

# RITĀGNI

a flame of aspiration for dynamic truth

TRUTH

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## Religion or Spirituality?

There is often a confusion between these two terms—religion and spirituality. But the two must not be confused. A religious teaching belongs to the past and is an obstacle to progress whereas spiritual teaching is the teaching of the future. The aim of a spiritual teaching is to enlighten the consciousness and prepare it for the future realisation. It is above religions and strives towards a total truth trying to bring us in direct contact with the Divine.

There is a fond hope in some people that their own religion will become the universal religion of tomorrow, that a particular religion contains all the truths. But each religion contains a partial truth and has been turned into a dogma or a set of rituals. Another view is to place the human being as central and not acknowledging the Divine behind all existence. But—

“A religion of humanity means the growing realisation 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 the human race and the human being 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. By its growth within us oneness with our fellow men will become the leading principle of all our life, not merely a principle of co-operation but a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity and equality and a common life. There must be the realisation by the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. There must be the realisation by the race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded. There must be too a discipline and a way of salvation in accordance with this religion, that is to say, a means by which it can be developed by each man within himself, so that it may be developed in the life of the race. . . . A spiritual oneness which would create a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel a oneness of life not bound up with its mechanical means of unification, but ready always to enrich its secure unity by a freer variation and a freely varied outer self-expression, this would be the basis for a higher type of human existence.

“Could such a realisation develop rapidly in mankind, we might then solve the problem of unification in a deeper and truer way from the inner truth to the outer forms”.

- Sri Aurobindo, *'The Ideal of Human Unity'*  
Pp. 554 - 555

But what would the aim of a spiritual society be? It would reveal to humanity the divinity within and would attempt to build up an outer life which would be an expression of this spirit within.

“The spiritual aim . . . will not proceed by a scornful neglect of the body, nor by an ascetic starving of the vital being and an utmost bareness or even squalor as the rule of spiritual living, nor by a puritanical denial of art and beauty and the aesthetic joy of life, nor by a neglect of science and philosophy as poor, negligible or misleading intellectual pursuits,—though the temporary utility even of these exaggerations as against the opposite excesses need not be denied; it will be all things to all, but in all it will be at once their highest aim and meaning and the most all-embracing expression of themselves in which all they are and seek for will be fulfilled.”

- Sri Aurobindo, *'The Human Cycle'*  
Pp. 216-217

*Editor*

# Prayer

## *The Mother*

Why all this noise, all this movement, this vain and futile agitation; why this whirlwind carrying men away like a swarm of flies caught in a storm? How sad is the sight of all that wasted energy, all those useless efforts! When will they stop dancing like puppets on a string, pulled they know not by whom or what? When will they find time to sit quietly and go within, to recollect themselves and open that inner door which screens from them Thy priceless treasure, Thy infinite boons? ...

How sorrowful and miserable seems to me their life of ignorance and obscurity, their life of mad agitation and unprofitable dispersion!—when one single spark of Thy sublime light, one single drop of Thy divine love, can transform this suffering into an ocean of delight!

O Lord, my prayer soars towards Thee: May they know at last Thy peace and that calm and irresistible strength which comes of an immutable serenity—the privilege of those whose eyes have been opened and who are able to contemplate Thee in the flaming core of their being.

But the hour of Thy manifestation is come.

And soon hymns of gladness will burst forth on every side.

Before the solemnity of this hour I bow down in devotion.

*Prayers and Meditations*  
*29 November, 1913*

# The Conservative Mind and Eastern Progress

*Sri Aurobindo*

The arrival of a new radical idea in the minds of men is the sign of a great coming change in human life and society; it may be combated, the reaction of the old idea may triumph for a time, but the struggle never leaves either the thoughts and sentiments or the habits and institutions of the society as they were when it commenced. Whether it knows it or not, it has gone forward and the change is irretrievable. Either new forms replace the old institutions or the old while preserving the aspect of continuity have profoundly changed within, or else these have secured for themselves a period of greater rigidity, increasing corruption, progressive deterioration of spirit and waning of real force which only assures them in the future a more complete catastrophe and absolute disappearance. The past can arrive at the most at a partial survival or an euthanasia, provided it knows how to compromise liberally with the future.

The conservative mind is unwilling to recognise this law though it is observable throughout human history and we can easily cull examples with full hands from all ages and all climes; and it is protected in its refusal to see by the comparative rarity of rapid revolutions and great cataclysmal changes; it is blinded by the disguise which Nature so often throws over her processes of mutation. If we look casually at European history in this light the attention is only seized by a few conspicuous landmarks, the evolution and end of Athenian democracy, the transition from the Roman republic to the empire, the emergence of feudal Europe out of the ruins of Rome, the Christianisation of Europe, the Reformation and Renaissance together preparing a new society, the French Revolution, the present rapid movement towards a socialistic State and the replacing of competition by organised co-operation. Because our view of European history is chiefly political, we do not see the constant mutation of society and of thought in the same relief; but we can recognise two great cycles of change, one of the ancient races leading

from the primitive ages to the cultured society of the Graeco-Roman world, the other from the semi-barbarism of feudal Christendom to the intellectual, materialistic and civilised society of modern times.

In the East, on the contrary, the great revolutions have been spiritual and cultural; the political and social changes, although they have been real and striking, if less profound than in Europe, fall into the shade and are apt to be overlooked; besides, this unobtrusiveness is increased by their want of relief, the slow subtlety of their process and instinctive persistence and reverence with which old names and formulas have been preserved while the thing itself was profoundly modified until its original sense remained only as a pious fiction. Thus Japan kept its sacrosanct Mikado as a cover for the change to an aristocratic and feudal government and has again brought him forward in modern times to cover and facilitate without too serious a shock the transition from a mediaeval form of society into the full flood of modernism. In India the continued fiction of the ancient fourfold order of society based on spiritual idealism, social type, ethical discipline and economic function is still used to cover and justify the quite different, complex and chaotic order of caste which, while it still preserves some confused fragments of the old motives, is really founded upon birth, privilege, local custom and religious formalism. The evolution from one type of society to another so opposed to it in its psychological motives and real institutions without any apparent change of formula is one of the most curious phenomenon in the social history of mankind and still awaits intelligent study.

Our minds are apt to seize things in the rough and to appreciate only what stands out in bold external relief; we miss the law of Nature's subtleties and disguises. We can see and fathom to some extent the motives, necessities, process of great revolutions and marked changes and we can consider and put in their right place the brief reactions which only modified without actually preventing the overt realisation of new ideas. We can

see, for instance, that the Sullan restoration of Roman oligarchy, the Stuart restoration in England or the brief return of monarchy in France with the Bourbons were no real restorations, but a momentary damming of the tide attended with insufficient concessions and forced developments which determined, not a return to the past, but the form and pace of the inevitable revolution. It is more difficult but still possible to appreciate the working of an idea against all obstacles through many centuries; we can comprehend now, for instance, that we must seek the beginnings of the French Revolution, not in Rousseau or Mirabeau or the blundering of Louis XVI, but in movements which date back to the Capet and the Valois, while the precise fact which prepared its tremendous outbreak and victory and determined its form was the defeat of the Calvinistic reformation in France and the absolute triumph of the monarchical system over the nobility and the bourgeoisie in the reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV. That double victory determined the destruction of the monarchy in France, the downfall of the Church and, by the failure of the nobles to lead faithfully the liberal cause whether in religion or politics, the disappearance of aristocracy.

But Nature has still more subtle and disguised movements in her dealings with men by which she leads them to change without their knowing that they have changed. It is because she has employed chiefly this method in the vast masses of the East that the conservative habit of mind is so much stronger there than in the West. It is able to nourish the illusion that it has not changed, that it is immovably faithful to the ideas of remote forefathers, to their religion, their traditions, their institutions, their social ideals, that it has preserved either a divine or an animal immobility both in thought and in the routine of life and has been free from the human law of mutation by which man and his social organisations must either progress or degenerate but can in no case maintain themselves unchanged against the attack of Time. Buddhism has come and gone and the Hindu still professes to belong to the Vedic religion held and practiced by his Aryan forefathers; he calls his creed the Aryan Dharma, the eternal religion. It is only when we look close that we see the magnitude of the illusion. Buddha has gone out of India indeed, but Buddhism remains; it has stamped its giant impress on the spirit of the national religion, leaving the forms to be determined by the Tantricism with

which itself had made alliance and some sort of fusion in its middle growth; what it destroyed no man has been able to restore, what it left no man has been able to destroy. As a matter of fact, the double cycle which India has described from the early Vedic times to India of Buddha and the philosophers and again from Buddha to the time of the European irruption was in its own way as vast in change religious, social, cultural, even political and administrative as the double cycle of Europe; but because it preserved old names for new things, old formulas for new methods and old coverings for new institutions and because the change was always marked in the internal but quite and unobtrusive in the external, we have been able to create and preserve the fiction of the unchanging East. There has also been this result that while the European conservative has learned the law of change in human society, knows that he must move and quarrels with the progressist only over the right pace and the exact direction, the eastern or rather the Indian conservative still imagines that stability may be the true law of mortal being, practices a sort of yogic *āsana* on the flood of Time and because he does not move himself, thinks,—for he keeps his eyes shut and is not in the habit of watching the banks,—that he can prevent the stream also from moving on.

