

# प्रज्ञा

— A Journal dedicated to the Social and Political Vision of Sri Aurobindo —

# PRAGYA

A flame of aspiration  
for dynamic truth

# रिताग्नि

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## Dear Readers...

With this issue, we conclude our Fourth Volume of 'Ritagni'. Sri Aurobindo Research Foundation has constantly been facing a financial struggle since its inception. But somehow we had managed to keep it going even though we nearly touched rock bottom a few times.

We have now reached a stage when we find the going extremely difficult and have decided that we should suspend all our activities for sometime – including 'Ritagni'. It maybe a year, maybe more, maybe less, before we are able to begin again. It all depends on the financial situation - sponsors for 'Ritagni' and donations for other activities.

We hope you will bear with us during this time. As soon as we are able to start functioning again, you will begin to receive the issues as usual. From January 2001, the address at Baroda will not be valid as we will be shifting our official address to Pondicherry as follows –

72 – Kamatchiamman Covil Street, 1<sup>st</sup> floor  
Pondicherry – 605 001

With much appreciation for your kind support.

*Editor*

# Savitri

*SriAurobindo*

How sayst thou Truth can never light the human mind  
And Bliss can never invade the mortal's heart  
Or God descend into the world he made?  
If in the meaningless Void creation rose,  
If from a bodiless Force Matter was born,  
If Life could climb in the unconscious tree,  
If green delight break into emerald leaves  
And its laughter of beauty blossom in the flower,  
If sense could wake in tissue, nerve and cell,  
And Thought seize the grey matter of the brain,  
And soul peep from its secrecy through the flesh,  
How shall the nameless light not leap on men,  
And unknown powers emerge from Nature's sleep?  
Even now hints of a luminous Truth like stars  
Arise in the mind-mooned splendour of Ignorance;  
Even now the deathless Lover's touch we feel:  
If the chamber's door is even a little ajar,  
What then can hinder God from stealing in  
Or who forbid his kiss on the sleeping soul?  
Already God is near, the Truth is close:  
Because the dark atheist body knows him not,  
Must the sage deny the Light, the seer his soul?  
I am not bound by thought or sense or shape;  
I live in the glory of the Infinite,  
I am near to the Nameless and Unknowable,  
The Ineffable is now my household mate.  
But standing on Eternity's luminous brink  
I have discovered that the world was He:  
I have met Spirit with spirit, Self with self,  
But I have loved too the body of my God.  
I have pursued him in his earthly form.  
A lonely freedom cannot satisfy  
A heart that has grown one with every heart:  
I am a deputy of the aspiring world,  
My spirit's liberty I ask for all.

*Book X Canto IV*

# War and the Need of Economic Unity

*Sri Aurobindo*

The military necessity, the pressure of war between nations and the need for prevention of war by the assumption of force and authority in the hands of an international body, World-State or Federation or League of Peace, is that which will most directly drive humanity in the end towards some sort of international union. But there is behind it another necessity which is much more powerful in its action on the modern mind, the commercial and industrial, the necessity born of economic interdependence. Commercialism is a modern sociological phenomenon; one might almost say that is the whole phenomenon of modern society. The economic part of life is always important to an organised community and even fundamental; but in former times it was simply the first need, it was not that which occupied the thoughts of men, gave the whole tone to the social life, stood at the head and was clearly recognised as standing at the root of social principles. Ancient man was in the group primarily a political being, in the Aristotelian sense,—as soon as he ceased to be primarily religious,—and to this preoccupation he added, wherever he was sufficiently at ease, the preoccupation of thought, art and culture. The economic impulses of the group were worked out as a mechanical necessity, a strong desire is the vital being rather than a leading thought in the mind. Nor was the society regarded or studied as an economic organism except in a very superficial aspect. The economic man held an honourable, but still a comparatively low position in the society; he was only the third caste or class, the Vaishya. The lead was in the hands of the intellectual and political

classes,—the Brahmin, thinker, scholar, philosopher and priest, the Kshatriya, ruler and warrior. It was their thoughts and preoccupations that gave the tone to society, determined its conscious drift and action, coloured most powerfully all its motives. Commercial interests entered into the relations of States and into the motives of war and peace; but they entered a subordinate and secondary pre-disposing causes of amity or hostility and only rarely and as it were accidentally came to be enumerated among the overt and conscious causes of peace, alliance and strife. The political consciousness, the political motive dominated; increase of wealth was primarily regarded as a means of political power and greatness and opulence of the mobilisable resources of the State than as an end in itself or a first consideration.

Everything now is changed. The phenomenon of modern social development is the decline of the Brahmin and Kshatriya, of the Church, the military aristocracy and the aristocracy of letters and culture, and the rise to power or predominance of the commercial and industrial classes, Vaishya and Shudra, Capital and Labour. Together they have swallowed up or cast out their rivals and are now engaged in a fratricidal conflict for sole possession in which the completion of the downward force of social gravitation, the ultimate triumph of Labour and the remodelling of all social conceptions and institutions with Labor as the first, the most dignified term which will give its value to all others seem to be the visible writing of Fate. At present, however, it is the Vaishya who still

predominates and his stamp on the world is commercialism, the predominance of the economic man, the universality of the commercial value or the utilitarian and materially efficient and productive value for everything in human life. Even in the outlook on knowledge, thought, science, art, poetry and religion the economic conception of life overrides all others.<sup>1</sup>

For the modern economic view of life, culture and its products have chiefly a decorative value; they are costly and desirable luxuries, not at all indispensable necessities. Religion is in this view a by-product of the human mind with a very restricted utility—if indeed it is not a waste and a hindrance. Education has a recognised importance but its object and form are no longer so much cultural as scientific, utilitarian and economic, its value the preparation of the efficient individual unit to take his place in the body of the economic organisation. Science is of immense importance not because it discovers the secrets of Nature for the advancement of knowledge, but because it utilises them for the creation of machinery and develops and organises the economic resources of the community. The thought-power of the society, almost its soul-power—if it has any longer so unsubstantial and unproductive a thing as a soul—is not in its religion or its literature, although the former drags on a feeble existence and the latter teems and spawns, but in the daily Press primarily an instrument of commercialism and governed by the political and commercial spirit and not like literature a direct instrument of culture. Politics, government itself are becoming more and more a machinery for the development of an industrialised society, divided between the service of bourgeois capitalism and the office of a half-involuntary channel for the incoming of economic

Socialism. Free thought and culture remain on the surface of this great increasing mass of commercialism and influence and modify it, but are themselves more and more influenced, penetrated, coloured, subjugated by the economic, commercial and industrial view of human life.

