what is below and what is above how shall this goodwill be a lasting and effective force? Not that it is an utter contradiction of the below and the above: there is in the former a certain instinct of mutual aid while in the latter is to be found a spontaneity of universal oneness, but the infra-rational has also a violent competitive impulse and the supra-rational brings at times a power of destruction at which the mere mind trembles and with which it can scarcely reconcile its principle of war-shunning pacifism. On one side, "Nature red in tooth and claw", on the other the dazzling devastation of Mahakali the Goddess who carries the Eternal Truth like a sword to cleave violently the darkness of ignorance and evil. No doubt there is also Mahalakshmi the beneficent Goddess, but she does not exclude the divine Warrior of the worlds: a subtle identity is between the two, most difficult for the human reason to understand and most disturbing to its ideative apotheosis goodwill in action.

Although the brute competitiveness of the infra-rational is to be curbed, the sword-sweep of the supra-rational cannot be rejected. The cry of Sri Krishna at the battle of Kurukshetra, "Fight and win a mighty kingdom" is too clear to be allegorised away, too insistent in one form or another down the ages, especially at their turning-points, to be drowned by any mellifluous sentimentalism. So we must stop contrasting peace to war: under particular circumstances war cannot help having justification, and not only defensive but also offensive war, since frequently the best method of defence is attack. A squeamish recoil from physical combat and destruction has no basis in the divine reality's method and movement vis-à-vis an evolving world in which truth and falsehood, right and wrong, beauty and ugliness are pitted against each other. Of course, every effort must be made to avoid such combat and destruction, compromise should go as far as is consistent with essential loyalty to the cause of civilisation, no mere convenience or superficial advantage should be cherished inordinately, yet a final resort to arms must not be looked upon as an evil. Consequently, from the highest point of view, absolute *ahimsa*, unmitigated non-violence, goes by the board at the very beginning of a discussion of pacifism. And when our Ministers make the apology that they are

keeping an army and navy and air-fleet because they are too weak to follow correctly the ideal of pacifism and that this weakness should not be construed as a total forgetfulness of the ideal, they are making a false fetish of *ahimsa* and completely confusing the issue. Most of the foreign pacifists seem to be themselves in no less confusion, for the name of Gandhi as the apostle of non-violence is lavishly strewn in their writings and speeches. If *ahimsa* signifies repugnance from shedding all blood except one's own even when one is confronted with Hitler's panzers or, to take a smaller yet sufficiently vicious example, the marauding tribesmen who with Pakistan's connivance broke into Kashmir, then *ahimsa* is just an unconscious collaboration with anti-civilisation forces and, far from being a merit, a pernicious mistake. To refuse to see in some collectivities of human beings on certain occasions of history a streak of the diabolic which cannot be mended but requires to be ended by physical attack is sheer blindness to facts. The last war threw these facts into so much relief that a host of sceptics, C. E. M. Joad the most prominent among them, who used to laugh at the idea of supernatural powers and principalities came to the necessity of faith in God by the curious road of finding themselves unable to overlook the existence of some sort of devilry acting from beyond the realm of Nature. Even in the absence of the markedly diabolic, we should be able to see the element of the infra-rational as quite likely at several times to need violent opposition on our part. Ahimsa, leading to an apologetic attitude towards our armed forces as if in keeping up the martial spirit we were defaulting from the ideal of the divine that India has always visioned, is an utter falsity. If the pacifists in India and abroad consider the avoidance of war by all means and the pedestalling of *ahimsa* at all costs to be the essence of their philosophy and their work, they are on a wrong track and, for all their good intentions, doing disservice to the world. Identify "goodwill in action" with extreme *ahimsa* and you immediately disqualify it from being a worthy pursuit.

What we have to pursue is noble effort to avoid war for selfish motives with their brood of hatred and greed: this is the only valid sense of pacifism in the context of international politics. Selfish motives: there is the arch-evil which pacifism should work to remove. As a result, the mere avoidance of war is not the *summum bonum* even if war be something wholly to be shunned. Hatred and greed can run riot without assuming the shape of tank and bomber. As a reminder of this truth, the phrase "goodwill in action" is genuinely useful and plunges towards the heart not only of what sincere pacifists everywhere mean but also of what our own ancient culture implies. The heart of meaning here may be broadly put as: a state of consciousness unagitated by selfish motives and therefore, so far as these motives go,

at peace with the world and expressing that peace in active relation with living creatures.

Goodwill and the Supra-rational

The question, however, remains: Can the active goodwill possible to rational man be quite clear of selfish motives, and function effectively in the interests of genuine peace? There is a strong tendency today to look on man not as a middle term between the infra-rational and the supra-rational but as the final term of the evolutionary process: all advancement is considered a further and further refining of man's rationality and of the contrast it presents to what is below it the animal kingdom. Many an Indian is inclined to be an agnostic: he does not deny the greatness of saints and mystics and yogis, yet he sees their greatness to lie rather in their intense humanitarian activity than in their intense experience of the Divine and the Eternal. He even wonders whether this experience is not a kind of magnificent illusion and thinks that their humanitarian activity should be dissociated from it and set up as our goal. Here is an attitude almost akin to Bertrand Russell's. Russell admits the mystic's ecstasy as a datum of experience and says that what is of most value in human life is analogous to the lofty unselfish principles enunciated by the great religious teachers, but denies that the equanimity and compassion that are the message of those teachers are best fostered by the mystical experience and cannot be fostered without it. But it should be evident that selfishness would be subdued most effectively if one has the experience of an ever-peaceful infinity-enjoying state like Atman or Nirvana in which the small ego of man is utterly annulled and that unless a Divine creative Mother or a beatific and luminous Lord of the world is realised by the heart no emotion of human brotherhood can attain extreme life-transfiguring pitch. Call mysticism a holy hallucination, if you are bent on taking a superficial view of the testimony of the world's finest figures, but you cannot escape logically granting that nothing short of such an hallucination can give rise exceedingly to "what is", in Russell's own words, "of most value in human life." If you admit certain so-called moral virtues to be of paramount importance to rational man, you cannot by-pass the mystical quest of the supra-rational which renders them the most beautifully potent, the most widely practicable.

Gandhi, whose name dominates most pacifist thinking, was not a mystic in the real sense in which Ramakrishna or Vivekananda, Raman Maharsi or Sri Aurobindo is, yet whatever intensity of fellow-feeling and unselfish behaviour he brought was born directly of his fervent faith in a God who was to him the perfect father of all creatures and the light of a stainless truth. To try to follow Gandhi's ideal and example without sharing his

faith is, of course, possible: the ethical nature is not dependent on the religious motive for its instinctive impulsion and emotional exaltation. Even intellectually it can justify itself without that motive: to do unto others as we would others to do unto us may seem capital sense to the thinking mind. But there are two levels of thought—the provisional and pragmatic, the fundamental and philosophic. Although the first level can provide the ethicist with "sensible" supports, the second will give him no standing ground except religion. It lays bare the full implication of the ethical consciousness. Ethics is essentially normative: its key terms are "right", "duty", "obligation", "good", "ought". These terms cannot be derived from natural factors with any finality: the study of natural factors is science—a study which is purely descriptive and not in the least normative. The universe of the scientist is impotent to yield those terms. Not even a human natural factor like "society" can be their source, for it can only impose on the individual what many individuals consider to be advantageous to collective existence and its will is not from any plane higher than that of the single individual and hence cannot have a definitively binding character. Mere numbers cannot make a thing right. Nor can any punishment visited on the recalcitrant individual prove the duty of not being dishonest, cruel and selfish: it can impress him only with the inexpediency of certain types of behaviour, convince him merely of the need to be clever enough to get away with dishonesty, cruelty and selfishness and not be foolishly found out. The real logic of ethical conduct can lie in nothing else than a Law Eternal behind the codes and statures of men, a Law which men strive to embody according to their best lights. Our ideals and morals may not always image the divine depths of the Eternal Law, but logically there can be no idealism and morality without an effort or aspiration to image the depths that are divine of a Law that is eternal. The sense of unconditional impressiveness and inherent validity, without which no "ought" can have justification, must argue that we are ethical in as much as we strain to express a supreme and absolute Reality faultlessly guided by its own Truth-light. Philosophically, ethics can be neither valid nor imperative without a religious sanction. Goodwill has its sole logical support in a sense of God-will.