This conservative principle has its advantages even as rapid progress has its vices and its perils. It helps towards the preservation of a fundamental continuity which makes for the longevity of civilisations and the persistence of what was valuable in humanity's past. So, in India, if religion has changed immensely its form and temperament, the religious spirit has been really eternal, the principle of spiritual discipline is the same as in the earliest times, the fundamental spiritual truths have been preserved and even enriched in their contents and the very forms can all be traced back through their mutations to the seed of the Veda. On the other hand, this habit of mind leads to the accumulation of a great mass of accretions which were once valuable but have lost their virtue and to the heaping up of dead forms and shibboleths which no longer correspond to any vital truth nor have any understood and helpful significance. All this putrid waste of the past is held to be too sacred to be touched by any profane hand and yet it chokes up the streams of the national life or corrupt its waters.

And if no successful process of purification takes place, a state of general ill-health in the social body supervenes in which the principle of conservation becomes the cause of dissolution.

The present era of the world is a stage of immense transformations. Not one but many radical ideas are at work in the mind of humanity and agitate its life with a vehement seeking and effort at change; and although the centre of the agitation is in progressive Europe, yet the East is being rapidly drawn into this churning of the sea of thought and this breaking up of old ideas and old institutions. No nation or community can any longer remain psychologically cloistered and apart in the unity of the modern world. It may even be said that the future of humanity depends most upon the answer that will be given to the modern riddle of the Sphinx by the East and especially by India, the hoary guardian of the Asiatic idea and its profound spiritual secrets. For the most vital issue of the age is whether the future progress of humanity is to be governed by the modern economic and materialistic mind of the West or by a nobler pragmatism guided, uplifted and enlightened by spiritual culture and knowledge. The West never really succeeded in spiritualising itself and latterly it has been habituated almost exclusively to an action in the external governed by political and economic ideals and necessities; in spite of the reawakening of the religious mind and the growth of a widespread but not yet profound or luminous spiritual and psychical curiosity and seeking, it has to act solely in the things of this world and to solve its problems by mechanical methods and as the thinking political and economic animal, simply because it knows no other standpoint and is accustomed to no other method. On the other hand the East, though it has allowed its spirituality to slumber too much in dead forms, has always been open to profound awakenings and preserves its spiritual capacity intact, even when it is actually inert and uncreative. Therefore the hope of the world lies in the re-arousing in the East of the old spiritual practicality and large and profound vision and power of organisation under the insistent contact of the West and in the flooding out of the light of Asia on the Occident, no longer in forms that are now static, effete, unadaptive, but in new forms stirred, dynamic and effective.

India, the heart of the orient, has to change as the whole West and the whole East are changing, and it cannot avoid changing in the sense of the problems forced upon it by Europe. The new orient must

necessarily be the result either of some balance and fusion or of some ardent struggle between progressive and conservative ideals and tendencies. If, therefore, the conservative mind in this country opens itself sufficiently to the necessity of transformation, the resulting culture born of a resurgent India may well bring about a profound modification in the future civilisation of the world. But if it remains shut up in dead fictions, or tries to meet the new needs with the mind of the school-man and the sophist dealing with words and ideas in the air rather than actual fact and truth and potentiality, or struggles merely to avoid all but scanty minimum of change, then, since the new ideas cannot fail to realise themselves, the future India will be formed in the crude mould of the westernised social and political reformer whose mind, barren of original thought and enlightened by vital experience, can do nothing but reproduce the forms and ideas of Europe and will turn us all into halting apes of the West. Or else, and that perhaps is the best thing that can happen, a new spiritual awakening must arise from the depths of this vast life that shall this time more successfully include in its scope the great problems of earthly life as well as those of the soul and its transmundane destinies, an awakening that shall ally itself closely with the renascent spiritual seeking of the West and with its yearning for the perfection of the human race. This third and as yet unknown quantity is indeed the force needed throughout the East. For at present we have only two extremes of a conservative immobility and incompetence imprisoned in the shell of the past conventions and a progressive force hardly less blind and ineffectual because second-hand and merely imitative of nineteenth-century Europe, with a vague floating mass of uncertainty between. The result is a continual fiasco and inability to evolve anything large, powerful, sure and vital,—a drifting in the stream of circumstances, a constant grasping at details and unessentials and failure to reach the heart of the great problems of life which the age is bringing to our doors. Something is needed which tries to be born; but as yet, in the phrase of the Veda, the Mother holds herself compressed in smallness, keeps the Birth concealed within her being and will not give it forth to the Father. When she becomes great in impulse and conception, then we shall see it born.

*'The Supramental Manifestation and  
Other Writings'*

# Seminar on the Indian Constitution

*Dr. Karan Singh*

... Let me say at the outset, how impressed I am that Sri Aurobindo Research Foundation should have thought of organising a seminar of this nature. We have been talking a great deal about the constitution but, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first time that an attempt is being made, to study in some depth, the Aurobindonian insights, if not into the Constitution itself, then into the fundamental principles that lie behind the Constitution and also an attempt to see whether we cannot draw some more inspiration from Sri Aurobindo in the difficult task that lies ahead. It is most fitting that the Faculty of Social Work of the M. S. University is collaborating in this interesting and innovative project. I have visited this university, named after a very great man, Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad, on earlier occasions too. It was he, in fact, who was responsible for bringing Sri Aurobindo back from England when he was only 20 years old. He selected him and brought him to Baroda in 1893.

The Baroda period was a very critical and important period in Sri Aurobindo's development and growth because, between his 14 years in England and the actual political explosion in Bengal in 1905, these were the preparatory years when he immersed himself in Indian culture, in Indian languages because he had been entirely educated abroad. When he came back, he knew much more Greek and Latin than he did Sanskrit. His English was far better than his Bengali. Nonetheless, this is where he started immersing himself in the Indian cultural tradition, This is where he met the Maharashtrian yogi, Lele, and started the processes of Yoga. He met Swami Brahmananda; he came in touch with the Bengal and Maharashtra revolutionaries and he began the whole process of developing from Aurobindo Ghosh into Sri Aurobindo. In that process, Bengal played a very useful

role. He started a series of articles in a paper called the *Indu Prakash* in 1893, as soon as he came back. He was 21 years old and yet, if you read these articles, they are so mature and clear in their articulation of national goals, that one is astonished that a young man of 21, totally cut off from his own motherland, should have this tremendously powerful capacity for articulation.

The topic today is *Aspects of the Constitution of India—Some Aurobindonian Perspectives*. Curiously enough, Sri Aurobindo does not seem to have commented very much on the actual work of the Constituent Assembly, although the work took place in his lifetime. The Constituent Assembly started meeting, I think, in December 1946 in the Central Hall of the Parliament and, it was finally adopted, of course, on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950. So, in effect, 1947, '48 and '49 were the three years in which the Constitution was on the anvil. I believe there is talk that, Dada Surendra Mohan Ghosh, a senior Congress leader who was in close touch with Sri Aurobindo, had kept some diaries of specific conversations with Sri Aurobindo regarding the Constitution. However, those diaries have not yet been discovered and until we actually get that material, we will not know, in detail, what Sri Aurobindo had to say directly of the processes of Constitution-making. However, in the entire corpus of Sri Aurobindo's writings, there is a wealth of material regarding sociology, anthropology, the development of various social forms, political structures and organisations and the possible evolution of new forms. *The Foundations of Indian Culture, The Ideal of Human Unity, The Human Cycle, The Essays on the Gita*—each of these contain a lot of very valuable material.