This great change has affected profoundly the character of international relations in the past and is likely to affect them still more openly and powerfully in the future. For there is no apparent probability of a turn in a new direction in the immediate future. Certain prophetic voices announce indeed the speedy passing of the age of commercialism. But it is not easy to see how this is to come about; certainly, it will not be by a reversion to the predominantly political spirit of the past or the temper and forms of the old aristocratic social type. The sigh of the extreme conservative mind for the golden age of the past, which was not so golden as it appears to an imaginative eye in the distance, is a vain breath blown to the winds by the rush of the car of the Time-Spirit in the extreme velocity of its progress. The end of commercialism can only come about either by some unexpected development of commercialism itself or through a reawakening of spirituality in the race and its coming to its own by the subordination of the political and economic motives of life to the spiritual motive.

Certain signs are thought to point in this direction. The religious spirit is reviving and even the old discouraged religious creeds and forms are recovering a kind of vigour. In the secular thought of mankind there are signs of an idealism, which increasingly admits a spiritual element among its motives. But all this is as yet slight and superficial; the body of thought and practice, the effective motive, the propelling impulsion remain untouched and

unchanged. That impulsion is still towards the industrialising of the human race and the perfection of the life of society as an economic and productive organism. Nor is this spirit likely to die as yet by exhaustion, for it has not yet fulfilled itself and is growing, not declining in force. It is aided, moreover, by modern Socialism which promises to be the master of the future; for Socialism proceeds on the Marxian principle that its own reign has to be preceded by an age of bourgeois capitalism of which it is to be the inheritor and seize upon its work and organisation in order to turn it to its own uses and modify it by its own principles and methods. It intends indeed to institute Labour as the Master instead of Capital;<sup>2</sup> but this only means that all activities will be valued by the labour contributed and work produced rather than by the wealth contribution and production. It will be a change from one side of economism to the other, but not a change from economism to the domination of some other and higher motive of human life. The change itself is likely to be one of the chief factors with which international unification will have to deal and either its greatest aid or its greatest difficulty.

In the past, the effect of commercialism has been to bind together the human race into a real economic unity behind its apparent political separateness. But this was a subconscious unity of inseparable interrelations and of intimate mutual dependence, not any oneness of the spirit or of the conscious organised life. Therefore these interrelations produced at once the necessity of peace and the unavoidability of war. Peace was necessary for their normal action, war frightfully perturbatory to their whole system of being. But because the organised units were politically separate and rival nations, their commercial interrelations became relations of rivalry and

strife or rather a confused tangle of exchange and interdependence and hostile separatism. Self-defence against each other by a wall of tariffs, a race for closed markets and fields of exploitation, a struggle for place or predominance in markets and fields which could not be monopolised and an attempt at mutual interpenetration in spite of tariff walls have been the chief features of this hostility and this separatism. The outbreak of war under such conditions was only a matter of time; it was bound to come as soon as one nation or else one group of nations felt itself either unable to proceed farther by pacific means or threatened with the definite limitation of its expansion by the growing combinations of its rivals. The Franco-German was the last great war dictated by political motives. Since then the political motive has been mainly a cover for the commercial. Not the political subjugation of Serbia which could only be a fresh embarrassment to the Austrian empire, but the commercial possession of the outlet through Salonika was the motive of Austrian policy. Pan-Germanism covered the longings of German industry for possession of the great resources and the large outlet into the North Sea offered by the countries along the Rhine. To seize African spaces of exploitation and perhaps French coal fields, not to rule over French territory was the drift of its real intention. In Africa, in China, in Persia, in Mesopotamia, commercial motives determined political and military action. War is no longer the legitimate child of ambition and earth-hunger, but the bastard offspring of wealth-hunger or commercialism with political ambition as its putative father.

On the other hand, the effect, the shock of war have been rendered intolerable by the industrial organization of human life and the commercial interdependence of the nations. It

would be too much to say that it laid that organization in ruins, but it turned it topsy-turvy, deranged its whole system and diverted it to unnatural ends. And it produced a widespread suffering and privation in belligerent and a *gêne* and perturbation of life in neutral countries to which the history of the world offers no parallel. The angry cry that this must not be suffered again and that the authors of this menace and disturbance to the modern industrial organization of the world, self-styled civilization, must be visited with condign punishment and remain for some time as international outcasts under a ban and a boycott, showed how deeply the lesson had gone home. But it showed too, as the post-war mentality has shown, that the real, the inner truth of it all has not yet been understood or not seized at its center. Certainly, from this point of view also, the prevention of war must be one of the first preoccupations of a new ordering of international life. But how is war to be entirely prevented if the old state of commercial rivalry between politically separate nations is to be perpetuated? If peace is still to be a covert war, an organization of strife and rivalry, how is the physical shock to be prevented? It may be said, through the regulation of the inevitable strife and rivalry by a state of law as in the competitive commercial life of a nation before the advent of Socialism. But that was only possible, because the competing individuals or combines were part of a single social organism subject to a single governmental authority and unable to assert their individual will of existence against it. Such a regulation between nations can therefore have no other conclusion, logically or practically, than the formation of a centralized World-State.

But let us suppose that the physical shock of war is prevented, not by law, but by the principle

of enforced arbitration in extreme cases which might lead to war, not by the creation of an international authority, but by the overhanging threat of international pressure. The state of covert war will still continue; it may even take new and disastrous forms. Deprived of other weapons the nations are bound to have increasing resort to the weapon of commercial pressure, as did Capital and Labour in their chronic state of 'pacific' struggle within the limits of the national life. The instruments would be different, but would follow the same principle, that of the strike and the lockout which are on one side a combined passive resistance by the weaker party to enforce its claims, on the other a passive pressure by the stronger party to enforce its wishes. Between nations, the corresponding weapon to the strike would be a commercial boycott, already used more than once in an unorganized fashion both in Asia and Europe and bound to be extremely effective and telling if organised even by a politically or commercially weak nation. For the weaker nation is necessary to the stronger, if as nothing else, yet as a market or as a commercial and industrial victim. The corresponding weapons to the lockout would be the refusal of capital or machinery, the prohibition of all or of any needed imports into the offending or victim country, or even a naval blockade leading, if long maintained, to industrial ruin or to national starvation. The blockade is a weapon used originally only in a state of war, but it was employed against Greece as a substitute for war, and this use may easily be extended in the future. There is always too the weapon of prohibitive tariffs.