Religion and Religionism

Pacifism, therefore, should identify itself with faith in the Infinite and the Eternal, an open acknowledgment of the supra-rational source of the flow of the true, the beautiful and the good to the earth. However, we must admit that a religious orientation of rational man is insufficient to transfigure life so long as there is no marked turn towards mystical experience. For religion

tends to degenerate into religionism. What should be a matter of soul-discovery and of living contact and communion with the divine depths and height of our being stops with a narrow creed, a rigid ritualism, a bigoted churchianity. The rational mind, if not influenced powerfully by the beyond-mind, is disposed to cut up the truth of existence and erect one part or another as the total verity: it cannot hold many things together in a harmonious synthesising view, the utmost it does is to attempt the subsumption of everything under one particular aspect which it exaggerates out of proportion. In consequence, we have trenchant oppositions of limited doctrines and, at best, "catholic systems" which yet are sectarian by sweeping all existence into a formula unduly magnifying a particular facet of reality. Intolerance, fanaticism, obscurantism are bound thus to go hand in hand with religion if the profound religious impulse is not directly aligned to the supra-rational progress has to come often by an attack on religious systems and much of the modern world's intellectual and social development is due to its break with the turn not in the direction of crass secularity but in that of mystical experience should be the sequel to the leap away from religionism. One of the first signs of the desirable turn is the intellectual attempt to find the common vital measure of the various denominations into which the world of believers is fragmented: a movement like the International Congress of World Fellowship of Faiths which lately met in India was therefore a right one. And it was as a significant and happy omen that a concourse of religious representatives bent on discovering ways and means to establish brotherhood in mankind should have taken place in India. But the full force of the omen would be lost if we failed to understand the stress India has always laid upon spiritual realisation; upon direct experience of the Divine. The motto of the International Congress of World Fellowship of Faiths was *Omnia vincit amor*, "Love conquers everything." Beautiful words yet liable to be mere tinkling cymbals until we break through the surface of their sentimental idealism and reach some meaningful mantra charged with the supra-rational. A gospel of "sweet reasonableness" set in a religious key cannot be the master-instrument of genuine pacifism. Although it will carry more conviction than any secular version of "goodwill in action", it will never, without the rhythm of mystical experience, re-tune the human heart to a divine harmony. There must be men in whom the rational has been absorbed and taken up into sainthood, seerhood, yoga—men who have inwardly opened to the Lord seated in the heart of hearts, the Cosmic Consciousness and the Transcendent Self and Master, men who are no moral preachers with an intellectually guided religious fervour but such as are at least on the way to realising the goal so integrally revealed in that fourfold mantra of Sri Aurobindo's:

Arms taking to a voiceless supreme delight,
Life that meets the Eternal with close breast,
An unwall'd mind dissolved in the Infinite,
Force one with unimaginable rest.

Yes, it is the mystic and the yogi who alone can bring the secret of world unity, the love that will conquer everything because it burns with the direct consciousness of the immortal, the illimitable and the perfect, has at all times the fire-keen impulsion of the supra-rational truth and beatitude, and is no hopey weakness of either the nerves or the emotions wedded to an unthinking and unqualified *ahimsa*, no syrup of goody-goodness manufactured from a recipe of pleasant religious ideas and conventional prayers, not even the sincere yet unenlightened zeal of social service in the name of a distantly paternal God, nor the well-meaning missionary indoctrination content with a result of superficial assent and formal knee-bending before the tables of the ten commandments or the eight fold path. If there is a God in whom are all beauty and harmony, an effort must be made to know Him as we know the sun of midday, feel Him as we feel our flesh of those who are dear to us, live Him as we live our hungers and our desires, manifest Him as we manifest the weight and warmth and vigour of our bodies. In short, by setting forth on the *via mystica*, we must strive to reach in our lives an incarnation of the Divinity we worship. Congresses of faiths soon become, for all their speeches and resolutions, frail and futile memories unless the mystic and the yogi infuse life into them. Out of the great hum of holy words and high declarations that made famous in its own day the first Parliament of Religions at Chicago almost half a century back, only one creative cry has remained the voice of Swami Vivekananda. It has remained because

it broke from a living realisation of the Infinite and the Eternal. Vivekananda uttered his message with the actual mystical experience glowing within him of the one supreme Self of selves present everywhere and the mighty Mother-Spirit from whom the entire universe has sprung.

His message may not be quite complete since with its superb dynamism it still mingled the feeling that man's fulfillment is ultimately outside earth and that the physical existence, the life-force and the mind-energy have to grow great and work magnificently for only a while and in the end serve as a stupendous bow shooting the soul out of the cosmos into some absolute Peace. Not a supra-cosmic quiescence is the supreme peace we need, any more than we need a cessation of the warrior, the hero, the *kshatriya* in us, or an outward political and social co-operation among earth's peoples precariously sustained with the help of a sort of liberal universal religion veneration with a reasoned goodwill our brute brain. The integral Godhead must be "force one with unimaginable rest," and our earth-being and its members must find perfection of themselves here and now in the multiplicity-in-unity of that supra-rational Power from whom this being and its members have originated because of some truth or archetype of them existing there. A divine creative and all-transforming peace should be our prayer. But, though we may look even beyond Vivekananda, his name is most appropriate in connection with the endeavour to establish world peace through religion. Without men like Vivekananda this endeavour will find little more than a glow-worm illumination, and neither moon nor star will shine for it, much less will dawn the day of truth.

'The Indian Spirit and the World's Future'

Destruction is always a simultaneous or alternate element which keeps pace with creation and it is by destroying and renewing that the Master of Life does his long work of preservation. More, destruction is the first condition of progress. Inwardly, the man who does not destroy his lower self-formations, cannot rise to a greater existence. Outwardly also, the nation or community or race which shrinks too long from destroying and replacing its past forms of life is itself destroyed, rots and perishes and out of its debris other nations, communities and races are formed ... Whoever prematurely attempts to get rid of this law of battle and destruction, strives vainly against the greater will or the World-Spirit. Whoever turns from it in the weakness of his lower members, as did Arjuna in the beginning... is showing not true virtue, but a want of spiritual courage to face the sterner truths of Nature and of action and existence. Man can only exceed the law of battle by discovering the greater law of his immortality. There are those who seek this where it always exists and must primarily be found, in the higher reaches of the pure spirit, and to find it turn away from a world governed by the law of Death. That is an individual solution which makes no difference to mankind and the world, or rather makes only this difference that they are deprived of so much spiritual power which might have helped them forward in the painful march of their evolution.

Sri Aurobindo
'Essays on the Gita'

The Problem of Human Unity

Mangesh Nadkarni

I think it would not be an exaggeration to say that our academics in universities and elsewhere in India have long come to the conclusion that they have no use for Sri Aurobindo. So his writings receive scant attention from them. It often comes to them as a surprise when they are told that a considerable corpus of Sri Aurobindo's writings deals very comprehensively and incisively with exactly those problems which Darwin, Freud and Marx, the three seminal influences on contemporary thought, so pointedly raised and so inadequately answered. Our academics probably think of him at best as an acrobat of the spirit performing "miracles" and too busy with the performance of austerities and penances to have any time for or interest in terrestrial affairs such as, for example, the future of the United Nations Organisation.