Now, as you are well aware, Sri Aurobindo's



active life falls into two phases. The first is from 1893 to 1910. That was what might be called the political phase, when the political struggle in India, the division in the Congress, the radical policies that he put forward, were his main obsessions, his main focus of attention in his articles in the *Indu Prakash*. With the *Banga Bhanga*, the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon, there was this tremendously powerful upsurge of public opinion and he left Baroda and went to Calcutta. He shone like a meteor there against the dark colonial sky for 4 to 5 years and he wrote a great deal in the *Bande Mataram* and *Yugantar*. In these two journals he wrote these beautiful political editorials on various aspects of politics. So, that is one phase and, I suggest, his attitude towards democracy (the Constitution, of course, was nowhere in the picture at that time because this was way back in 1910) would have been slightly different in its emphasis than in the second phase, 1910-1915, Pondicherry, when he was more mature and when he came out with those great works in the *Arya*. That was the time when the Indian freedom movement developed gradually and when the Constituent Assembly finally came into being and, perhaps, we can find a different type of material in that phase. But, it seems to me that, in both these phases, it is possible to extract certain concepts to which Sri Aurobindo was committed.

I will try to share with you this morning, some views about Sri Aurobindo's basic approach, and not on all topics Kosha Shah has suggested. The first point I would like to make is that, as soon as he got to Calcutta, he realized the tremendous and crucial role of the proletariat and this was long before the Russian revolution. Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1907, ten years before the Russian Revolution, "The proletariat, as I have striven to show, is the real key of the situation. Torpid he is, and immobile; he is nothing of an actual force but, he is a very great potential force and whoever succeeds in understanding and eliciting his strength becomes, by the very fact, master of the future." So, the importance of involving

the proletariat, or the masses of the people, in the political process, was very clear to Sri Aurobindo. It would be wrong to interpret him as some kind of an elitist philosopher, sitting in an ivory tower and talking only of something coming down from above. He was fully aware of the importance of the people's participation because he had lived for 14 years in England. He had seen the parliamentary system working there. He had drawn his inspiration from two major sources—one was the *Seine Finn* movement in Ireland, led by Parnell and De Valera and the second was the *Risorgimento* in Italy, led by Mazzini, Garibaldi and Cavour. They had created nations and had both been fighting against colonial domination. So, he was fully aware and had faith in democracy and in the processes of democracy and with the necessity of involving the people. At least, in the earlier phase, I do not find any negative remarks with regard to democracy. That is why I am trying to make a distinction between Sri Aurobindo's thoughts in the first phase and his thoughts in the second phase. So, the role of the proletariat is extremely important.

Then, he writes, I am not quite sure what date it is, "Parliamentarianism, the invention of the English political genius, is a necessary stage in the evolution of democracy for, without the generalized faculty of considering and managing, with the least possible friction, large problems of politics, organisation, economics, legislation concerning considerable aggregates of men, cannot be easily developed. It is also deemed the one successful means, yet discovered, of preventing the state executive from suppressing the liberties of the individual and the nation." So, his commitment, I think, to democracy, was very clear. He not only accepted the importance of the proletariat but, he also accepted the role of democracy although, he did seem to feel that it was not an ideal system and, I think, 50 years after independence, all of us are absolutely certain that it is not an ideal system. On the contrary, it has shown some considerable weaknesses. The great idealism of the founding fathers of

our constitution has slipped away. And so, the Constitution, is certainly always a document of great importance but, you can have a very noble Constitution and a very ignoble set of politicians. Whereas, on the other hand, you can have no Constitution and you can have a land like King Janak's, who was the epitome of justice and of compassion and of understanding. So, I am not at all trying to denigrate the Constitution but, I am pointing out that the Constitution is simply a document, which certainly should reflect the deeper cravings of the nation but which, by itself, is not going to be able to ensure any other thing enshrined within it.

So, Sri Aurobindo's view with regard to democracy was that it was an essential condition. He had seen all the other systems working in Europe. He had seen monarchies, he had seen other republics and he was also, surely, fully aware of the American system, of the French system. British parliamentarianism was something he accepted but, not as a final solution. Later on, in his writings, increasingly he says that this is a transitory phase and this should be then ultimately improved. He looked at this as a passing phase and said, "Spirituality is India's only politics; the fulfillment of the *Sanatan Dharma* its only *Swaraj*. I have no doubt, we shall have to go through the parliamentary period in order to get rid of the notion of western democracy by seeing, in practice, how helpless it is to make nations blessed." This is post second phase, 1911, just after he left Calcutta. But, this is a very curious thing. First of all, he says that democracy is good but then he says that we are simply going through it so it can prove to us how useless it is. It is a very interesting formulation and maybe that is what it is doing. I do not know. It is something we can comment upon.

Now, there are other things that emerge from his writings from time to time. There is this whole question, for example, of reservations. There is reason to believe that Sri Aurobindo supported the policy of reservation for the so-called depressed class, which really then

became the Scheduled Tribes. In his Independence Day message, which I submit is a message of tremendous importance because, in a way, it is his last will and testament, he sums up all the dreams that he had seen and all that he was working for. In it, he specifically mentions, "the wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly makes it possible that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fission but, the old communal division between Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into a figure of a problem." The "wisely drastic policy", I presume, refers to the move to make reservation rather than have a separate *Harijanstan* or *Dalitstan* that Dr. Ambedkar, at one stage, was talking about.

Then, another insight, reading his papers, is that he was supportive of a federalist type of structure. He said, for example, that a union of states and regional parties and people would together form a united India. Our country, soon after independence, was called the Indian Union, meaning thereby a union of states, which has been dropped now. And so, clearly, Sri Aurobindo realized the pluralistic nature of the Indian social and political structure and, therefore, was not in favour of a highly centralized form of government. He, therefore, stressed the importance of giving all the regions and all the states full opportunities for growth.

Now, one major thing about Sri Aurobindo's thought, in some way or other, directly connected to the Constitution was that he was very much opposed to the Partition because he had this image of India as the Mother, as *Bhavani Bharati*. If you read his white-hot writings in the *Bande Mataram*, in the 1905-10 period, he writes beautifully about how the nation is the mother and how the freedom movement is the *yagna* in which you have to offer everything that you have and everything that you are. And, therefore, his main aim was to get rid of the foreigner, from their ruling of the 'Mother' but then he realized that, along with getting rid of the foreigner, there was going to be a partition.

Of all the people who fought the idea at that time, Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo, in particular, were dead set against partition. Ultimately, they were not able to, even Mahatma Gandhi was not able to, prevent it. Although, he did say, "India will be partitioned over my dead body", it was partitioned. Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter to Sir Stafford Cripps and made a statement saying, "This is the last chance to prevent the partition of India". He urged the Congress to accept Cripps' proposal. Of course, the Congress rejected that. Gandhiji and the Congress totally rejected it saying that it was some kind of an imperial plan. The result was, in five years there was partition, millions of people uprooted, lakhs of people butchered. One of the greatest disasters of modern history took place. Sri Aurobindo had envisaged that there was going to be bloodshed and disaster and, therefore, he said, "For God's sake, accept the Cripps' mission". But, it was not accepted. The Congress, at that time was on a high. It thought that it had all the people behind it and that it did not have to deal with the Muslim League, it did not have to deal with the Princes, it will do what it will do and, ultimately, it got independence and it certainly got power but, look at the price! The price that we had to pay and the price that we are still paying! And so, he writes in his message, that he had five dreams and his first dream was a free and resurgent India. He said, "Today India is free but, she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom." And, then he says, "The communal division into Hindus and Muslims has hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that the Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as forever settled but, as anything not more than a temporary expedient. For, if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled. Civil strife may be possible, even a new invasion and foreign conquest. The partition of the country must go. It is to be hoped by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the needs of peace and concord, a constant necessity of

common concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic, but not a fundamental, importance. But, by whatever means, the division will, and must, go, for without it, the destiny of India might be seriously impaired and even frustrated." Now, this is a very interesting point. The partition took place. He said that the partition must go. How will it go?

I wrote an article based on this very idea—I was thinking and discussing this with friends from time to time—"How is it possible for the partition to go?" There is not going to be a voluntary union. There is not going to be union by conquest. So, I put forward the suggestion of a sub-continental federation between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, in which, each country retains its full independence but, we move towards some kind of a confederation and, ultimately, move towards a European Union type of situation. That is the only way in which the problems of the sub-continent can be solved. Otherwise, what is happening is that, there is updated nuclear technology on both sides and, I have myself, in my own lifetime, seen three wars in my homestate and there is no assurance that we will not have another disastrous conflict at sometime in the future. Therefore, I think here of Sri Aurobindo's vision, that something must be done. Is it not possible, to have some kind of a loose confederation, so that we can derive benefit, economic benefit, from collaboration and coordination and so on? So this is a point which, I think, needs very serious consideration by all of those who are involved in the study of Sri Aurobindo and of India.