It is clear that these weapons need not be employed for commercial purposes or motives only, they may be grasped at to defend or to attack any national interest, to enforce any claim of justice or injustice between nation and



nation. It has been shown into how tremendous a weapon commercial pressure can be turned when it is used as an aid to war. If Germany was crushed in the end, the real means of victory was the blockade, the cutting off of money, resources and food and the ruin of industry and commerce. For the military debacle was not directly due to military weakness, but primarily to the diminution and failure of resources, to exhaustion, semi-starvation and the moral depression of an intolerable position cut off from all hope of replenishment and recovery. This lesson also may have in the future considerable application in a time of 'peace'. Already it was proposed at one time in some quarters to continue the commercial war after the political had ceased, in order that Germany might not only be struck off the list of great imperial nations but also permanently hampered, disabled or even ruined as a commercial and industrial rival. A policy of refusal of capital and trade relations and a kind of cordon or hostile blockade has been openly advocated and was for a time almost in force against Bolshevist Russia. And it has been suggested too that a League of Peace<sup>3</sup> might use this weapon of commercial pressure against any recalcitrant nation in place of military force.

But so long as there is not a firm international authority, the use of this weapon would not be likely to be limited to such occasions or used only for just and legitimate ends. It might be used by a strong nation, secure of general indifference, to crush and violate the weak; it might be used by a combination of strong imperial Powers to enforce their selfish and evil will upon the world. Force and coercion of any kind not concentrated in the hands of a just and impartial authority are always liable to abuse and misapplication. Therefore inevitably in the growing unity of mankind the

evolution of such an authority must become an early and pressing need. The World-State even in its early and imperfect organization must begin not only to concentrate military force in its hands, but to commence consciously in the beginning what the national State only arrived at by a slow and natural development, the ordering of the commercial, industrial, economic life of the race and the control at first, no doubt, only of the principal relations of international commerce,<sup>4</sup> but inevitably in the end of its whole system and principles. Since industry and trade are now five-sixths of social life and the economic principle the governing principle of society, a World-State which did not control human life in its chief principle and its largest activity would exist only in name.

*'The Ideal of Human Unity'*

*References:*

1. It is noticeable that the bourgeois habit of the predominance of commercialism has been taken up and continued in an even larger scale by the new Socialist societies though on the basis of a labour, instead of a bourgeois economy, and an attempt at a new distribution of its profits or else, more characteristically, a concentration of all in the hands of the State.
2. The connection between Socialism and the democratic or equalitarian idea or the revolt of the proletariat is however an accident of its history, not its essence. In Italian Fascism there rose a Socialism non-democratic and unequalitarian in form, idea and temper. Fascism has gone, but there is no inevitable connection between Socialism and the domination of Labour.
3. Afterwards realised as the League of Nations.
4. Some first beginnings of this kind of activity were trying to appear in the activities of the now almost moribund League of Nations. These activities were still only platonic and advisory as in its futile discussions about disarmament and its inconclusive attempts to regulate certain relations of Capital and Labour, but they showed that the need is already felt and were a signpost on the road to the future.

# Indian Culture

## Past, Present and Future

Kireet Joshi

The history of India would remain enigmatic, particularly, the remarkable phenomenon of the continuity of Indian culture through the millennia would remain a mystery, if we do not take into account the role that spirituality has played not only in determining the direction of her philosophical and cultural effort but also in replenishing the springs of creativity at every crucial hour in the long and often weary journey. It is true that spirituality has played a role in every civilisation and that no culture can claim a monopoly for spirituality. And yet, it can safely be affirmed that the unique greatness and continuity of Indian culture can be traced to her unparalleled experimentation, discovery and achievement in the vast field of spirituality.

Indian culture has recognised spirituality not only as the supreme occupation of Man but also as his all-integrating occupation. Similarly, the entire spectrum of Indian culture, its religion, ethics, philosophy, literature, art, architecture, dance, music, and even its polity and social and economic organisation, all these have been constantly influenced and moulded by the inspiring force of a multi-sided spirituality.

The distinctive character of Indian spirituality is its conscious and deliberate insistence on *direct experience*. It affirms that deep within the heart and high above the mind there is accessible to our consciousness a realm of truths, powers and ecstasies that we can, by methodised effort

of Yoga,<sup>1</sup> realise in the direct experience, can even hold permanently, and express in varying degrees through our instruments of the mind, life and body. This affirmation has conditioned the entire development of religion in India and has introduced in the body of religion the recognition that direct experience of the spirit is far superior to dogma, belief and ritualism, and that dogmatic religion can and must ultimately be surpassed by experiential spirituality.

Consequently, the history of Indian spirituality and religion shows a remarkable spirit of research, of an increasing subtlety, plasticity, sounding of depths, extension of seeking. There have been systems of specialisation and also conflicting claims and counter-claims, but the supervening tendency has been to combine, assimilate, harmonise and synthesise. In the past, there have been at least four great stages of synthesis, represented by the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita, and the Tantra. And, in modern times, we are passing through the fifth stage, represented by a new synthesis, which is in the making.

||

It is impossible to describe Indian spirituality and religion by any exclusive label. Even in its advanced forms, it cannot be described as monotheism or monism or pantheism or nihilism or transcendentalism, although each one of these is present in it in some subtle or pronounced way. Even the spiritual truths

behind the primitive forms such as those of animism, spiritism, fetishism and totemism have been allowed to play a role in its complex totality, although their external forms have been discouraged and are not valid or applicable to those who lead an inner mental and spiritual life. It is this complexity that bewilders the foreign student when he tries to define Indian spirituality and religion in terms and under criteria that are not born of the Indian experiment. But things become easier once it is grasped that the fundamental point of reference is not the outward form of a given belief and practice but the spirit behind and the justifying spiritual experience.

Indian scriptures and records abound with the statements and descriptions of varieties of spiritual experience. But there are three central spiritual experiences in terms of which all these varieties can be readily understood. The first is that of the individual in a state of complete detachment from all movement, dynamism, and activity. In this state, the individual finds himself in an utter passivity and inactivity, but also of a complete luminosity and discrimination between himself as an eternal witness (*Sakshin*), free from the sense of ego and the activities of Nature in the universe. This experience is the basis of the Samkhya philosophy. The second experience is that of the eternal and infinite Reality above Space and Time in which all that we call individuality and universality are completely silenced and sublated, and the experiencing consciousness discovers itself to be That Reality (*tat sat*), one, without the second (*ekam eva advityam*), entirely silent and immobile, the Pure Being, so ineffable that even to describe it as Being is to violate its sheer transcendence. This experience has given rise to the philosophy of Advaita (non-

dualism), in particular that of Illusionistic Advaita, which proclaims that only the Brahman is real, and the world is an illusion. The third experience is that one in which the individual and cosmos are found to be free expressions of the Supreme Reality (*Purushottama*) which, although above Space and Time, determines Space and Time and all activities through various intermediary expressions of itself. This experience and some variations of it form the basis of various theistic philosophies of India. These theistic philosophies are those of qualified monism (*Vishishtadvaita* philosophy), integral monism (*Poornadvaita* philosophy), dualistic philosophy (*Dvaita* philosophy) and dualistic-non-dualistic philosophy (*Dwaitadvaita* philosophy). Each of these experiences, when permanently established gives liberation (*Moksha*) and it is this which has in India been regarded as a high consummation of man's destiny upon earth. But, more importantly, the ancient ideal as given by the Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita, was to achieve an integrality of all these experiences, to combine utter Silence with effective Action, to be liberated from ego and yet at the same time to be a free living center (*Jivanmukta*) of luminous action that would aid the progressive unity of mankind (*Lokasangraha*).