In 1949 Sri Aurobindo added a 17-page postscript to his book *The Ideal of Human Unity*, originally serialised in *The Arya* between 1915 and 1918, and in this postscript he clearly warned the world of the threat communism was going to pose to several parts of Asia. In particular, he made a pointed reference to the possibility of the Chinese military power trying to overrun the borders of India. When this statement was brought to the attention of President Kennedy in 1962, a little after the Chinese invasion of India, he seems to have inquired whether there was any typing mistake about the date, and whether the date of Sri Aurobindo's statement was in fact 1960 and not 1950. He is reported to have asked exactly as our academics ask even today "You mean to say that a man devoted to meditation and contemplation, sitting in one corner of India, said this about the intentions of Communist China as early as 1950?" (Iyengar, 1952, p.696-7) The late John F. Kennedy's ignorance about Sri Aurobindo is understandable but not that of the intellectuals in our country.

Our country has already paid a heavy price for ignoring Sri Aurobindo's firm advice to the Indian National Congress that they should accept the Cripps' Proposals; it was ignored, and the result has been the partition of India which has weakened our country and wrecked all our attempts at planned economic growth.

What is generally not recognised about Sri Aurobindo is that the ultimate aim of his much misunderstood meditation and contemplation, and indeed the very aim of his withdrawal to Pondicherry in 1910 and of his

yoga, was not salvation, *mukti* or *nirvana* or anything personal at all; his aim was to find the secret of a perfect life for the whole of humanity a goal to be achieved here on earth and not in some remote heaven. He was not interested in possessing the heaven, his one aim was to make life on this earth safe and perfect for man.

During this century, thinkers and philosophers all over the world have generally tended to take a gloomy view of the future of man. There is a burgeoning literature on this subject, but for our purposes the following statement by the well-known anthropologist, Konrad Lorenz should suffice. In the preface to his book *The Waning of Humaneness* (p.3) he says:

"Now as never before, the prospects for a human future are exceptionally dismal. Most probably the human race will soon and swiftly, but certainly not painlessly, be committed to suicide through use of extant nuclear weaponry. Even if this does not happen, every human being remains in peril of a slow death through poisoning and desiccating the environment in which he lives and by which he is sustained. Even if, just in time, humans should somehow impose a check on their blind and unbelievably stupid conduct, they still remain threatened by a progressive decline of all those attributes and attainments that constitute their humanity."

Compare this with the confidently optimistic note that is so typical of Sri Aurobindo. The following lines are from his epic *Savitri*:

Earth shall be made a home of Heaven's light,
A seer heaven-born shall lodge in human breasts;
The superconscious beam shall touch men's eyes
And the truth-conscious world come down to earth
Invading Matter with the Spirit's ray
Awaking its silence to immortal thoughts,
Awaking the dumb heart to the living Word.
This mortal life shall house Eternity's bliss,
The body's self taste immortality.
Then shall the world-redeemer's task be done.

Savitri, p.451

And again,

Slowly the Light grows greater in the East,
Slowly the world progresses on God's road.
His seal is on my task, it cannot fail:

I shall hear the silver swing of heaven's gates
When God comes out to meet the soul of the world.
Savitri, p. 510

Why is it that Sri Aurobindo is so confident about the future of humanity while most other thinkers of our age tend to think of it in the bleakest possible terms? A brief answer to this question can be formulated in these terms: Sri Aurobindo has seen a greater potential in man than seen by any other thinker. He does not believe that mind is the highest level of consciousness man is capable of achieving or is destined to achieve; if indeed it were, then the gloomy forecast of the future of mankind made by other contemporary thinkers is fully justified. Sri Aurobindo has discovered the secret which would not only ensure man's survival but also bring to him the perfection and fulfillment he has always missed. He describes this secret as an evolutionary leap in the human consciousness. In the words of *The Life Divine*:

“As there has been established on earth a mental Consciousness and Power which shapes a race of mental beings and takes up into itself all of earthly nature that is ready for the change, so now there will be established on earth a gnostic Consciousness and Power which will shape a race of gnostic spiritual beings and take up into itself all of earth-nature that is ready for this new transformation.”

He is convinced that man is destined to rise beyond the limitations of mental consciousness to a higher level of consciousness, a point at which the mantle of ignorance, egoism, division, suffering and death will fall away from him like a black cloak from the reclining body of a god. To reach this gnostic consciousness, or what he also called the Supramental Consciousness, and to bring it down and make it operative in human life on earth was Sri Aurobindo's mission in life. This is the key which he has said will solve the current evolutionary paradox facing man and bring him fulfillment not only in his individual life but also in his collective life.

Sri Aurobindo examined the problem of man's collective life in two of his major works; in *The Human Cycle* he looked at this problem in sociological terms and in *The Ideal of Human Unity* he examined the problem in political and global terms. Both were serialised in *The Arya* between 1915 and 1918, that is, even before The League of Nations came into being. When he turned to them again in 1949 to see if any revision was called for in the light of subsequent developments in the world-scene, he found that there was no need to change any of his major conclusions. He only added the Postscript chapter at that time to *The Ideal of Human Unity*. After reviewing the international situation as it then existed and the role that the United Nations Organisation was trying to play, he records his conclusions in this chapter as follows:

“If man is intended to survive and carry forward the evolution of which he is at present the head and, to some extent, a half-conscious leader of its march, he must come out of his present chaotic international life and arrive at a beginning of organised united action; some kind of World-State, unitary or federal, or a confederacy or a coalition he must arrive at in the end; no smaller or looser expedient would adequately serve the purpose....” (p.562)

“The ultimate result must be the formation of a World-State and the most desirable form of it would be a federation of free nations in which all subjection or forced inequality and subordination of one to another would have disappeared and, though some might preserve a greater national influence, all would have equal power... A world-union of this kind would have the greatest chances of long survival or permanent existence.” (p.571)

Sri Aurobindo believed that Nature is proceeding slowly towards the goal of the unification of humanity. Man has formed various groups and collectivities during the long human history. The earliest such unit was the family, which has until now proved itself to be the most durable atomic unit of society. The clan and the tribe, the village, baronies and kingdoms are the various kinds of regional units with which humanity has experimented. The development of nation was an enrichment of the notion of a social unit, and it has proved to be a momentous development. Next to the family, the nation has proved to be the most durable social aggregate.

But unfortunately, nationhood has now developed into such a firm and selfishly aggressive unit that it has become almost a barrier to the enlargement of the social unit towards a greater unification of mankind. Sri Aurobindo points out that three different kinds of attempts at a larger unification have already been tried and found not entirely satisfactory. One was the political solution of building empires which tended to suppress local differences in order to be able to achieve some kind of a strong central organisation. All such empires suppressed their dependencies which in time brought about their collapse and destruction. Next, there were attempts made on racial lines, such as Pan-Slavism, Pan-Arabism, Pan-Jewery, etc. But this effort at human unification suffered from the basic flaw of not having any firm principle for cohesion between the various subunits.

A third kind of attempt was made which sought to make institutional religion the basis of human unity. The two Semitic religions, Christianity and Islam did have as their basis the dream of conquering the whole world for the one jealous Lord. Buddhism and Hinduism are not proselytizing religions and yet at one time, particularly the former, influenced and over flooded distant countries. But religious imperialism too failed to unify humanity.

In our own century, an imperialism of a new kind, which called itself the Dictatorship of the Proletariat attempted to unite human groupings across national, racial and religious boundaries. This experiment too, as we have seen, failed.

Sri Aurobindo foresaw a new kind of grouping of nations gradually emerging; and this has been borne out by subsequent history as can be seen in the subsequent emergence of the European Economic Community, the proposed North American free-trade zone area, the ASEAN, the Organisation of African Unity, the Pacific Basin Economic Cooperation Council, and nearer home, the SAARC, etc. The grouping of Europe into the Western and Eastern block of nations is now in the process of giving way to a healthier approach to federal grouping of national units.