Then there are two or three more points, which I would like to place before you. After freedom, he talks of an Asian federation, and he says, because he was not only an Indian freedom fighter, he was a freedom fighter for all, "In Asia, a more perilous institution has arisen, standing sharply across the way to any possibility of continental unity of the peoples of this part of the world, in the emergence of

Communist China. This creates a gigantic block which could easily englobe the whole of northern Asia in a combination between two Communist powers, Russia and China, and would overshadow, with the threat of absorption, South West Asia and Tibet and, might be pushed to overrun upto the whole frontier of India, menacing her security and that of western Asia with the possibility of invasion." Of course, Russia is no longer there in that sense. Now, he had already seen this and the Chinese invasion, that took pace in 1962 is, in some way, a clear reflection of this. So, the importance of Asian countries, all of which had been under colonial rule, coming together in some kind of a broad grouping, is something that he had envisaged. But, it seems to me personally, what we have to start with is India, Pakistan and Bangladesh because that is the India that Sri Aurobindo talked about and about "a form of government, which would manifest the underlying truths of our being." Now, this is the real crux. With regard to certain specific problems, Sri Aurobindo had foreseen that while it would not be possible to avoid India adopting parliamentary form of democracy and even a socialist path, it would be a temporary phase and, that India would evolve an alternative to the present models of political government and economic development. The ideal that he has put forward is of the evolution of a form of government that would manifest the underlying truths of the different forms that have developed in history. It would be a rule of the people by their deepest souls and their hearts obeying inwardly the law of mutuality and harmony. Now, how are we going to get to this sort of state? In fact, at present, we seem to be going in the opposite direction. What is happening is that, far from moving into a new model of political governance, manifesting the underlying forms, we are losing even the overlying forms. The whole situation has been distorted. So, where are we going? Are we at all going towards Sri Aurobindo's dream? I do not think we are. If we were moving in a certain direction, you could say, it may take 50 years, it may take 100 years or it may take 200 years,

it is alright but, only if we are still going in the straight and right direction. If you are going in the wrong direction, then it may take a thousand years and you will never reach your goal. So, how long are we going to wait?

By the time the underlying truths come to the surface, we will all have gone. Then let us see, in some post-nuclear disaster age, whether some new creatures will emerge from the depths of the earth. So, what I am trying to say, we are not going in the direction that Sri Aurobindo had envisaged. That is very clear. Or the one that Swami Vivekananda had envisaged because, both of these people envisaged India's role in the regeneration of humanity and the human race. Vivekananda said, "India would be the *guru* of nations". I beg your pardon but, in today's India, I cannot see any signs of a 'guru'. Sri Aurobindo wrote, "India is rising, not when she has risen to trample upon the weak but, to shed the light of the eternal *Dharma* she has nurtured in her breast for the welfare of humanity." I do not understand how we will be able to do that when we are losing our own light.

India has a great role to play. She has the greatest continuing civilisation in the world. Our Vedas, our Upanishads, our philosophical approaches are unique in their capacity, in their pluralism, in their generosity, in their compassion, in their understanding. We have this tremendously rich cultural tradition. But, somehow or the other, we have got caught in some kind of a negative syndrome.

In the India International Centre, in Delhi, of which when I was President, we set up a group called the 'I. I. C. Group on the Constitution of India' and we presented a report in which we made certain concrete suggestions regarding amending the Constitution. Then there was talk that there was going to be a Commission. But now, unfortunately, the whole thing has become politicised and the moment anybody talks about amending the Constitution, they feel that this is a hidden 'Saffron' agenda. That means that you are stuck now. You cannot even do anything

because, if you want to do something now, it will become involved in party politics. This is very unfortunate. I think that, if we are to amend the Constitution, we should do it by consensus. It is not something, which can be done by one individual. There should be a team of very high level people of impeccable integrity, who should sit together and review the entire Constitution and then come up with some kind of a comprehensive proposal forthwith. I think that it should not be politicized either by the party in power or by the party in opposition. And, you never know, today the party in power may tomorrow become the party in opposition and the party in opposition will become the party in power. So, it is no use in putting everything into party terms. These are national problems. The regeneration, revival, reorganization, and restructuring of the Constitution is something which is a national problem, a national need. And, therefore, I think, we should go with that.

In the list, Fundamental Rights are mentioned and there is just one point that I would like to say—there are also, in the Constitution, Fundamental Duties. But, I do not think that even one person, out of millions, knows how many Constitutional duties are there. The point is that, there was an amendment, the 42nd Amendment, during the Emergency. It was entirely repealed by the Janata government except that chapter on Fundamental Duties. I was on the drafting committee of the Swaran Singh Committee that drafted the Fundamental Duties. What they are trying to do is say that, everybody asks for Fundamental Rights but is anybody prepared to fulfil their Fundamental Duties? We are all for Fundamental Rights. The citizen also has to make a major contribution and then derive benefit from the structure. We take all the benefits but, when it comes to our responsibilities, we do not fulfil them. Therefore, this is the idea, which I would also suggest, when you are studying the Constitution, not necessarily based on Sri Aurobindo's, there are certain ideals, which need to be developed.

What Kosha Shah is now rightly trying to do is, trying to see what sort of Constitution Sri

Aurobindo would have liked. Or, rather, how we can make the Constitution more amenable, more in line with what Sri Aurobindo thought. It is an interesting, academic and intellectual exercise. Whether you can actually do anything to change the Constitution is a very deep question. Our political structures are now, as it were, jammed, and those of us who are in the Parliament, are aware that even simple bills cannot be brought through the Parliament because of the fragmented nature of our polity, let alone Constitutional amendment. We want two-third majority in both houses plus a majority of state legislatures. That is a huge task and, *prima facie*, unless the Supramental directly intervenes, there seems to be no chance, whatsoever, of being able to amend the Constitution in the near future. However, I do not mean to discourage. I think that you are doing a very good work and if you can come out with some concrete recommendations on how you think the Constitution should be amended, in the light of Sri Aurobindo's thought and, if those can be discussed by your distinguished participants and further discussed and, ultimately, a document can be produced, maybe it can have some effect on the thinking of our leaders.

So, I will end on an upbeat note. I may have sounded a little negative but I am essentially an optimist. I basically feel that there is some power of regeneration within the Indian psyche. From Vedic times, whenever there has been any crisis, there has been this awakening. Right from the time of the Upanishads, of Mahavir, of Buddha, of Acharya Shankara, of South Indian acharyas there has been this awakening. The Bhakti saints, in their own languages, spoke of this. In the same way, in the Indian Renaissance, which started in Bengal, Raja Rammohan Roy, Debendranath Thakore, Keshav Chandra Sen, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the social reformists like Ranade, Bhandarkar in Maharashtra, Dayanand Saraswati in Punjab and, after that the *Trimurti* came—Sri Ramkrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri

Aurobindo—such great personalities have been born in our country who, through their spiritual strength, meditation and devotion have brought about a new awakening in this country. So, there is no need to despair. But, this strength will emerge from our own inner selves. We will ourselves have to rouse this inner strength. Then, and only then, can it manifest itself. It will have to be more than an intellectual awakening, a spiritual awakening. That is why I think that we should have courage although it is a very difficult path we are now going across and it is getting more and more difficult and dangerous. But, if we have faith in ourselves, if we have faith in our culture and if we have faith in great souls,

like Sri Aurobindo, we should be able to cross the dangerous path. And, I will end with that famous quote from the Katha Upanishad, which exhorts us to awake and arise, '*Utho, jago aur ek chhuri ki dhaar ke upar se chalo*'. (Arise, awake and walk on the edge of a sword.) That is the only path—the path shown by our ancient texts and sages. That is the only path to build a new society, a new man and a new world. As Swami Vivekananda said, "Arise, awake and stop not until the goal is reached."