### III

This integral ideal was to be realised in its integrality not only by a few exceptional individuals but also by increasing number of people, groups, collectivities, even on massive scale, through a long and conscious preparation and training. This great and difficult task was pursued with increasing unfolding of its aim through the ages, and it has passed through two main stages, while

a third has taken initial steps and promises to be the destiny of India's future.

The early Vedic was the first stage; the Purano-Tantric was the second stage.<sup>2</sup> In the former, an attempt was made to approach the mass-mind through the physical mind of man and make it familiar with the Godhead in the universe through the symbol of the sacrificial fire (Yajna). In the latter, deeper approaches of man's inner mind and life to the Divine in the universe were attempted through the development of great religious movements, philosophies,<sup>3</sup> many-sided epic literature (particularly Ramayana and Mahabharata), systems of Puranas and Tantras,<sup>4</sup> and even through art and science. An enlarged secular turn was given, and this was balanced by deepening of the intensities of psycho-religious experience. New tendencies and mystic forms and disciplines attempted to seize not only the soul and the intellect, but the emotions, the senses, the vital and the aesthetic nature of man and turn them into stuff of the spiritual life. But this great effort and achievement covered all the time between the Vedic age and the decline of Buddhism. Vaishnavism and Shaivism flourished during this period, and although there were during this period conflicts of religions and claims of superiority of one system of religion or Yoga over other systems of religion or Yoga, there was fundamentally a large catholicism and spirit of assimilation and even of synthesis. Christianity came to India early in the first century AD and there came also several other influences, all of which were welcomed and given a place in the large and developing field of the Indian Religion. All this rich growth gave rise to a further development through the third stage. But it was arrested as it synchronised with a period of general exhaustion,

and, in the eighteenth century, which can be regarded as the period of dense obscurity, the work that had begun seemed almost lost.

The aim of this third stage was to approach not only the inner mind and life of man, but to approach his whole mental, psychical and physical living, his totality of being and activity, and to turn it into a first beginning of at least a generalised spiritual life. Philosophers and saints such as Shri Chaitanya (1485-1533) and others of 15th and 16th centuries belong to this stage. There was also during this period a remarkable attempt to combine Vedanta and Islam or of establishing lasting communal harmony. In particular, the work of Guru Nanak (1469-1538) and of the subsequent Sikh Khalsa movement was astonishingly original and novel. The speciality of this third stage was an intense outburst and fresh creativity, not a revivalism, but based upon a deep assimilation of the past, a new effort and a new formulation. But the time was not yet ripe, and India had to pass through a period of an eclipse, almost total and disastrous.

Happily, the 19th century witnessed a great awakening and a new spiritual impulse pregnant with a power to fulfil the mission of the work that had started in the third stage. Great and flaming pioneers appeared, Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902), to name just a few of them, and through their work the entire country was electrified not only spiritually but even socially and politically. India became renascent, and there began to develop a capacity for a new synthesis, not only of the threads of Indian culture but also of world culture. Nationalism came to be proclaimed

as the new spirituality and this nationalism was right from the beginning international in its spirit and sweep. Not an escape from life, but acceptance of life, integration of life and transformation of life by an integral spirituality—this ideal came to be felt and expressed in various ways and through various activities of the renascent India.

Gradually, it has become evident that this new movement has to do not merely with India but fundamentally with the essential problem of Man and his future evolution. It is becoming clearer that Man is a field of interaction between Matter and Spirit, that this interaction has reached a point of criticality, and that this criticality demands a new knowledge, an integral knowledge of Matter and Spirit.

#### IV

This is the task, which Free India has begun to perceive as central to her real fulfillment. It is significant that we have in India a most comprehensive statement of this task in the luminous writings of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), who has been described by Romain Rolland as “the completest synthesis of the East and West.” Sri Aurobindo has declared that man is a transitional being, that his destiny is to be the spiritual superman, and that the present hour is the hour of his evolutionary crisis in which his entire life, his very body, must undergo an integral spiritual transformation, not indeed by an escape into some far-off heaven, but here, in this physical earth itself, by a victorious union of Spirit and Matter. This, he has declared, is not an issue of an individual but of collectivity, not an issue of Indian spirituality and culture, but of the entire world’s upward aspiration and fulfillment.

It must be noted that in this task of universal importance, India, the East has received from the West a collaboration of incalculable magnitude and value. For it is from France that The Mother (Madame Mira Alfassa [1878-1973] ) came to Sri Aurobindo and made India her permanent home in order to collaborate with him and to fulfil this task of integral transformation. The work that he has done is not yet sufficiently known, but as we study the great account of Her work in “Mother’s Agenda”, we find in her the highest heights that Indian spirituality has reached, and we feel that the near future is bound to show the revolutionary effects of her work for humanity, for its lasting unity and harmony, and for its transmutation into super humanity.

Indeed, the renascent spirituality of India opens up new vistas of experience and research. It transcends the boundaries of dogma and exclusive claims of Truth. It is not opposed to any religion, but points to a way to a synthesis and integrality of spiritual experience in the light of which the truth behind each religion is understood and permitted to grow to its fullness and to meet in harmony with all the others. The important thing is to turn the human mentality, vitality and physicality to the realm of spiritual experiences and to transform the human mould by an ever-widening light of the Spirit. In this perception, even scepticism, agnosticism and atheism have a meaning and value as an indispensable stage for a certain line of mental development. But here, too, the dogma and denial behind the doubt and atheism have to be surpassed, and whether by rigorous methods of philosophy and science or by a deeper plunge into deeper experiences, a way can be opened to transcend the dogmatic refusal to seek and

to discover. It is in this direction that we seem to reach a point where a fruitful synthesis of science and spirituality can be effectuated.

The renascent spirituality is all-embracing and is deeply committed to undertake all activities of human life and to transform them. It has begun to influence literature and art and music, education and physical culture. Even social and economic and political fields are being taken up, not indeed to cast them once again into some rigid formula of a religious dogma but rather to liberate them and to inundate them with a spiritual light and motive and to restructure them by a gradual evolution so that they may breathe widely and freely the progressive harmonies of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Thus is it that the old forms of society, casteism and all the rest, are being broken and there is a fresh search for new forms, plastic and flexible, to permit the highest possible perfectibility of the individual and the collectivity to blossom spontaneously and perpetually. In the ultimate analysis, it is through such a vast and potent change in the social milieu that the total man can be uplifted to his next stage of evolutionary mutation.