After the First World War, the overwhelming desire among the peoples of the world for the formation of a world organization found its expression in the League of Nations. The League of Nations was a flawed organisation in many ways; it was primarily just an oligarchy of big powers, mostly European. Although it could not prevent the Second World War, it paved the way for the formation of the United World Organisation. The UNO began with great hopes and has been trying to overcome the weaknesses that crippled the League of Nations. The five great powers in the Security Council with their power to veto still constitute an oligarchy and often the great organisation finds itself helpless in responding to the needs and aspirations of mankind.

So far the only two units that have proved stable are the family and the nation. It would appear that the grouping of nations united largely by economic interests may well be the intermediate stage towards the ultimate union of free and equal nations of the world.

In *The Ideal of Human Unity* Sri Aurobindo examines the various possible intermediate aggregates which could eventually lead to world unity. According to him the most desirable would be a federation of free and independent nations; unity in diversity should be the very basis of such a federation and freedom and equality should be its corner stones. The United Nations Organisation is no more than a hopeful beginning. During the forty years since Sri Aurobindo wrote the Postscript chapter to *The Ideal of Human Unity*, mankind has lived through the long nightmare of cold war. The United Nations Organisation has been most of this time a helpless spectator of events, because there are some glaring defects in the way it is constituted. As Sri A. B. Patel (1974) has pointed out:

“The right of veto and the membership of the

Security Council call for immediate revision in the Charter of the U. N. The condition precedent to achieve this must be the general desire among the nations to strengthen the United Nations and the readiness to surrender a part of their sovereignty for the good of the human race. The greatest obstacle to (the growth of) the evolution of the U. N. into a world union is a false sense of national interests opposing the realisation that humanity is a totality. Man's paramount loyalty must go beyond one fragment of the human race to the human race itself and national States should invest a portion of their sovereignty to a world body for the common good.”

Sri Aurobindo has also laid down the broad guidelines for the political, economic and administrative arrangements (what he has called "mechanical means") needed for the ideal of human unity to work. A free world-union must in its very nature be a complex unity based on a diversity and that diversity must be based on a free self-determination. In this the geographical and the physical principles should be subordinated to psychological principles. The peoples of humanity must be allowed to group themselves according to their free will and their natural affinities. Freedom should be the foundation stone of this union. The elimination of war and the recognition of the equal rights of all peoples would dissolve the present power blocks. Since the forcible exploitation of one nation by another would necessarily be abolished, the stress of struggle in the economic field would be greatly reduced, although a sort of peaceful economic struggle might continue.

Sri Aurobindo then goes on to emphasize that global unification in politics, administration and economy through international relations cannot be lasting unless a majority accept a fundamental need for unity. For all these fundamental changes to succeed and continue a certain psychological element will have to be present in great strength in human consciousness. Sri Aurobindo repeatedly points out that the success of our political, social, economic, and religious institutions depends entirely on the state of the consciousness of the people who run them. Therefore inner changes must come before radical improvements in the outer life can be brought about. In other words, the limits to what kind of world we can create are in fact our inner limits. And he indicated in clear terms the nature of the inner change that was called for if our dream of world unity is to be realised.

“There would be needed to make the change persist, a religion of humanity or an equivalent sentiment much more powerful, explicit, self-conscious, universal in its appeal than the nationalist's religion of country, the clear recognition by man in all his

thought and life of a single soul in humanity of which each man and each people is an incarnation and soul-form. an ascension of men beyond the principle of ego which lives by separativeness—and yet there must be no destruction of individuality, for without that man would stagnate; a principle and arrangement of the common life which would give free play to the individual variation, interchange in diversity and the need of adventure and conquest by which the soul of man lives and grows great...”

The Ideal of Human Unity (pp.539-40)

It should be noted that by "a religion of humanity", Sri Aurobindo does not mean some credal religion, old or new, which the whole world would accept. The word "religion" is used here metaphorically, to mean "a system of beliefs held with ardour and faith", and notice that he contrasts the religion of humanity with the nationalist's religion of the country. The fundamental creed of this religion of humanity is that humanity has a single soul, and no matter where one is born, all men are brethren. This would call for the expansion of the human ego from the boundaries of a nation to embrace the whole of humanity. Sri Aurobindo is careful to point out that this universalisation of consciousness should not result in the destruction of individuality nor in the suppression of variation. The human soul needs freedom to grow, to be creatively adventurous.

The paramount importance of the change in man's consciousness as a prerequisite for a solution to most of man's current problems, which Sri Aurobindo kept emphasising in many of his writings, was not generally appreciated until recently. Marx may not be entirely wrong in saying that the consciousness of man is determined by his social being and not vice versa, but that is only a surface truth. The deeper truth is that what we make of our external circumstances depends entirely on the state of our consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo put it in his *Thoughts and Aphorisms*:

“This erring race of human beings dreams always of perfecting their environment by the machinery of government and society; but it is only by the perfection of the soul within that the outer environment can be perfected. What thou art within that outside thee thou shalt enjoy; no machinery can rescue thee from the law of thy being.”

The Hour of God, Cent. Vol. 17, p.120

This awareness that the solution of most of our world problems depends basically on the state of our consciousness, of our inner being, has gradually begun to receive recognition in recent years. Thus Ervin Laszlo

(1978) has recently elaborated this point in his book *The Inner Limits of Mankind*:

“The critical but as yet generally unrecognised issue confronting mankind is that its truly decisive limits are inner, not outer. They are not physical limits due to the finiteness or vulnerability of this world, but psychological, cultural and above all, political limits inner to people and societies, manifested by individual and collective mismanagement, irresponsibility and myopia. They eventuate in scores of other world problems, politically sensitive—and hence less discussed—but fundamentally real. They include social discrimination, racism, economic injustice, political repression and totalitarianism, torture and terrorism, undernourishment and unemployment, frightening gaps between rich and poor as well as between cities and countryside, the worldwide armament race, the proliferation of nuclear arms, nuclear technologies and materials, a highly skewed international economic system, illiteracy and ignorance—the list could go on and on.

Many world problems involve outer limits, but most of them are due fundamentally to inner limits. There are hardly any world problems that cannot be traced to human agency and which could not be overcome by appropriate changes in human behaviour. The root causes even of physical and ecological problems are the inner constraints on our vision and values... We contemplate changing almost anything on this earth but ourselves.”

The Inner Limits of Mankind p.3

If a proof is needed to convince ourselves that what Sri Aurobindo has said about the primacy of an inner change in man is entirely correct, we need only look at the world scene today. The U. N. has met with very meagre success because the consciousness of man is not yet ready for a more effective U. N. The world situation has changed in many details during the last forty years but in essential ways it still reflects the psychological limitations of the human race.

Until recently we used to attribute most conflicts in the world to the antagonism between capitalism and communism. At last the cold war is over, and who won? Nobody won; everybody lost. As an observer of the international scene (Hylke Tromp 1990) has recently given us the following score card:

“The Soviet Union and its satellites are faced with stagnation, pollution, corruption, criminality, unemployment, alcoholism, illiteracy, and an increasing national debt.

The United States and its allies are faced with stagnation, pollution, corruption, criminality, unemployment, drug abuse, illiteracy and increasing national debt.

Both sides in the cold war have secretly dumped industrial, chemical and nuclear waste on their own soil, contaminating the air, polluting the water, and poisoning their territory in order to defend it.

Both sides in the cold war have overstretched their economies as well as the social structures of their societies. The U.S.S.R. now is in a state of poverty only found in third world countries. The U.S.A. now is in a state with a foreign debt unsurpassed by any other country.

Both parties have cut down instead of increased expenditures for education and social welfare in order to pay for the research, development, production and deployment of new generations of weapons-systems. In consequence they are now faced with disintegration, alienation, illiteracy, organised criminality, drug abuse and high levels of unemployment."

It is interesting that through diametrically opposed political and economic systems the votaries of Capitalism and Communism have derived strikingly similar outcomes. This is because the inner limits to the consciousness of both the groups were very similar. Whether you live under a capitalist dispensation or a communist dispensation so long as dimensions of your inner consciousness are the same, you reap from life a similar harvest of frustration and despair.