'Aspects of the Constitution of India -  
Some Aurobindonian Perspectives',  
Baroda, November 1998

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*Spirituality is much wider than any particular religion, and in the larger ideas of it that are now coming on us even the greatest religion becomes no more than a broad sect or branch of the one universal religion; by which we shall understand in the future man's seeking for the eternal, the divine, the greater self, the source of unity and his attempt to arrive at some equation, some increasing approximation of the values of human life with the eternal and the divine values.*

*Nor do we mean the exclusion of anything whatsoever from our scope, of any of the great aims of human life, any of the great problems of our modern world, any form of human activity, any general or inherent impulse or characteristic means of the desire of the soul of man for development, expansion, increasing vigour and joy, light, power and perfection. Spirit without mind, spirit without body is not the type of man, therefore a human spirituality must not belittle the mind, life or body or hold them of small account; it will rather hold them of high account, of immense importance, precisely because they are the conditions and instruments of the life of the spirit in man. The ancient Indian culture attached quite as much value to the soundness, growth and strength of mind, life and body as the old Hellenic or the modern scientific thought, although for a different end and a greater motive. Therefore to everything that serves and belongs to the healthy fullness of these things, it gave free play, to the activity of the reason, to science and philosophy, to the satisfaction of the aesthetic being and to all the many arts great or small, to the health and strength of the body, to the physical and economical well-being, ease, opulence of the race,—there was never a national ideal of poverty in India as some would have us believe, nor was bareness or squalor the essential setting of her spirituality,—and to its general military, political and social strength and efficiency. Their aim was high, but firm and wide too was the base they sought to establish and great the care bestowed on these first instruments. Necessarily, the new India will seek the same end in new ways under the vivid impulse of fresh and large ideas and by an instrumentality suited to more complex conditions; but the scope of her effort and action and the suppleness and variety of her mind will not be less, but greater than of old. Spirituality is not necessarily exclusive; it can be and in its fullness must be all-inclusive.*

**Sri Aurobindo**  
'The Foundations of Indian Culture'

# Nationality and Spiritual Evolution

*Bel Atrides*

It is not uncommon for people who follow a discipline of spiritual improvement, once they reach certain states of communion with themselves and with the human collectivity, to begin to feel that all men are their brothers, that they belong to one single planetary race or nation, and that any earlier national identification was something primitive, lacking in substance and content, narrow-minded, and even dangerous in its play and its historical development. Such a position is not without justification. From the point of view of individual psychology, nationality is certainly a powerful determining factor of external character. It is a complex identification which has important consequences at all levels of the personality: in the physical being, in the sentimental, emotional and vital character, in language, and, above all, through the mental individuality, in the individual's religious, spiritual and ethical tendencies. But initially this is a pre-conscious, and therefore non-volitional, identification of the human being with the community to which he belongs by race, birth or adoption.

Any such 'natural' determinism of personality, anything which precedes or contradicts the conscious act of forming our own being by a fully conscious exertion of will, must be deeply troubling to one who believes in the unlimited possibility for self-improvement, and who feels that this necessarily requires us to make all the functions of our integral being conscious and voluntary, converting all the natural determinisms of our personality into free expressions and manifestations of our essential being or of our deepest identity. From all this comes the sense of primitiveness which in some states of consciousness or stages in the spiritual development may be associated with the fact of national identification. From all this too there often comes the sense of poverty of substance, for this thing that has not been accepted in a totally conscious and voluntary manner tends to be a confused and unclarified substrate on the threshold of our emotions or thoughts, which our heart or mind has not managed to organise and outline. This

poverty of content becomes evident to some when they compare the irrational sense of national identity with a more global sentiment, a planetary one of universal brotherhood; or when, trying to explain the essence of nationality, they find they can get no further than superficial characterological national definitions, set against the irresistible movement towards a homogeneous mix of human culture. The horizon of nationality may come to seem narrow to us when we realise that, overvaluing the features and achievements of our own nation, we have fallen into that ridiculous form of provincialism which consists of exalting minor native triumphs while undervaluing great foreign accomplishments; and dangerous too, when we experience the sad but recurrent truth that the average human consciousness all too often makes diversity and difference an excuse for conflict and confrontation.

To the ordinary western mind—which can only rarely and with difficulty believe that man is anything more than an outward personality cloaking a hidden, fluid confusion of subconscious and unconscious elements—national determinism is, on one hand, natural, and on the other, difficult if not impossible to overcome, except in the case of mixed communities which are consciously or unconsciously searching for a single human race. In effect, nationality is something like a seal stamped in molten wax, which will only disappear from the cooled and solidified wax if it is shattered or remelted.

But to a mentality which considers the outer personality as the most external facet of a more complex being, a being with other levels of existence and manifestation, a facet that is, in the final analysis, both a projection and an expression of an essential consciousness and an immortal soul, the determinism of nationality, like any other natural and external determining factor, is not necessarily unsurmountable. Moreover, to such a view, in the process of development of consciousness—whether this occurs by slow, natural evolution, or by the

concentrated evolution of an intense discipline of self-perfection—all phenomenal identifications are destined to be gradually overcome: abolished, transcended or transformed. In effect, the goal of this process of development—the full possession of the essential identity or soul of the human individual through the growth of consciousness and the conquest of all levels of being—cannot be attained without an increasingly radical liberation from all the temporary conditioning identifications which veil the one true identity, the Soul.

Does all this mean that a sense of nationality is necessarily incompatible with spiritual development? Does it mean that spiritual growth, on an individual level, is bound to erase all those shadings, subtleties and textures which make an individual a member of a particular culture? On a global level, will it finally dissolve all distinctive national characteristics and transform the world into a single monotonous and insipid homogenous community? Does it mean that there is no transcendent truth in nationality? This last question encapsulates the preceding ones; and once resolved it will provide answers to those fundamental questions about the apparent contradiction between spirituality and national identity. Let us reformulate the question in an equivalent and complementary way: is there a profound reality, which supports the external fact of nationality, of a plurality of nations?

If such an archetypal reality does exist, it must be a manifestation or an aspect—in terms of group, collective souls—of the multiplicity of the One. That multiplicity is the expression of a potentially infinite number of individualities, of the infinite aspects, potencies and faces of the One who is All. And in our phenomenal universe, the mystery of the multiplicity of the One seems to correspond to an essential, divine intention of richness and complexity in the cosmic manifestation. Seen in this light, nationality, national diversity and plurality appear in essence to be a characteristic way of expression of the One Divine Soul, for the richness and complexity of its earthly manifestation.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, to an individual who reached this archetypal level of reality, who combined in his own being and in his conscious self this essential truth of things, who manifested them in accordance with the formula imposed by the

earthly universe, the national element, far from dissolving in the excess of light of his new consciousness, would become an enrichment to the expression of his multiple individuality. What will disappear is any involuntary and preconscious identification, any subjugation to a too-rigid mould of external personality based on an unavoidable genetic and cultural inheritance. In exchange, there would be a full and conscious possession of those states of being which characterise the nation souls and create their diversities, and a multiform and complex, rich and powerful expression through all of them. Such a person, founded in the One and Multiple Truth, as well as being conscious of his eternity and transcendence, would be the Planet Individual, the History Individual, in whose gestures, words and looks the great accomplishments of all races would be perceptible, fused in a single, luminous, potent amalgam, yet perfectly individualised, all the races that Gaya, the Earth Mother, shelters in her heart and memory among the great treasures that Time, Providence and the efforts of man have sown in her.

Now the level of reality or the plane of consciousness on which the One and the Multiple coexist as mutually equivalent realities, where the One is in full possession of its Multiplicity and the Multiple is in full possession of its Unity, is what Sri Aurobindo calls Supermind, which he deems destined to become, in the course of evolution, the next and plenary earthly possession. The Supramental Being, evolutionary son of man—at once multiple and fragmented—spiritual son of the man who has attained realization and become united with the Supreme Consciousness, with the Essence of all things, would possess a nature at once one and multiple, corresponding to the mystery which Sri Aurobindo expresses in such beautiful terms:

“And what is the end of the whole matter? As if honey could taste itself and all its drops together and all its drops could taste each other and each the whole honeycomb as itself, so should the end be with God and the soul of man and the universe.”

So for the individual who is still in the process of growing up from his mere external physical consciousness into his archetypal, supramental and essential personality, it is not absurd to foresee different degrees or modes of national



determinism and manifestation. These would begin from a state of spontaneous and unconscious identification, at all levels of being, with one single nation; would advance through a progressive universalisation, in which a liberation of the different parts of the personality from fixed and one-dimensional identifications would become more and more evident; parallel to this universalisation would come about an increasing plasticity of the personality (or some aspects of it) and therefore a capacity for conscious and voluntary assimilations of diverse notes and shades of character and expression belonging to the diverse national souls. The final stage would be the supramental one, outlined above so far as

the limitation of our mind allows us to foresee it.

The factor of national peculiarity and diversity should not therefore be rejected as a part of the spiritual life. It can form part of the path of spiritual effort which considers evolution as a line of development leading ultimately to the manifestation of transcendental Truths in our material universe.