It is in this context that India needs to view the various social and political upheavals of the recent times. These upheavals have their own genesis in so far as that nature wants the human being to resolve by finding out deeper resources which have hitherto been ignored and ill-explored. Contemporary humanity has reached a point where two conflicting ideals have to be harmonised, the ideal of individual perfection and the ideal of collective perfection. This conflict has presented itself throughout the history both

of India and the rest of the world from time to time and different answers have been given at different epochs according to the needs and circumstances and possibilities of circumstances. In early times, the individual was subordinated to the collectivity, in due course of time, the individual began to gain some freedom against the demands of the collectivity, but it is only in recent times, particularly after the European Renaissance, that individualism has gained a great predominance, but even then with the rise of collectivistic philosophy, the ideal of individual perfection had to suffer a great setback. With the collapse of Communist regime in the USSR, however, the pendulum has swung back again in favour of individualism. In India, the balance between the ideal of the perfection of the individual and the perfection of the collectivity was sought to be achieved by means of a profound sociological and psychological understanding of human development. A great stress was laid on the needs of the welfare of the collectivity, and the individual was required to subordinate himself through the system of duties towards the members of the family or of the joint family, to the guild and to the community, the state and the country, and even humanity at large and to universal *dharma*. At the same time, the demands of individual perfection were sought to be met by erecting the ideal of the Shreshtha or of the Arya; facility for integral education for all those aimed at perfection were amply provided for, and the system provided for the realisation of the individual's perfection, if he qualified himself for it by undertaking the life of renunciation, Sanyasa. However, in due course, the system of these obligations broke down, and the subordination of the individual to collectivity became more and more prominent. During

the last thousand years, various invasions, battles and subjugation of the country under the heavy hand of foreign rulers crippled not only the ideal of individual perfection but even that of collective perfection. The weakening of the ideal of individual and the collective perfection became severest under the British rule, and it is only recently that there has been some beginning, after the attainment of independence, of an uneasy and uncertain groping to gain freedom for the individual and collectivity. But, again, under the choice that India made for the road of socialism or socialistic pattern of society, the individual came to be subordinated, and in spite of the recent orientations towards liberalisation, it is difficult to say how this liberalisation will go beyond the economic sphere so that the real purposes of the ideal of individual perfection and the ideal of collective perfection can come to their own and affirm themselves powerfully. In the West, too, where individual freedom which flourished under the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, which were pronounced powerfully by the French Revolution, came under a great constraint because of the powerful rise of Nazism and Communism, and even though the latter have now fallen to a great extent, and the ideal of individual freedom has come to be re-affirmed, it is mostly being advocated in the economic field, and that, too, in the services of the system that is being sought to be perfected for the life of standardisation, mechanisation and of comfortable search and satisfaction of appetites for pleasure and egoistic domination.

What is happening in the West is bound to have a great impact upon India, and the central problem of India is whether India wants to become a province of western

culture and whether, even while assimilating the best that the West has to offer, it can find from great resources of culture which are available in its heritage, a new solution of the harmony of the individual perfection and the collective perfection, and whether it can give that solution as a gift to the world which also needs it, and which will suffer if that solution is not made available to it.

But while dealing with this problem, India will have to resolve four important questions, namely, those related to (1) the conflict of religions, (2) the conflict of religion and science, (3) the conflict between science and philosophy, and (4) the conflict between asceticism and materialism.

It is evident that the conflict of religions cannot be resolved at the level of dogmas. For dogmas are themselves unquestionable and if the unquestionable are in conflict, there can be no issue and no answer. It is only if we go behind the dogmas, as Indian religion has always attempted to do, in search of the living experiences which are at the core of various religions, that there can be a hope of the resolution of the conflict. Not, therefore, the synthesis of religions, but the synthesis of spiritual experiences seems to be the answer. It is significant that in modern India, we have today as fully exemplified in Sri Aurobindo a puissant and irresistible drive towards the synthesis of spiritual experiences.

The conflict of religions and science can be resolved only if science expands itself into an inquiry of the 'invisible' actuality, and if religion enlarges itself and transforms itself into an impartial open search of the verifiable and repeatable spiritual experience. Here, again, there are signs in

modern India, which promise a new orientation initiated by scientists like Jagdish Chandra Bose. This orientation, however, needs to be pursued much more rigorously than has been done during the last several decades. We have achieved much in the field of science, but we have still not related science to spirituality, and we have not yet seen how science itself can be enriched by the knowledge that spirituality can deliver.

The conflict between science and philosophy has grown in the modern intellectual world and the credentials of philosophy have been severely questioned. The modern Indian philosopher, sympathetic to the Indian philosophical traditions, attempts to reconstruct the Indian philosophy in the light of the modern trends of philosophical and scientific thought, but he finds himself in a grip of a most acute conflict and difficulty. There has, however, been one special element in Indian philosophy which promises to be a great aid in a possible resolution of the difficulty. For Indian philosophy has not really been merely speculative. This is not to say that speculation has been absent. There is, we might say, even a profusion of it, the pure reason has been at full play and has been allowed to arrive at its own independent conclusions, and it can even be said that Indian metaphysics has been as powerful as any metaphysical system in the world. But, still, Indian philosophy has been primarily a *darshana*, a vision based upon spiritual experience and channelised into a metaphysical system by means of intellectual processes of reasoning. Even when intellectual speculations have been free both in regard to the premises and conclusions, still the conclusions have never been accepted as authentic unless they have been

found verifiable in spiritual experience or confirmed by the records of spiritual experience, Shruti. In other words, Indian philosophy has always recognised the claim of experience to be superior to that of mere intellectual reasoning, and it is interesting to note that the entire trend of modern enquiry seems to turn back to the primacy and superiority of experience over mere speculation and 'fictions' of reasoning. It is then in the recovery of this Indianness of Indian philosophy that the future conflict of science and philosophy may be resolved in India, and this might probably benefit the entire movement of the world-thought.