The cold war has already militarised the entire world. There is no place on earth now which cannot be reached within minutes by a nuclear-tipped missile. The weapons trade has become one of the most profitable. Anybody can buy any of these weapons, from terrorists to rebel groups.

The world is realizing more and more that there is no rationality in pursuing political goals with military means. The cost of a war always exceeds the benefits. This does not mean that power politics has beaten a retreat. No, it has only changed its preference for what weapons to use. The powerful nations in the world now prefer economic strategies to raw military might. And it would look as if the economic struggle is going to be bitter in the coming years, as can be seen from the recent GATT talks held in Brussels which collapsed amid much acrimony after a week of stalemate over the knotty issue of farm subsidy. And this time the tussle was between the economic leaders of the so-called free world.

Since nuclear weapons cannot be disinvented, their proliferation cannot be stopped either. And so the threat of a nuclear holocaust will grow with the proliferation of nuclear arms.

Among the non-military threats to the very survival of the human race are "underdevelopment, overpopulation, declining prospects of development, degradation of environment, mass poverty, illiteracy, disease, squalor and malnutrition" afflicting large proportion of the world's population, the arms race within the bipolar adversarial framework, the wastage of resources in armaments, the conspicuous and profligate consumption patterns of living in the developed world which is responsible for the generation of 85 percent of "greenhouse gases." (Subrahmanyam 1990)

The use of violence for political purpose has now spread to non-state actors. The easy availability of weapons has made it easy for groups who have scores to settle. Consequently political violence has become a major problem and seeks to achieve its political objectives by threatening, terrifying and killing innocent people. The hostage-taking, hijackings, bomb attacks and direct murders it uses as its strategies make it as monstrous as war.

So once again we see a world facing tensions different in their outer form but all arising out of the same kind of inner inadequacy of mankind.

A world-union of the kind Sri Aurobindo suggests above has also been the dream of many thinkers and savants, and some of them have suggested a new religion as the prerequisite to this world-union. But we have always had religions and they never were able to prevent wars. In fact just as during the last forty years all conflicts in the world were attributed to the antagonism between capitalism and communism, at one time most conflicts were attributed to religious antagonism—the so-called wars of religion between Christians and Muslims; between Sunnite and Shi'ite Muslims, and between Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians. So how can we expect any future religion to do any better and to be a positive force for peace and world-union? Although a number of people have pinned down all their hopes on a new religion to bring about this miraculous change, nobody except Sri Aurobindo, in my view, has clearly indicated what this new religion has to be and how exactly it would do this. Before I discuss Sri Aurobindo's views on this subject, I would like to present here the views expressed on the same subject

in 1975 by two internationally respected thinkers. This may help us to appreciate the profundity of the seer-vision of Sri Aurobindo better.

Toynbee, the well-known British historian and Ikeda, a Japanese thinker, held a dialogue on a number of subjects over several days in London in 1975, the transcript of which was subsequently edited by Richard L. Gage and published by Oxford University Press under the title *Choose Life: A Dialogue*. In this *Dialogue* Toynbee and Ikeda come to the conclusion that world unification under a single government is absolutely necessary if mankind is to be saved from future wars of total self-destruction. They note a number of hopeful global developments such as the following which in their view are conducive to the promotion of international goodwill and understanding.

One, the annihilation of distance which has increased the volume of business and tourist travel and volume of information about foreign countries that can be obtained even without travel by means of radio and television;

Two, the huge international technological projects which inspire a sense of unity among peoples—the exploration of outer space, for example;

Three, multipolarisation: the emergence of China in the communist block, the emergence of West Germany and Japan as economic superpowers also has helped.

Both Toynbee and Ikeda believe that this is not enough to achieve world unification. They hope to see the rise of a new world religion that will serve as a catalyst for the spiritual unity of all nations. Toynbee holds that a dictator with outstanding leadership ability may be necessary for world unification, while Ikeda does not think that the idea of one-man rule will find universal welcome in the modern world. He believes that a precedent for future world unity may be found in the current European attempt to achieve an inter-continental federation of nations. He also believes that an integral system of religion or philosophy that will help incorporate all nations into one body is needed. What is needed most is the development of a feeling of spiritual oneness for all mankind. Once this feeling has been established, concrete methods of unification will emerge automatically. The question Toynbee and Ikeda leave unanswered is how to bring about this feeling of spiritual oneness for all mankind.

Toynbee is less sanguine about the chances for a voluntary political unification of the present-day world and is therefore pessimistic about human prospects. He wonders how a sudden and widespread change of the hearts of men could come about through a revolution on the religious plane, and thinks that it

would be a miracle if such a widespread change of the hearts of men came about. He hopes that such a miracle would happen and save the world.

Ikeda agrees that the problem is difficult but he too is convinced that only religious fervour can help overcome it. Today, all the traditional religions have fallen into a powerless state, and therefore we may have to find a new religion. Such a religion will have to arise out of the spontaneous human search for truth and fervour of faith. Ikeda further adds that when such a religion does arise, no coercion should be applied to make people accept this new religion. The religion required for world unity must appear reasonable to man. Modern man's reasoning faculty forbids illogical doctrines.

Ikeda points out that the key precept of all religion is that self-mastery is man's first task. We must master our greed and our pride. These two fatal human failings have never been so rife as they are in the modern age. The present sequel to the industrial revolution has demonstrated that in spite of his scientific and technological prowess, modern man, like the primitive man, is not master of the situation in which he finds himself. He has failed to master it because he has failed to master himself. Self-mastery is the only means of avoiding self-frustration. This truth was proclaimed by the traditional religions. It is hoped that it will also be proclaimed by any serious future religion. To master oneself is the essence of religion. But the widespread profession and practice of traditional religions has not enabled man to master himself. How then do we ensure that the new religion will succeed where traditional religions failed?

It should be noted here that neither Toynbee nor Ikeda tells us how exactly the new religion is likely to bring about the feeling of spiritual oneness, and also how it will enable us to master our greed and pride, which was avowedly the aim also of all traditional religions. We have seen that Toynbee is not sure how the new religion will bring this about and hopes for a miracle. However, at another place in the same book, while talking about methods of being able to control the human ego, Ikeda says: "As a concrete method, simply teaching control as a kind of knowledge and attempting to propagate it in this way are meaningless. A total reformation of the individual from below the depths of consciousness is essential. Of course, this reformation cannot be imposed from without." (p.308)

This then is the crucial problem. How to bring about "a total reformation of man" "from the depths of consciousness" not just of a few people but of a majority of people everywhere? For this world to be

a happier place, man has to change from within. Most thinkers have come to this conclusion. But then what would this inner change involve and how to bring it about? These are questions most of these thinkers leave either unanswered or answer vaguely, while Sri Aurobindo is the one thinker who provides a comprehensive answer to all these questions. I shall devote the rest of this paper to a brief formulation of Sri Aurobindo's answer.

One of the concluding chapters of *The Ideal of Human Unity* has the title The Religion of Humanity, and in this chapter Sri Aurobindo suggests that a spiritual religion is the answer to the problem of human unity. He summarizes his views in the last chapter in the following words:

“A spiritual religion is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed and mental form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development. A religion of humanity means the growing realization that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that human race and the human beings are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here. It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge and bring about a kingdom of this divine Spirit upon earth.” (p.554)

Note that Sri Aurobindo is careful to describe this religion as a “spiritual religion”. He points out clearly that what he has in mind is not a matter of creed and intellectual belief, but a religion based on the growing realization that there is a divine Reality in which we are all one, and this reality can be made to progressively reveal itself here in our lives. By religion Sri Aurobindo means here this total turning of the whole life towards the Spirit. In fact, both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, his collaborator, held that no credal religion, new or old, can be a solution to the crisis facing humanity today. Mother once declared this emphatically in these words:

“In the supramental creation there will be no more religions.” And again,

“A new religion would not only be useless but harmful.” In *The Life Divine*, which gives the metaphysical basis for his philosophy and which was also serialised in *The Arya* nearly 75 years ago, Sri Aurobindo clearly foresaw that humanity was going to be disillusioned

by the God-denying materialist gospel, and also that when that happened there would be a swing back towards religion. But he cautioned that organised religion, although it can provide for an individual an opening to spiritual experience, has not changed human life and society. It cannot do so because it compromises with the lower and egoistic impulses of man and cannot insist on the inner change of the whole being. Religion can only insist on a credal adherence, a formal acceptance of its ethical standards and a conformity to ceremony and rituals. Religion does not go far enough and is incapable of transforming the race; it is incapable of creating a new principle of human existence. A total spiritual direction given to the whole life and the whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself.