‘*In Search of the Soul of Spain*’  
CIRHU Papers

**Reference:**

1. In the words of the Mother: “In Sri Aurobindo’s teaching he reveals that all nations are essentially one and meant to express the Divine Unity upon earth through an organised and harmonious diversity.” (Collected Works of the Mother, 13:43)

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*The objective view of society has reigned throughout the historical period of humanity in the West; it has been sufficiently strong though not absolutely engrossing in the East. Rulers, people and thinkers alike have understood by their national existence a political status, the extent of their borders, their economic well-being and expansion, their laws, institutions and the working of these things. For this reason political and economic motives have everywhere predominated on the surface and history has been a record of their operations and influence. The one subjective and psychological force consciously admitted and with difficulty deniable has been that of the individual. This predominance is so great that most modern historians and some political thinkers have concluded that objective necessities are by law of Nature the only really determining forces, all else is result or superficial accidents of these forces. Scientific history has been conceived as if it must be a record and appreciation of the environmental motives of political action, of the play of economic forces and developments and the course of institutional evolution. The few who still valued the psychological element have kept their eyes fixed on individuals and are not far from conceiving of history as a mass of biographies. The truer and more comprehensive science of the future will see that these conditions only apply to the imperfectly self-conscious period of national development. Even then there was always a greater subjective force working behind individuals, policies, economic movements and the change of institutions; but it worked for the most part subconsciously, more as a subliminal self than as a conscious mind. It is when this subconscious power of the group-soul comes to the surface that nations begin to enter into possession of their subjective selves; they set about getting, however vaguely or imperfectly, at their souls.*

*Certainly, there is always a vague sense of this subjective existence at work even on the surface of the communal mentality. But so far as this vague sense becomes at all definite, it concerns itself mostly with details and unessentials, national idiosyncrasies, habits, prejudices, marked mental tendencies. It is, so to speak, an objective sense of subjectivity. As man has been accustomed to look on himself as a body and a life, the physical animal with a moral or immoral temperament, and the things of the mind have been regarded as a fine flower and attainment of the physical life rather than themselves anything essential or the sign of something essential, so and much more has the community regarded that small part of its subjective self of which it becomes aware. It clings indeed always to its idiosyncrasies, habits, prejudices, but in a blind objective fashion, insisting on their most external aspect and not at all going behind them to that for which they stand, that which they try blindly to express.*

Sri Aurobindo  
‘*The Human Cycle*’

# India the Secular State

## The Right Interpretation and the Wrong

*K. D. Sethna*

India has been declared a Secular State and the advanced elements in the country are proud of this declaration—but in a rather vague way. Nobody seems to know what are the exact implications of secularity and quite a number of people even doubt if, except in name, India is any more secular than Pakistan who has declared herself a Muslim State with the name of Allah an integral part of the constitution. The doubt is occasioned by the fact that most of our leaders and ministers openly encourage belief in a religious order of the world.

Even Nehru, socialist though his tendencies are, honoured with his presence the occasion of the return of sacred Buddhist relics to India from abroad. Not only that, but he actually made a most humble *namaskār* to the relics, joining his palms together and bowing his head over them—a gesture almost of worship. He also affirmed recently that true religion is very precious and that its absence in what is conventionally termed religious is to be regretted. As for Sardar Patel and Rajagopalachariar and most of the Congress notables, they make no secret in public of their reverence for the teachings of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita. All of them and Nehru himself never tire of pronouncing Gandhiji's ideals and principles to be true, and everybody knows that Gandhiji's entire attitude to life was dictated by a firm faith in God, especially God as incarnated in the traditional Hindu figure Rama. If those who stand as symbols of the Government are avowedly in favour not only of a religious world-view but also of the Hindu religion, how, it is asked, can India be considered a Secular State?

### *Secularity Has Many Meanings*

The question does not go to the root of the matter. Secularity has many meanings. In its extreme form it is defined as total indifference to and discouragement of religious concepts and practices. The Soviet State is the outstanding

example of anti-religious secularity. But there can be a less positive and more non-committal form. France and the U.S.A. are not pledged in their constitutions to any religion, but have no hostility towards religious beliefs and bodies; they regard religion as the individual's private business and let no religious partiality mould their political conduct. Great Britain, inasmuch as the King is entitled the Defender of the Faith, implies reference not only to God but also a particular brand of religion, and yet in actual working she is without any political bias prompted by the Established Protestant Church.

If by secularity we mean all omission of the idea of God, Great Britain is a theocratic State. If we mean lack of religious favouritism, then she is certainly secular. India is at present secular like France and the U.S.A. rather than like Great Britain. But she is very far indeed from being secular in the Soviet sense. And even as compared to France and the U.S.A., she is more secular in principle than practice, for, while there is a strong irreligious strain among the individuals who compose France and considerable amount of scepticism among the American people, the majority of Indians are free from the agnostic attitude no less than the atheistic. Rank atheism is rare in India; agnosticism is confined to only a part of the literate population which is itself a small part of the humanity surging within our sub-continent. This is not to deny that, with a great many of our literati, religion is just a hazy background and what governs their thought and behaviour is too-worldly utilitarianism and hedonism *à la* the modern West. But our finest minds are alive to the importance of the religious consciousness and the large multitude of Indians are believers. It would be more in conformity with our turn of mind as a nation if we had a constitution framed less according to the temper of the French or the American State than to that of the British.

In other words, if the name 'God' has a place in our constitution, we should be truer to the psychological condition of the country.

### *The Indian Secular Concept*

The first point to be settled is: can India avow belief in God, and yet be secular? The second point is: can that belief be Hindu-coloured without vitiating secularity? India called herself secular for only one purpose: she wanted to make it clear that Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Jews and Jains living within her borders would suffer no discrimination or penalty or suppression on account of their not being Hindus and not partaking in the Hindu conventions of worship. India wished to stress political liberty and communal equality irrespective of different religious conventions; that is why she chose the designation of 'secular'. She never had the intention of favouring atheism and agnosticism, or of hiding the fact that on the whole her fundamental beliefs are those which constitute the core and kernel of Hinduism as distinguished from its shell and superficialities. Sometimes the inner and outer Hinduisms are joined together; in that case, the leaders and ministers who symbolised the Government have to see, before they lend their personal support to religious occasions, that the inner is a living force and not stifled by rigid rule and uninspired ceremony. But there is nothing basically inconsistent in their reverence for religious values—even those which are closely connected with the Hindu religion as distinguished from any other. Read in its proper context, understood in its root motive, India's secular constitution does not run counter to a belief in God by the majority of the nation who are religious and whose voice is echoed in the Government. Nor does it run counter to the Government's being Hindu in essential religion, for if the majority of India follow the Hindu religion what else should we expect a representative Government to do?

In consideration of the fact that minorities subscribe to non-Hindu religions, the Hinduism of the Government must strip itself of all sectarianism, bigotry and orthodoxy and be the pure quintessence of the Hindu faith. The quintessence consists simply in the doctrine that there is an Infinite, Eternal, Perfect Being who is one yet capable of a

myriad forms of manifestation, a Being whose divinity lives like a secret fire in all things and creatures and can guide and enlighten the human to unite with the divine, a Being who down the ages manifests also in a special sovereign form of spirituality which is the Avatar, the direct divine Incarnation. The Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita are all here in a seed-significance to which, under one aspect or another and with this or that qualification, the living substance of all religions held in India today can be virtually reduced.

When it comes to making this seed-significance a dynamic for man's growth out of his ignorance and incapacity into a greater poise of consciousness, Hinduism cannot help being stressed more than the other religions, for it is universally acknowledged by all who have seriously looked into the matter to have the best psychological methods of God-realisation. The Government could not be criticised for any such stress if the minorities are ignorant of those methods they should be illuminated and if they refuse illumination they have nobody save themselves to blame for feeling slighted. To assure them of safety from sectarianism the Government can be said to have done their best so long as the constitution guarantees freedom from Hinduism's outer husk.

Let us avoid all confusion about the Indian secular concept. There can be envisaged in it neither a conflict between the secular and the religious nor the absence of religion by virtue of the absence of God's name nor the absence of Hinduism's inner meaning. The term 'secular' and the omission of God's name must be taken merely to be expedients to avoid bringing up philosophical subtleties and to give no chance to the minorities to fear political and communal oppression. When the present period of intercommunal unsettlement is over, we should not be afraid of having the word 'theocracy' hurled at us, provided we take care to be different from orthodox semi-obscurantist theocracies like Spain and Eire and Pakistan.

### *Secularity and the Presence of Ideals*

A final point to remember is that an India which sets up the ideals of liberty and equality is bound to answer why these ideals are selected. No answer short of

saying that they are the true principles of life will satisfy. And once we start speaking of 'truth' we are in the realm of what are termed 'values' and confront the enigma of the 'ought'. Why ought we to cherish liberty and equality? If we reply that they conduce to the welfare and happiness of a country, the question arises: why ought we to conduce to a country's welfare and happiness? The 'ought' is a riddle we can never read except by going beyond the world of passing fact. If there is no Law eternal behind the codes and statutes of men, a law which men strive to embody according to their best lights, then nothing fundamentally bars the right of cunning and selfish opportunism to have full play and the only commandment is—"Thou shalt not be found out." If honesty and other virtues are held to be the best policy in the long run, it is only because some eternal Law is on their side and the sense of it in human breasts works ultimately on their behalf. Our morals and ideals may not always image the divine depth of the eternal Law; but there can be nothing like morality and idealism without an effort or aspiration to image the depths that are divine of a Law that is eternal.