But the conflict between asceticism and materialism will still remain to be resolved. And this is perhaps the most difficult issue concerning modern India in its search of the new future. It is true that the economic, social and political necessities of our modern life have imposed the necessity of a robust dynamism which is remote from the tenets of asceticism, but still the spirit of asceticism has been so deeply ingrained since the last two thousand years that at every turn we feel confronted with the ideas of the illusoriness of the world and of the escape of life as the very meaning of life. The present Indian scene is, therefore, divided and torn between the invasion of materialism and the persistent whisper and call of the gospel of the renunciation of world and life. This conflict can be resolved only if it is discovered that Spirit is not the negation of Matter, but that Matter itself is an expression of the Spirit, that Spirit is an underlying omnipresent reality of Matter and that Spirit is unfolding itself gradually in Matter so that there would be a total spiritual transformation of material life, here itself, *ih eva*, in this earthly Earth. There is no



need to renounce Matter in order to embrace the Spirit. Indeed, all life is an evolving expression of the Spirit, and therefore, a truly spiritual culture embraces all life and transforms it into spiritual terms. A spiritual manifestation in the physical life would be the only possible and acceptable solution to this conflict between asceticism and materialism. And it is in this direction that India needs to move forward and fashion itself for the new future and for the new role that it has to play in the comity of nations.

If we are to ask ourselves what specific things we should do, we may refer to a brief statement of Sri Aurobindo in which three important tasks have been identified. He has said:

“The recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its splendour, depth and fullness is its first, most essential work; the flowing of this spirituality into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge is the second; an original dealing with modern problems in the light of Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society is the third and most difficult. Its success on these three lines will be the measure of its help to the future of humanity.”<sup>5</sup>

Let us hope that we in India shall become aware of the implications of these tasks and re-dedicate ourselves in carrying them out in the service of Mother India.

*Workshop on  
'Education for Tomorrow'  
held in Baroda in September 1996.*

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1. Yoga is a comprehensive system of concentration, passive and dynamic, leading to

living contact, union and identity with realities or Reality underlying the universe, with appropriate consequences in our nature and action, individual and cosmic. In recent times, Yoga is often misrepresented to be identical with Hathayoga, a system of physical and subtle exercises, which is only a specialisation, and a dispensable one, of the real comprehensive system.

2. The date of the Vedic age is controversial, but according to a conservative hypothesis, its origins are dated 2000 BC. The Purano-Tantric age can be regarded to have extended from 600 BC to 800 AD.

3. Particularly, the six systems, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Poorva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa and their numerous interpretations and commentaries. These six systems are Vedic systems of philosophy. There developed also Buddhism and Jainism and their numerous philosophical systems which did not accept the authority of the Vedas. Similarly, Charavaka philosophy, the Philosophy of materialism, which also developed during this period, was entirely anti-Vedic.

4. There are 18 Puranas. Each Purana has five parts:

- (1) Creation of the world,
- (2) destruction and recreation of the world,
- (3) reigns and periods of Manus,
- (4) genealogy of Gods, and
- (5) dynasties of solar and lunar kings.

Tantras are called Agamas. We do not know the exact number of Agamas, but it is estimated that there are 64 of them.

Tantras are devoted to the methods of utilising the vital and dynamic energies of life in order to open up the doors of the Divine Power for a triumphant mastery over the world-activities.

5. Sri Aurobindo, Collected Works, Centenary Edition, Vol. 14, p. 409.

# Perspectives on Modern Globalism

*M. S. Srinivasan*

In each phase or cycle of human evolution we can find a single master-idea or a few ideas shaping the course of events or the civilisation of that period. The master-ideas of the pre-rational cycles of evolution were God, immortality and spiritual salvation. The advent of the rational age gave birth to the ideals of science, humanism, evolution and the triple ideas of the French revolution: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The advent of the industrial revolution brought the ideal of socio-economic development or "progress" through the application of Science and Technology. The ideas which are in the boiling-pot of the contemporary world are those of ecology and environment, sustainable development, spiritual evolution of mankind, globalism and holism. Among these new ideas that which is most discussed and talked about is "Globalism". This article examines this idea in the light of Sri Aurobindo's thought.

## **Globalism and Holism**

The concept of globalism is now trumpeted by everyone as the master-idea of the future. But the question is: "What is the type of globalism which can bring a lasting solution to the problem of humanity and fulfill the higher evolutionary destiny of Man?" The present brand of globalism is primarily an economic, commercial and scientific globalism which is the result of two modern perceptions. First is the pragmatic perception of the economic and commercial interdependence of nations and second is the insight of modern science—especially modern physics, biology and system science—into the truth of Unity of Man and Nature in the physical and biological dimension.

But the most interesting feature of the present globalism is that the concern for the preservation of Nature has relegated even humanism into the background. The modern ecologist argues that if Man is an integral part of Nature and his well-being is inseparably interwoven with the ecological condition of Nature then an exclusive Humanism which aims at the well-being and development of humanity at the expense of or apart from the well-being of other living organisms in the biological and animal kingdom is from the longterm point of view not a viable philosophy. So the new and emerging philosophy is "holism" which argues that Man and Nature form an integral whole and have to grow in symbiotic harmony with each other. This is the modern synthesis of humanism, ecology and globalism. Here again the crucial question is whether this is the best possible synthesis. To answer this question we have to first examine what are the contributions and shortcomings of the present globalism and the preceding movement of pure humanism, and the modern synthesis and their longterm viability. For the values and ideals released by these modern movements belong to the idea-forces of the future, the highest truth, significance and purpose of which are not yet fully understood by the modern mind.

## **Religion of Humanity and Globalism**

But to understand the significance and impact of globalism we should have some understanding of the significance and impact of humanism in the evolution of humanity. For, the Indian spiritual thought moves towards some form of a spiritual Humanism as the collective ideal of the future.

Humanism is the result of the eighteenth century philosophical movement which gave birth to the triple values of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The fundamental tenet of Humanism is that Man and not God should be the object to be worshipped and should be the focus of all development. The highest well-being, progress and development of the individual and collective life of man in the present terrestrial existence and not some postmortem heavenly salvation, asserts the humanist thinker, should be the goal of human life. The philosophy of humanism is one of the most influential movements of thought in the history of civilisation. Its action was subtle and silent without the noise and pomp and fury of organised religions, but effected a profound revolution in the thought and sentiment of the race. Sri Aurobindo sums up the contributions of humanism for human progress:

“It, to some degree, humanised society, humanised law and punishment, humanised the outlook of man on man, abolished legalised torture and the cruder forms of slavery, raised those who were depressed or fallen, gave large hopes to humanity, stimulated philanthropy and charity and the service of mankind, encouraged everywhere the desire of freedom, put a curb on oppression and greatly minimised its more brutal expressions. It had almost succeeded in humanising war and would perhaps have succeeded entirely but for the contrary trend of modern Science. It made it possible for man to conceive of a world free from war as imaginable even without waiting for the Christian millenium. At any rate, this much change came about that, while peace was formerly a rare interlude of constant war, war became an interlude, if a much too frequent interlude of peace, though as yet only of an armed peace. That may not be a great step, but still it was a step forward. It gave new conceptions of the dignity of the human being

and opened new ideas and new vistas of his education, self-development and potentiality. It spread enlightenment; it made man feel more his responsibility for the progress and the happiness of the race; it raised the average self-respect and capacity of mankind; it gave hope to the serf, self-assertion to the downtrodden and made the labourer in his manhood the potential equal of the rich and powerful. True, if we compare what is with what should be, the actual achievement with the ideal, all this will seem only a scanty work of preparation. But it was a remarkable record for a century and a half or a little more and for an unembodied spirit which had to work through what instruments it could find and had as yet no form, habitation or visible engine of its own concentrated workings. But perhaps it was in this that lay its power and advantage, since that saved it from crystallising into a form and getting petrified or at least losing its more free and subtle action.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus we can see that this Religion of Humanity had triggered a silent moral revolution in the thoughts and sentiments of the race with a positive effect on the social and political life of humanity. This is the positive contribution of Humanism to human evolution. Now let us look at the contributions of globalism.