In *The Human Cycle* Sri Aurobindo has given a most illuminating critique of what is generally understood by the term religion, and has shown why it cannot be expected to be the guide to our life today. He points out that humanity got rid of much that was cruel, evil, ignorant, dark, and odious, not by the power of religion, but by the power of the awakened intelligence and of human idealism and sympathy. Very often the accredited religions have opposed progress and sided with the forces of obscurity and oppression, and this is why the modern mind has revolted against religion. The second important reason why religion has failed is that it has confused the essential with the adventitious. True religion is in its inner nature a seeking after God, the opening of the deepest life of the soul to the Supreme Consciousness. True religion is spiritual religion, that which seeks to live in the spirit, in what is beyond the intellect, and to govern one's ethical, aesthetic and practical life by the light and law of the spirit. What is generally understood by the term religion is a set of intellectual dogmas, a pietistic exaltation of our lower being, some fixed moral code and some religio-political or religio-social system. Not that these things are totally unnecessary and that we need disdain the aid of forms, ceremonies, creeds and systems. They may be needed in different degrees at different stages before our entire life can be spiritualised. But these things are aids and supports, not the essence. A blind insistence on them may even defeat the whole purpose of religion. Tolerance and freedom to be different is the first rule to be observed. The spiritual essence of religion is the one thing supremely needful.

Sri Aurobindo points out that religion often considers spirituality as synonymous with renunciation of life and mortification of body and life. It seems to condemn the pursuit of earthly aims as a trend opposed to spirituality and to regard hopes of man on earth as an illusion or a vanity incompatible with the hopes of man

in heaven. If this is what religion is, then it cannot be a true law and guide for life. Each principle of our nature seeks perfection in its own sphere and a perfect physical existence is as much a spiritual aim as a perfect life of the spirit. This quarrel between earth and heaven, between spirit and the rest of our being is most sterilizing and real spirituality has nothing to do with a religion of sorrow, suffering and mortification.

Sri Aurobindo has also offered a most perceptive critique of what is called humanism, or what he calls "the religion of humanity", which is the inspiration behind the Nehruvian ideal of secularism and humanism. The fundamental idea of modern humanism is that mankind is the godhead to be worshipped, no other idol, neither the nation, the State, nor anything else. Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, colour, nationality, political or social advancement. The body of man is to be respected, made immune from violence and outrage. The life of man is to be held sacred, ennobled and uplifted. So too the heart of man and his mind. This religion of man stands resolutely against war, capital punishment, the taking of human life, cruelty of all kinds whether committed by individual, the State or society, not only physical cruelty, but moral cruelty and degradation of human beings under whatever specious plea. It has already accomplished rapidly many things which orthodox religion failed to do effectively. During the last two centuries it has been active, it has to some degree humanised society, humanised law and punishment; humanised the outlook of man on man, abolished legalised torture and the cruder forms of slavery, raised the depressed and the fallen, stimulated philanthropy and charity, encouraged everywhere the desire for freedom, put a curb on oppression and minimised its more brutal expressions.

And yet, Sri Aurobindo points out, this religion of humanity or humanism has failed exactly where the orthodox religions also failed—in prevailing over its principal enemy.

"That enemy, the enemy of all religion, is human egoism, the egoism of the individual, the egoism of class or nation. These it could for a time soften, modify... but not to give place to the love of mankind, not to recognise a real unity between man and man. For that essentially must be the aim of the religion of humanity, as it must be the earthly aim of all human religion, love, mutual recognition of human brotherhood, a living sense of human oneness and practice of human oneness in thought, feeling and life... Till that is brought about, the religion of humanity remains unaccomplished. With that done, the one necessary psychological change will have been effected without which no

formal and mechanical, no political and administrative unity can be real or effective."

The Ideal of Human Unity p.545

Sri Aurobindo points out that humanism which is purely intellectual or sentimental in its nature will not be able to bring about so great a change in our psychology because it does not get at the center of man's being.

"The intellect and the feelings are only instruments of the being and they may be the instruments of either its lower external form of the inner and higher man, servants of the ego or channels of the soul."

Modern humanism was formulated in the eighteenth century and its aim was to re-create human society in the image of three kindred ideas, liberty, equality and fraternity. None of these has really been won in spite of all the progress that has been achieved. Whatever equality has been won generally turns out to be unequal equality, and the liberty that has been won turns out to be mechanical liberty. Fraternity has not been even recognised as practicable principle because it is a thing of the soul and modern humanism is unwilling even to recognize that soul exists. As a result it has tried to bring about changes in political and social institutions without attempting to alter man's inner nature or inner way of living. Sri Aurobindo observes:

"Freedom, equality, brotherhood are three godheads of the soul; they cannot be really achieved through the external machinery of society or by man so long as he lives only in the individual and communal ego. When the ego claims liberty, it arrives at competitive individualism. When it asserts equality, it arrives first at strife, then at an attempt to ignore the variations of Nature, and, as the sole way of doing that successfully, it constructs an artificial and machine-made society. A society that pursues liberty as its ideal is unable to achieve equality; a society that aims at equality will be obliged to sacrifice liberty. For the ego to speak of fraternity is for it to speak of something contrary to its nature... Yet brotherhood is the real key to the triple gospel of the idea of humanity. The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else.

But brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else."

Freedom, liberty and brotherhood can only be founded on the recognition of the same soul, same godhead in all, and unless man is awakened to his soul and made to live from his soul and not from the ego can the dream of human unity ever be realised. This is the inner meaning of

religion, of the traditional religions as well as what we have called the religion of man, or humanism. How can man be made to live from his soul?—that is the real problem.

Arthur Koestler pointedly draws our attention to this vexed problem in his book *Janus*. He observes that roughly two and a half millennia ago, in the 6th century B. C., the Greeks embarked on the scientific adventure which eventually carried man to the moon; that is indeed a very impressive rate of growth. Sixth century B. C. also saw the rise of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism—the twentieth century of Hitlerism, Stalinism and Maoism, there seems to be not progress but regression in the moral quality of man. Human progress seems to be purely an intellectual affair, on the moral side the developments seem to be negligible if not negative during the last twenty-five hundred years. To quote Koestler:

“We have moved very quickly from stone axes to airplanes and atomic bombs, from primitive mythology to quantum theory. There does not seem to be any corresponding development on the instinctive side of man. As a result the moral exhortation through the centuries of founders of religions and other great leaders have proved disconcertingly ineffective.”

Now let us look briefly at how Sri Aurobindo has explained this problem and its solution in *The Human Cycle*. Man seems to have a double nature; his vital and physical being seems to be of an unrefined animal nature and lives according to its instincts, impulses, desires, while his intellectual, aesthetic and ethical being seems to be almost half-divine in nature. He has not yet been able to do more than impose some yoke of the ethical and intellectual being on his vital and physical parts and this only in a small number of people. Man has not been able to shift upward the implicit will central to his life, the motive and force that is central to his life. This is the root of the whole failure. His central will of action is still situated in his vital and physical being with its drift toward vital and physical enjoyment. This will is only partially enlightened but it is not transformed. It is checked to some extent from running absolutely wild but not sufficiently uplifted. Man's higher life is still somewhat of a superimposition on the lower; it is as yet an intruder generally resented. It can interfere from time to time with normal life, scold it, lecture to it, encourage it, but it has no power to transform or recreate the lower in its own image of the true, the good and the beautiful.