This is plain logic. And every State must either accept this logic or else forfeit all claims to attempting an ideal government worthy of allegiance. Not only the ideals of liberty and equality but all ideals whatever must imply a divine sanction when they are offered us as true. The sense of unconditional imperativeness and inherent validity, without which no 'ought' exists, leads ever to a theocracy of the universe. And if India or any State wishes to escape the charge of being a monstrous monument of cynical opportunism it must be overtly or covertly theocratic. A Secular State which is indifferent to religion and yet tries to be based on true ideals is a contradiction in terms!

### *Secularity in the Most Appropriate and Vital Sense*

If words like 'theocratic' and 'religious' smack of an outward credal formality, let us choose a word like 'spiritual' which has a freshness and wideness and inwardness of suggestion. But let us clearly perceive the right significance of secularity. Especially a country like India cannot keep indulging in a misinterpretation of it, for predominantly spiritual is the Indian genius. And until this character of the Indian genius is fully recognised—nay, felt in the heart and all along the blood—we shall never rise to the golden top of our bent and we shall waste the magnificent possibilities that seers like Sri Aurobindo bring us today of initiating a new world-order inspired and illumined by the divinity hidden within man.

Mention of Sri Aurobindo lays here a further shade of the right significance we should attach to secularity. One meaning of 'secular' is: 'concerned with the affairs of this world'; it is opposed to 'other worldly'. Spirituality in India has had two orientations: an earth-renouncing orientation and an earth-embracing one. The Aurobindonian spirituality is averse to all escapism, however sublime, and is emphatic about the need of transmitting and fulfilling earth's life with the light of the Eternal, the Infinite, the Perfect. It can therefore be described as secular spirituality, and it is the dynamic modern *Zeitgeist*, the active temper of our time in the finest and deepest form. As such, it illustrates the most appropriate and vital sense in which India can be faithful to her spiritual genius without either failing to be abreast of modernism or ceasing to be a Secular State.

*India and the World Scene*

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*We should be as faithful, as free in our dealings with the Indian spirit and modern influences; correct what went wrong with us; apply our spirituality on broader and freer lines, be if possible not less but more spiritual than were our forefathers; admit Western science, reason, progressiveness, the essential modern ideas, but on the basis of our own way of life and assimilated to our spiritual aim and ideal; open ourselves to the throb of life, the pragmatic activity, the great modern endeavour, but not therefore abandon our fundamental view of God and man and Nature. There is no real quarrel between them; for rather these two things need each other to fill themselves in, to discover all their own implications, to awaken to their own richest and completest significances.*

*Sri Aurobindo  
The Foundations of Indian Culture*

# Miracles—Derterminism—Supreme Will

*The Mother*

*“The outer being is like a crust. In ordinary people the crust is so hard and thick that they are not conscious of the Divine within them. If once, even for a moment only, the inner being has said, ‘I am here and I am yours’, then it is as though a bridge has been built and little by little the crust becomes thinner and thinner until the two parts are wholly joined and the inner and the outer become one.”*

*Questions and Answers 1929 (14 April)*

Have you ever thought of unifying your being? Have you been disturbed, sometimes, to see that now you are one person, at other times another, at one time you want to do one thing, at another time you cannot do it, that you find yourself facing an individuality which you can call *yourself* and yet at the same time there are many parts of this individuality which escape you?

*I have not attempted the unification of the different personalities which may be in me, but I have tried to put them facing each other, the good opposite the bad, and I have never found in the good a sufficient dynamism to fight against the bad.*

Have you never thought that your judgment of what is 'good' and 'bad' was a purely human judgment? And that it might not necessarily tally with the judgment of the divine Presence within you? The 'bad' things you could not get rid of were probably things not in their place, things not properly balanced, and it would be a great pity if they were eliminated because, perhaps, a part of your energy and of your divine Presence would disappear at the same time. People who do not do yoga under the direction of a guide follow ordinary moral notions and at times they feel very perplexed because with all their goodwill they do not get the expected result; that happens because generally they wish to approve of their being instead of transforming it and because moral notions are very bad. In

the work of unification of the being, you must needs have imagination enough to be able to put the movements you have, the movements you wish to keep, to put them before what you are capable of imagining as most akin to the divine Presence; naturally, at first it is only an imagination quite far from the truth, but it would help you to get out a little from moral narrowness and also from the limitations of your consciousness. For example, you have the idea of putting what you are and what you do before a consciousness which is at once infinite and eternal. These two words do not perhaps make much sense at the beginning, but they compel you to break the limits and to put yourself in front of something which surpasses you so much on every side that its judgment cannot be the same as that of a human mentality. One must begin absolutely like that. If you try to analyze yourself according to moral principles, you may be sure of going contrary to the divine plan. Not that the Divine is amoral, mark that, but this is not a kind of morality that mankind understands at all, it is not the same.

*“Ambition has been the undoing of many Yogis... “A story is told of a Yogi who had attained wonderful powers. He was invited by his disciples to a great dinner. It was served on a big low table. The disciples asked their Master to show his power in some way. He knew he should not, but the seed of ambition was there in him and he thought, ‘After all, it is a very innocent thing and it may prove to them that such things are possible and teach them the greatness of God.’ So he said, ‘Take away the table, but only the table, let the table-cloth remain as it is with all the dishes upon it.’ The disciples cried out, ‘Oh, that cannot be done, everything will fall down.’ But he insisted and they removed the table from under the cloth. Lo, the miracle! The cloth and all that was upon it remained there just as though the table was underneath. The disciples wondered. But all of a sudden the Master*

*jumped up and rushed out screaming and crying, 'Nevermore shall I have a disciple, nevermore! Woe is me! I have betrayed my God.'*

*Questions and Answers 1929 (14 April)*

This is a temptation that every teacher meets at each step, for the very simple reason that ordinary humanity, in a general way, not being in personal contact with the divine powers, understands nothing of what an illumined consciousness may be and asks for material proofs. It is on this demand that most religions are established and, for reasons which I may very frankly call 'political', they have put at the origin of their religion a more or less considerable number of miracles as having been performed by the founders, and they have thus more or less crudely encouraged among ignorant people the taste, the necessity for seeing what they call 'miracles' in order to believe in the divine power of a person. This is an extraordinary ignorance, because it is not at all necessary to have a divine power or consciousness to perform miracles. It is infinitely more easy to perform miracles with the help of small entities of the vital world who are material enough to be in touch with the physical world and act upon it, than to live in the consciousness of the higher regions and to work upon Nature only through the intermediary of all the other domains. It has been repeated over and over again to all human intellects that the proof of a being's divinity is that he can raise the dead, cure maladies, and do many other things of the same kind (except making a fool wise).<sup>1</sup> Well, I guarantee that this is not a proof; it proves only one thing, that these 'Masters' are in contact with the powers of the vital world and that with the help of those beings they can perform these miracles, that's all. If one relies upon that to recognize the superiority of a man, one would make a glaring mistake. Naturally, there are other religions which are established on revelations made to their founders. These revelations are more or less happy mental transcriptions of the knowledge they received. This is already of a higher order but it is not yet a proof. And I would finally say, the human demand for proofs is not at all favorable to one's development. 'Because the true divine power has organized the world according to a certain plan and in this plan there was no question of things happening in an illogical way; otherwise from the very beginning the world would have been illogical and it is not so. Men imagine for the most part one of two things, either

that there is a material world to which they belong, that all comes from there, all returns there and all ends there—these are the unbelievers—or, the believers, most of them, that there is something which they call 'God' and then the physical world, and that this physical world is the creation of that God who knows what he is doing or does what he wants; and the confusion lies in saying that everything happens by a kind of arbitrariness, natural or supernatural. There are very few people who know that there exists in the universe an infinite number of gradations and that each one of these gradations has its own reality, its own life, its own law, its own determinism, and that the creation did not come about 'like that', by an arbitrary will, in an arbitrary way but is a deploying of consciousness and each thing has evolved as a logical result of the preceding one. I am telling you all this as simply as I can, you know, it is a very incomplete expression, but if I wanted to tell you the story exactly as it is, it would be a little difficult to make you understand. Only my conclusion I would like you to know, (I have already spoken about it several times, more or less in detail), it is this: each one of these numberless regions has its own very logical determinism—everything proceeds from cause to effect; but these worlds, although differentiated, are not separate from each other and, by numerous processes which we may study, the inner or higher worlds are in constant contact with the lower or external worlds and act upon these, so that the determinism of one changes the determinism of the other. If you take the purely material domain, for instance, and if you notice that the material laws, the purely material laws are altered by something all of a sudden, you ought to say that it was a 'miracle', because there is a rupture of the determinism of one plane through the intervention of another, but usually we do not call this a miracle. For example, when the human will intervenes and changes something, that seems to you quite natural, because you have been accustomed to it from your childhood; you remember, don't you, the example I gave you the other day: a stone falls according to the law of its own determinism, but you wish to interrupt its fall and you stretch out your hand and catch it; well you ought to call this a 'miracle', but you don't because you are used to it (but a rat or a dog would perhaps call it a miracle if they could speak). And note that it is the same for what people call a 'miracle'; they speak of a 'miracle' because they are absolutely ignorant, unaware of