Globalism is now emerging as a pragmatic necessity for the very economic survival of groups and nations and for solving national problems. Human life, especially the economic and commercial life, has become so closely interdependent that even the problems of individual nations cannot be solved without help and co-operation from other groups and nations outside their territorial boundaries. “To solve local problems with a global outlook” is now becoming the practical motto of modern development strategy. This means that

mutual interdependence, if not yet unity, has now become a vital need of the race. Evolutionary nature has driven the vital ego of Man to the corner and has compelled it towards acceptance of the Law of Mutuality. On the other side, discoveries of modern science in physics, ecology and systems theory have led to a reasoned acceptance of the truth of Unity of Man and Nature by the higher mind of humanity and a practical acceptance of the truth by the pragmatic mind of Man. Just as the eighteenth-century Humanism implanted a positive mental idea and sentiments for humanity and the Unity of Mankind in the consciousness of the race, the present ecological globalism has implanted a positive mental idea and sentiment for Nature and the Unity of Man and Nature in human consciousness. Just as the earlier Religion of Humanity had a positive effect on the political life of humanity, the present ecological globalism is bound to have a positive effect on society towards a practical recognition of the unity and interdependence of Man and Nature. Both these religions of the modern age are able to compel the pragmatic vital mind of humanity to accept and recognise some higher human and ecological values.

But none of these modern religions was able to change the essential motives of the vital ego in man. They are able to enlighten the pragmatic mind of man to make it a little bit more accommodative and receptive to higher values—this itself is of course a considerable achievement—but not able to persuade the vital being to renounce its ego and self-interest. This means acceptance of these higher values is not real but only practical, a matter of long-term “strategy”. Here we bump again into some of the bedrock limitations of the human mind. The mental idea and sentiments can only modify

the outer mind of man but cannot change the roots of his life and action.

The idea of the intellect and the sentiments are not able to transform the vital being in man which is the source of his life and action. The mental idea, if it is powerful, can compel the vital mind towards its theoretical acceptance and if it supports itself with some irrefutable scientific and practical evidence, can force the vital will towards a practical recognition of the idea. Ultimately, however, the primitive but more powerful feelings, instincts and impulses of the vital being of man overwhelm the idea and sentiment. This is because for the vital being these feelings, instincts and impulses are much more concretely real and compelling than the abstract mental ideas and sentiments. The other defect of the mind is in its approach and attitude towards the realisation of the ideal. The pragmatic vital mind of man, the moment it gets excited over an idea, plunges headlong into action in creating an outer machinery for realising the ideal in society. In the case of Religion of Humanity Sri Aurobindo points out: “It has laboured to establish a political, social and legal liberty, equality and mutual help in an equal association”.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the present economic and ecological globalism, the attempt to realise the ideal is taking the same course: towards the creation of an outer international economic, political and legal machinery for a more balanced and enlightened exploitation of Nature with a more mutually accommodative association of group self-interests. The pragmatic vital mind, finding that interdependence has become an imperative law of the contemporary society, is ready to sacrifice a little bit of its self-interest and become a little bit more generous in order to survive and prosper in an increasingly interwoven “global village”; finding that physical Nature

can no longer support its aggressive and ruthless exploitation of her resources, it is ready to enlarge its vision to include "environment" and that too to safeguard its long-term self-interest. We must remember here that it is not the love of Nature or the scientific discoveries of ecology which led to a rapid diffusion of the environmental movement but the vital motives of fear of survival, mounting pressure of public opinion supported by irrefutable scientific evidence and actual facts of environmental damage, long-term commercial interest and recently a much more positive and refined motive of "sustainable development". Here we must distinguish clearly between the "environmental" motives of a cultured aesthetic and poetic mind which loves and adores the beauty of Nature, the pure truth-seeking scientific mind which on the basis of a clear insight into the laws of ecology counsels environmental preservation as the only logical policy and the pragmatic vital mind which opts for "environment" as a long-term "strategy".

But "globalism" is incompatible with self-assertive egoism. Globalism is not likely to solve human problems if it is based on the same old motives of competitive self-interest, expansion and development of the individual and collective ego, especially the vital ego. The globalism which is so much bandied about in the contemporary commercial world is of the dubious kind based on the expansive ambitions of corporate egos. Previously the political ambitions of Nations gave birth to the game of empire-building and the phenomenon of colonialism. Now the same phenomenon is happening on the economic and commercial plane. In fact the same old process has been transferred from the political to the economic level. In our modern commercial world "globalism" is only a modern euphemism for building huge

world-wide industrial and commercial empires. The same old game of domination, war, conquest, colonialism is played with the same old motives but in a different arena with more subtle and sophisticated methods and weapons.

### **Towards a Global Consciousness**

So the present form of globalism is not likely to solve the problems of humanity. It has only "globalised" the unchanged motives of the vital corporate ego without creating any sincere aspiration in human consciousness for unity and harmony. But a global society can be realised only on the basis of global consciousness. This requires a compromising renunciation of the ego and its motives. To talk about globalism keeping the competitive self-interest of the ego intact is to indulge in glaring contradiction bordering on insincerity and hypocrisy. As long as the self-interest and self-assertion of the individual and collective ego remain the central motive of human and social development, globalism will also remain a concept in the mind of the thinkers and an empty word and pretence on the lips of the politicians. The dream of a global society begins to become a possibility only when the present practical acceptance of the mutual interdependence of the world—and the mental acceptance of the ideal of the Unity of Mankind and the Unity of Man and Nature—grows and deepens into a living vision and a real acceptance of the ideal of unity and, as a consequence, harmony and integration as the basic motives of social organisation.