These two elements live together in man in a continual, a mutual perplexity, uncomfortable with each other somewhat like an ill-assorted wife and husband, always at odds and yet half in love or at least necessary to each other, unable to work out a harmony, yet condemned to be joined in an unhappy leash until death separates them. All the disillusionment, weariness, pessimism of the human mind comes from man's failure to solve this riddle and difficulty of the double nature of man.

It is obvious that the human mind or his mental consciousness does not have the resources needed to solve the riddle of man's double nature. Over the centuries man has tried every possible means—religion, ethics, education, the plenty and comfort that science and technology have brought, social and political reforms and revolutions. Nothing seems to have worked. As Sri Aurobindo puts it in *Savitri*:

The Avatars have lived and died in vain,
Vain was the sage's thought, the prophet's voice:
In vain is seen the shining upward Way,
Earth lies unchanged beneath the circling sun;
She loves her fall and no omnipotence
Her mortal imperfections can erase.

Savitri :610-11

What then is the solution? According to Sri Aurobindo, the solution is to transfer our center of living to a higher consciousness. In other words, the central driving power of life which now comes from our lower being must be transferred to our higher being. This is not an easy thing to achieve because it would require a leap or an ascent of consciousness in man more momentous than that which nature must have made at one time when it rose from the vital mind of the animal to the thinking mind still imperfectly manifested in man. This is the only way of liberating man from the entrenched, ancestral animality of his lower nature. No ethical pottering or patchwork, no idealistic and sentimental moral rearmament, or any such surface tinkering with the nature of man can bring out this fundamental change in human nature. Traditional religions at their best can help some people to liberate themselves out of life into some kind of transcendental peace or bliss; it is in vain to expect them to change the world from its present state of darkness, ignorance and strife. As we have repeatedly found in this country and elsewhere, it does not take much effort to arouse the animal in man and to arouse his lusts, fears, greed and savage instincts.

This insistence on a radical change of human nature and on the ascent to the supramental level of consciousness may look like asking of man an endeavor too high and difficult and at present, for man as he is, even impossible. At best it might look like putting off all the hope of humanity to a distant evolutionary future. Nature in its normal course takes millions of years to ascend from one level of consciousness to the next higher level; has been the story of evolution in nature as Life evolved out of Matter and Mind evolved out of Life. But Sri Aurobindo believes that with the arrival of man on the scene nature has available to it a medium who is capable of understanding its purpose and co-operating with it. With the willing co-operation of man in this adventure of consciousness nature may be able to make the transition comparatively quickly, but it may still take a few centuries if not millennia, and what is more important, it will require some people at least who are willing to be laboratories dedicated to this change in human consciousness. The animal was a living laboratory in which Nature worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose co-operation Nature wills to work out the new Man. (*The Life Divine*, pp. 3-4) This is indeed a very difficult challenge which man is facing today.

Howsoever difficult and distant the prospect of this change may look, Sri Aurobindo tells us, it would still remain the sole possibility because to hope for a true change of human life without a change in human nature is an irrational proposition: it is to ask for something unnatural, an impossible miracle. After all, what is demanded by this change is not something distant, alien to our existence and radically impossible. For what has to be developed is the Spirit or the Self in us which is already there in our being, and evolutionary Nature is pressing for an awakening to the knowledge of the Self. The whole of evolution has been a preparation for this awakening of man and each crisis of human destiny cries out for its recognition.

“Therefore the individuals who will help most the future of humanity in the new age will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being. Even as the animal has been largely converted into a mentalised and at the top a highly mentalised humanity, so too now or in the future an evolution or conversion—it does not greatly matter which figure we use or what theory we adopt to support it—of the present type of

humanity into a spiritualised humanity is the need of the race and surely the intention of Nature.”

The Human Cycle p.250

Man has laboured for several millennia with little success to build a perfect life for himself here on earth, and he has tried every thing, swords and guns and bombs, gospels, scriptures and sacred books, philanthropy and moral rearmament, revolutions and reformations, education and social engineering, machines and robots, neutrons and protons, and yet as the Mundaka Upanishad said long ago, we "go round and round, battered and stumbling, like blind men led by one who is blind." Sri Aurobindo is asking us, why not tend and cultivate your consciousness and turn it over? That is where the seed of a new consciousness will sprout and from that will come human unity and a perfect life for man on earth.

I shall conclude this talk with the following lines from *Savitri*, which beckon to this great adventure:

O Force-compelled, Fate-driven earth-born race,
O petty adventurers in an infinite world
And prisoners of a dwarf humanity,
How long will you tread the circling tracks of mind
Around your little self and petty things?
But not for a changeless littleness were you meant,
Not for vain repetition were you built;
Out of the Immortal's substance you were made
Your actions can be swift revealing steps,
Your life a changeful mould for growing gods.
Almighty powers are shut in Nature's cells,
A greater destiny awaits you in your front:
This transient earthly being if he wills
Can fit his acts to a transcendent scheme.

.....
The earth you tread is a border screened from heaven,
The life that you lead conceals the light you are:
.....

Only a little lifted is Mind's screen.
The Wise who know see but one half of Truth,
The strong climb hardly to a low-peaked height,
The hearts that yearn are given one hour to love,
His tale half-told, falters the secret Bard;
The gods are still too few in mortal forms.

Savitri pp. 370-72

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The Education of the Vital

The Mother

Of all education, the education of the vital is perhaps the most important and the most indispensable. Yet it is rarely taken up and followed with understanding and method. There are several reasons for this: first, human thinking is in a great confusion over what concerns this particular subject; secondly, the enterprise is very difficult and to be successful in it one must have endurance, endless persistence and an inflexible will.

Indeed, the vital in man's nature is a despotic and exacting tyrant. Moreover, since it holds within itself power, energy, enthusiasm, effective dynamism, many have a feeling of timorous respect for it and try always to please it. But it is a master that is satisfied by nothing and its demands have no limit. Two ideas, very widespread, specially in the West, contribute towards making its domination ever more masterful. One is that the goal of life is to be happy, the other that you are born with a certain character and it is impossible to change it.

The first idea is a childish deformation of a very profound truth: it is that all existence is based upon the delight of being and without the delight of being there would be no life. But this delight of being, which is a quality of the Divine and therefore unconditioned, must not be confused with the pursuit of pleasure in life, for that depends largely upon circumstances. The conviction that makes one believe that one has the right to be happy leads, as a matter of course, towards the will to live one's life at any cost. This attitude in its obscure and aggressive egoism brings about every conflict and misery, deception and discouragement, ending often in a catastrophe.

In the world, as it actually is, the goal of life is not to secure personal happiness, but to awaken the individual progressively towards the Truth-consciousness.

The second idea arises from the fact that a fundamental change in character needs an almost complete mastery over the subconscious and a very rigorous disciplining of whatever comes up from the unconscious, which, in ordinary natures, is an expression of the consequences of atavism and of the environment in which one is born. Only an almost abnormal growth of consciousness and the constant help of Grace can achieve this Herculean task. Besides, this task has rarely been attempted; many

famous teachers have declared it unrealisable and chimerical. Yet it is not unrealisable. The transformation of character has been realised in fact by means of a clear-sighted discipline and perseverance so obstinate that nothing, not even the most persistent failures, can discourage it.