the gradations between the will which wants to express itself and the plane on which it expresses itself. When they have a mental or a vital will, the thing seems quite natural to them but when it is a question of the will of a higher world—the world of the gods or of a higher entity—which all of a sudden upsets all your little organization, that seems to you a miracle. But it is a miracle simply because you are unable to follow the gradations by which the phenomenon took place. Therefore, the Supreme Will, that which comes from the very highest region, if you saw it in its logical action, if you were aware of it continually, it would seem to you altogether natural. You can express this in two ways: either say, “It is quite natural, it is like this that things must happen, it is only an expression of the divine Will”, or, each time you see on the material plane an intervention coming from another plane, you ought to say, “It is miraculous!” So I may say with certainty that people who want to see miracles are people who cherish their ignorance! You understand my logic, don’t you? These people love their ignorance, they insist upon seeing miracles and being astounded! And that is why people who have done yoga seriously consider it altogether fatal to encourage this tendency; hence it is forbidden.

There is a 'miracle' because you do not give people time to see the procedure by which you do things, you do not show them the stages. Thus, some men have reached higher mental regions and do not need to follow step by step all the gradations of thought; they can jump from one idea to a far distant inference without the intermediary links; this is usually called intuition (it is not altogether an 'intuition'; it is that the idea, to begin with, is at a great height and from there these people can see while descending the whole totality of things and consequences without passing through all the gradations as ordinary human thought is obliged to do). It is an experience I have had; when I used to speak with Sri Aurobindo, we never had the need to go through intermediary ideas; he said one thing and I saw the far off result; we used to talk always like that, and if a person had happened to be present at our conversations he would have said, “What are they talking about!” But for us, you know, it was as clear as a continuous sentence. You could call that a mental miracle—it was not a miracle, it was simply that Sri Aurobindo had the vision of the totality of

mental phenomena and hence we had no need to waste a good deal of time in going through all the gradations. For any person capable of following the line, the thing would have been quite natural and logical; for ignorant people it was a 'miracle'.

*“They [powers] have to be used in the same way as they came. They come by union with the Divine. They must be used by the will of the Divine and not for display.”*

*Questions and Answers 1929 (14 April)*

If you use power to show that you possess it, it becomes so full of falsehood and untruth that finally it disappears. But it is not always thus, because, as I said at the beginning, when it concerns a power like the power of healing or the power of changing an altogether external thing—of making an unfavourable circumstance favourable, of finding lost objects, all these countless little 'miracles' which are found in all religions—it is much more easy and even more effective to do these 'miracles' with the help of the entities of the vital world which are not always recommendable, far from it; and then these beings make fun of you. This begins very well, very brilliantly, and usually finishes very badly.

I know the story of a man who had a few small powers and indulged in all kinds of so-called 'spiritualist' practices, and through repeated exercises he had succeeded in coming into conscious contact with what he called a 'spirit'. This man was doing business; he was a financier and was even a speculator. His relations with his 'spirit' were of a very practical kind! This spirit used to tell him when the stocks and shares would go up and when they would come down; it told him, “Sell this”, “Buy that”—it gave him very precise financial particulars. For years he had been listening to his 'spirit' and had followed it, and was fantastically successful; he became tremendously rich and naturally boasted a lot about the spirit which 'guided' him. He used to tell everybody, “You see, it is really worth while learning how to put oneself in contact with these spirits.” But one day he met a man who was a little wiser, who told him, “Take care.” He did not listen to him, he was swollen with his power and ambition. And it was then that his 'spirit' gave him a last advice, “Now you can become the richest man in the world. Your ambition will be

fulfilled. You have only to follow my direction. Do this: put all that you have into this transaction and you will become the richest man in the world.” The stupid fool did not even realise the trap laid for him: for years he had followed his 'guide' and succeeded, so he followed the last direction; and he lost everything, to the last penny.

So you see, these are small entities who make fun of you, and to make sure of you they work these little miracles to encourage you, and when they feel that you are well trapped, they play a fine trick upon you and it is all over with you.

We have said that there is only one safety, never to act except in harmony with the divine Will. There is one question: how to know that it is the divine Will which makes you act? I replied to the person who put to me this question (although this person did not agree with me) that it is not difficult to distinguish the voice of the Divine: one cannot make a mistake. You need not be very far on the path to be able to recognise it; you must listen to the still, small peaceful voice which speaks in the silence of your heart.

I forgot one thing: to hear it you must be absolutely sincere, for if you are not sincere, you will begin by deceiving yourself and you will hear nothing at all except the voice of your ego and then you will commit with assurance (thinking that it is the real small voice) the most awful stupidities. But if you are sincere, the way is sure. It is not even a voice, not even a sensation, it is something extremely subtle—a slight indication. When everything goes well, that is, when you do nothing contrary to the divine Will, you will not perhaps have any definite impression, everything will seem to you normal. Of course, you should be eager to know whether you are acting in accordance with the divine Will, that is the first point, naturally, without which you can know nothing at all. But once you are eager and you pay attention, everything seems to you normal, natural, then all of a sudden, you feel a little uneasiness somewhere in the head, in the heart or even in the stomach—generally one doesn't give it a thought; you may feel it several times in the day but you reject it without giving it any attention; but it is no longer quite the same; then, at that moment, you must stop, no matter what you may be doing, and look, and if you are sincere, you will

notice a small black spot (a tiny wicked idea, a tiny false movement, a small arbitrary decision) and that's the source of the uneasiness. You will notice then that the little black spot comes from the ego which is full of preferences; generally it does what it likes; the things it likes are called good and those it does not are called bad—this clouds your judgment. It is difficult to judge under these conditions. If you truly want to know, you must draw back a step and look, and you will know then that it is this small movement of the ego which is the cause of the uneasiness. You will see that it is a tiny thing curled back upon itself; you will have the impression of being in front of something hard which resists or is black. Then with patience, from the height of your consciousness, you must explain to this thing its mistake, and in the end it will disappear. I do not say that you will succeed all at once the very first day, but if you try sincerely, you will always end with success. And if you persevere, you will see that all of a sudden you are relieved of a mass of meanness and ugliness and obscurity which was preventing you from flowering in the light. It is those things which make you shrivel up, prevent you from widening yourself, opening out in a light where you have the impression of being very comfortable. If you make this effort, you will see finally that you are very far from the point where you had begun, the things you did not feel, did not understand, have become clear. If you are resolved, you are sure to succeed.

This is the first step towards unifying yourself, becoming a conscious being who has a central will and acts only according to this will, which will be a constant expression of the divine Will. It is worth trying.

And I may tell you from my personal experience that there is nothing in the world more interesting. If you begin making this effort you will find that your life is full of interest—you know, of the ordinary life of people at least a third is a kind of dull boredom (I say a third, but for some two-thirds of the day is a dull boredom), and all that gets volatilised! Everything becomes so interesting, the least little thing, the least casual meeting, the least word exchanged, the least thing displaced—everything is full of life and interest.

8 February 1951  
*Questions and Answers 1950-51*



# Silence is All

*Sri Aurobindo*

1

Silence is all, say the sages.  
Silence watches the work of the ages;  
In the book of Silence the cosmic Scribe has written his cosmic pages;  
Silence is all, say the sages.

2

What then of the word, O speaker?  
What then of the thought, O thinker?  
Thought is the wine of the soul and the word is the beaker;  
Life is the banquet-table—the soul of the sage is the drinker.

3

What of the wine, O mortal?  
I am drunk with the wine as I sit at Wisdom's portal,  
Waiting for the Light beyond thought and the Word immortal.  
Long I sit in vain at Wisdom's portal.

4

How shalt thou know the Word when it comes, O seeker?  
How shalt thou know the Light when it breaks, O witness?  
I shall hear the voice of the God within me and grow wiser and meeker;  
I shall be the tree that takes in the light as food, I shall drink its  
nectar of sweetness.