The indispensable starting-point is a detailed and discerning observation of the character to be transformed. In most cases, that itself is a difficult and often baffling task. But there is one fact which the old traditions knew and which can serve as the clew in the labyrinth of inner discovery. It is that everyone possesses in a large measure, and the exceptional individual in an increasing degree of precision, two opposite tendencies in the character, almost in equal proportions, which are like the light and the shadow of the same thing. Thus a man who has the capacity of being exceptionally generous suddenly finds rushing up in his nature an obstinate avarice; the courageous is somewhere a coward and the good suddenly have wicked impulses. Life seems to endow everyone, along with the possibility of expressing an ideal, with contrary elements representing in a concrete manner the battle he has to wage and victory he has to win so that the realisation may be possible. In this way, all life is an education carried on more or less consciously, more or less deliberately. In certain cases this education helps the movements expressing the light, in others the opposite movements i.e., those that express the shadow. If the circumstances and the environment are favourable, the light will grow at the expense of the shadow; otherwise the contrary will happen. Hence the individual's character will crystallise according to the caprice of nature and the determinism of a material and vital life, unless there is a luminous intervention of a higher element, a conscious will which will not let nature follow its whimsical procedure but replace it by a logical and clear-seeing discipline. This conscious will is what we mean by the rational method of education.

That is why it is of prime importance that the education of the child's vital should begin as early as possible, indeed, as soon as he is able to use his senses. In that way, many bad habits will be avoided and harmful influences eliminated.

The education of the vital has two principal aspects,

very different as to the goal and the process, but both are equally important. The first is to develop and utilise the sense organs, the second is to become conscious and gradually master of one's character and in the end to achieve its transformation.

The education of the senses, again, has several aspects, adding to each other as the being grows: indeed this education should not stop at all. The sense organs may be so cultivated as to attain a precision and power in their functioning far greater than what is normally expected of them.

Some ancient mystic knowledge declared that the number of senses that man can develop is not five but seven and in certain special cases even twelve. Certain races at certain epochs have, through necessity, developed more or less perfectly one or the other of these supplementary senses. With a proper discipline persistently gone through, they are within the reach of all who are sincerely interested in their culture and its results. Among the many faculties that are often spoken of, there is, for example, this one: to widen the physical consciousness, project it out of oneself so as to concentrate on a definite point and thus get the sight, hearing, smell, taste and even the touch at a distance.

To this general education of the senses and their action there will be added, as early as possible, the cultivation of discrimination and the aesthetic sense, the capacity to choose and take up what is beautiful and harmonious, simple, healthy and pure. For, there is a psychological health even as there is a physical health; there is a beauty and harmony of the sensations even as there is a beauty of the body and its movements. As the capacity of understanding grows in the child he should be taught, in the course of his education, to add artistic taste and refinement to power and precision. He must be shown, made to appreciate, taught to love beautiful, lofty, healthy and noble things, whether in nature or in human creation. It must be a true aesthetic culture and it will save him from degrading influences. For in the wake of the last wars and the terrible nervous tension which they provoked, as a sign, perhaps, of the decline of civilisation and decomposition of society, has come a growing vulgarity which seems to have taken possession of human life, individual as well as collective, particularly on the level of aesthetic life and the life of the senses. A methodical and enlightened cultivation of the senses can, little by little, remove from the child whatever is vulgar, commonplace and crude in him through contagion: this education will have happy reactions even on his character. For one who has developed a truly refined taste, will feel, because of this very refinement, incapable of acting in crude,

brutal or vulgar manner. This refinement, if it is sincere, will bring to the being a nobility and generosity which will spontaneously find expression in his behaviour and will keep him away from many base and perverse movements.

And this brings us naturally to the second aspect of vital education, i.e., that which concerns character and its transformation.

Generally, systems of discipline dealing with the vital, its purification and its mastery proceed by coercion, suppression, abstinence and asceticism. The procedure is certainly easier and quicker although, in a deeper way, less enduring and effective than that of strict and detailed education. Besides, it eliminates all possibility of the intervention, help and collaboration of the vital. However, this help is of the utmost importance if one wishes to have an all-round growth of the individual and his activity.

To become conscious of the many movements in oneself and take note of what one does and why one does it, is the indispensable starting-point. The child must be taught to observe himself, to note his reactions and impulses and their causes, to become a clear-sighted witness of his desires, his movements of violence and passion, his instincts of possession and appropriation and domination and the background of vanity against which they stand with their counterparts of weakness, discouragement, depression and despair.

Evidently, the process would be useful only when along with the growth of the power of observation there grows also the will towards progress and perfection. This will is to be instilled into the child as soon as he is capable of having one, that is to say, at a much younger age than is usually believed.

There are different methods according to different cases for awakening this will to surmount and conquer: on certain individuals it is rational arguments that are effective, for others sentiment and goodwill are to be brought into play, in others again it is the sense of dignity and self-respect; for all, however, it is the example shown constantly and sincerely that is the most powerful means.

Once the resolution is firmly established, there is nothing more to do than to proceed with strictness and persistence, never to accept defeat as final. If you are to avoid all weakening and withdrawing, there is one important point you must know and never forget: the will can be cultivated and developed even like the muscles by methodical and progressive exercise. You

must not shrink from demanding of your will the maximum effort even for a thing that appears to be of no importance; for it is by effort that capacity grows, acquiring little by little the power to apply itself even to the most difficult things. What you have decided to do, you must do, come what may, even if you have to begin your attempt over and over again any number of times. Your will will be strengthened by the effort, and in the end you will have nothing more to do than to choose with a clear vision the goal to which you will apply it.

To sum up: one must gain a full knowledge of one's

character and then acquire control over one's movements so that one may achieve perfect mastery and transformation of all the elements that have to be transformed.

Now, all will depend upon the ideal which the effort for mastery and transformation seeks to achieve. The value of the effort and its result will depend upon the value of the ideal. This is the subject we shall deal with next, in connection with mental education.

'Bulletin of Physical Education'

To transform the vital one must have will, perseverance, sincerity, etc. But in what part of the being are all these things found?

The source of sincerity, of will, of perseverance is in the psychic being, but this translates itself differently in different people. Generally it is in the higher part of the mind that this begins to take shape, but for it to be effective at least one part of the vital must respond, because the intensity of your will comes from there, the realising power of the will comes from its contact with the vital. If there were only refractory elements in the vital, you would not be able to do anything at all. But there is always something, somewhere, which is willing—it is perhaps something insignificant, but there is always something which is willing. It is enough to have had once one minute of aspiration and a will even if it be very fugitive, to become conscious of the Divine, to realise the Divine, for it to flash like lightning through the whole being—there are even cells of the body which respond. This is not visible all at once, but there is a response everywhere. And it is by slowly, carefully, putting together all these parts which have responded, though it be but once, that one can build up something which will be coherent and organised, and which will permit one's action to continue with will, sincerity and perseverance.

Even a fleeting idea in a child, at a certain moment in its childhood when the psychic being is most in front, if it succeeds in penetrating through the outer consciousness and giving the child just an impression of something beautiful which must be realised, it creates a little nucleus and upon this you build your action. There is a vast mass of humanity to whom one would never say, "You must realise the Divine" or "Do yoga to find the Divine." If you observe well you will see that it is a tiny minority to whom this can be said. It means that this minority of beings is "prepared" to do yoga, it is that. It is that there has been a beginning of realisation—a beginning is enough. With others it is perhaps an old thing, an awakening which may come from past lives. But we are speaking of those who are less ready; they are those who have had at a certain moment a flash which has passed through their whole being and created a response, but that suffices. This does not happen to many people. Those ready to do yoga are not many if you compare them with the unconscious human mass. But one thing is certain, the fact that you are all here proves that at the least you have had that—there are those who are very far on the path (sometimes they have no idea about it), but at the least all of you had that, that kind of spontaneous integral contact which is like an electric shock, a lightning-flash which goes through you and wakes you up to something: there is something to be realised. It is possible that the experience is not translated into words, only into a flame. That is enough. And it is around this nucleus that one organises oneself, slowly, slowly, progressively. And once it is there it never disappears. It is only if you have made a pact with the adverse forces and make a considerable effort to break the contact and not notice its existence, that you may believe it has disappeared. And yet a single flash suffices for it to come back.

If you have had this just once, you may tell yourself that in this life or another you are sure to realise.

*The Mother
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