We would like to re-emphasise here that it is not enough that this ideal of unity remains as a shining ideal in the higher mind of humanity; it has to move the policy and decision levers in every level of the

economic, social and political life of humanity. This can happen only when the vital consciousness and will in man consents to the ideal, not out of practical necessity or forced by circumstances, but as the result of a sincere and enlightened perception of the truth of unity. This requires a radical change in this part of human nature which is possible only through a spiritual transformation. For unity exists as a living, concrete and experiential reality only in the consciousness of the soul or in the spiritual dimension of Man. Mind can conceive this truth of unity only as an ideal abstraction or feel it is a sentiment or at best perceive it as an intellectual insight. But, as we have said, these mental verities do not have the power to transform the vital instincts and impulses. The idealistic, intellectual and rational mind is not able to gain a sincere acceptance of the ideal from the vital being in man because it is not able to make the vital being *feel* the truth of the ideal. This is again due to the fact that the idealistic rational mind itself is not able to feel and experience the truth of the ideal as a concrete reality. Only the Soul and Spirit in man can see, feel, live and experience the truth of unity as a concrete self-evident reality and therefore can make the mind and vital—if and when they become receptive to it—share in its own experience and transform them in its higher light and power. So a global society can become a reality only when humanity as a whole—not perhaps *en masse* and in a single block but gradually through various stages—is able to rise beyond mind and live in the consciousness of the Spirit and impose the harmonious mastery of the light and power and unity of the Spirit on the diversity of life.

The human mind was able to catch rightly the basic principles of a global society. The

Unity of Man and Nature which is the ideal of modern ecology; the interdependence of human life which is now being felt with an increasing concreteness in the economic, industrial and commercial life as the result of a rapidly expanding “global” commercial life; the unity, well-being and progress of Mankind—along with the great values of the French Revolution—Liberty, Equality and Fraternity—which is the ideal of the Religion of Humanity; these are and must be the principles of a global society. But the mind was not able to perceive the deeper truth behind these ideals in all its integrality and comprehensiveness. So there was a faulty misapplication in the approach and the method for realising the ideal in life. Instead of first trying to make the ideal real to the consciousness of the people and allowing it to take an outward form in life as a spontaneous movement from within outwards, a gigantic effort was made to give an outer social form to the ideal through the external organisation and machinery.

But the inward or psychological approach to globalism is not totally against or opposed to the outer approach through organisation; it only calls for a shift in emphasis from the outer to the inner because it believes that outer unity can be stable and secure only when it is based on an inner unity of consciousness; so its emphasis will not be on building a global organisation but on creating a global consciousness in the mind and heart and soul of the human race.

‘Mother India’  
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1. *SABCL*, Vol. 15, pp. 543-44
2. *Ibid.*, p. 546

# Humanecology: Religion and Philosophy

Hinduism And Human Ecology – Emerging Perspectives of Wholeness

Aster Patel

The theme of 'Hinduism and Human Ecology' moves us deeply. It is not a subject of mere academic interest but symbolises something that is in our very being—the way we *are* and the way we see things today and respond to them. This, in turn, is a reflection of the spirit of the times that we live through. These are the exceptional ones—in the deepest existential sense. There is a kind of reversal operating in the life of man the like of which history has not seen. The science of Human Ecology, which has emerged in such a setting, reflects these changes.

In order to have a fuller appreciation of what it stands for, let us first see what is the essential character of the changes that are taking place. There is a fundamental shift in the orientation that we bring to bear upon life and in the manner in which we pursue experience. It is a veritable 'reversal' of method and approach that is taking place. In the past, the method was one of concept-forming, of characterisations and delineations, of identifying elements and isolating them so as to attempt a subsequent reconstruction of those elements. We thus built up 'blocks' which we stacked in our minds and which we took out one by one to help us understand the universe. As the method, so the view of the universe that we arrived at. For some decades, however, a reversal of this method has begun to take place and this is now proceeding with an increasing rapidity and with far-reaching consequences.

Today when we look for experience, we try to discern 'perspectives' in which the experience takes place, we look for 'lines of growth', we attempt to follow the 'processes' that seem to be operative in the universe. In all this effort, we try to 'identify' ourselves with the movement

and the deeper rhythm of reality: and we do so by placing ourselves at a 'feeling' level of reality, where it is possible to 'reach out', to 'become co-terminous'. There is a kind of sympathetic approximation of our own selves with that of which we are seeking experience. A 'continuity of being' has thus become the process that leads to experience—and, what we may call, 'concrete knowledge'. Ideas, concepts, norms are fast becoming things of the past: perspectives, processes, patterns and lines of growth are the emerging directions of the present and, even more so, of the future.

It is such a changing vision of life that has given birth to the science of Human Ecology—a science yet in its infancy. We shall now try to see what was the actual need of man out of which it arose, the purpose it has served so far, the point at which it stands today and the possible directions of growth in the future.

The ecological concern, if we may thus describe it, began to be manifest when the process of fragmentation, which has relentlessly pursued the organisation of our life and our quest for knowledge since the European Renaissance of the sixteenth century reached an extreme edge of severity where the being of man seemed to disintegrate and no semblance or distant figure of unity was found to exist. When the lowest had been reached, the sheer survival of the race demanded that an upward trend began to emerge. From such an existential need arose the movement to 'reach out', to include all that had been put aside in the earlier exclusive kind of endeavour. The urge 'to make whole again' was paramount. Human Ecology is the scientific term we have coined to respond to this essential need of man.

What is the precise content that we put into this science today? We are essentially trying to re-create a relationship between ourselves and our environment of life, from which we had, in the past, made an abstraction of ourselves. Man plus nature describes the circumference in which this new relationship is trying to work itself out. There are many specifics in this situation, diverse elements which come in for a handling but this is the broad field in which the science of ecology functions. And this, we feel, is exactly where its limitations for the future lie. We will come back to this later. For the time being, let us make an attempt to reach out to the body of experience that goes under the name of 'Hinduism'.

In our contemporary existential situation, the very term seems to be curiously anachronistic and we must confess to feeling ill at ease with it! The term has been coined by the Western mind of a past age and denotes more a concept, that of religion, than the living reality of an experience. As such, it corresponds neither to the spirit of our times nor is it expressive of the spirit of the people who embodied the original experience in the past, nor does it reflect the essential quality of that experience itself. By the use of such a term—emerging as it does from a religious, credal framework—the 'experiential' content gets not only diluted but even misrepresented. We would, therefore, like to clarify this point before proceeding any further. However, when we do use the term—since we seem obliged to do so for the present—what we understand it to mean is the sum total of the experience of reality, of man and universe and God, that has been made over a long, continuous span of many centuries and not any external formulation of the same. What is this extraordinary experience? What light does it throw on these fundamental questions? Can we reach out to it today? Does it continue to be pertinent? These are the questions that come up for us.

We cannot concern ourselves here with the many-sided subtleties of this vast body of

experience or refer to the various directions in which this experience has flowed—one in essence but richly diverse in its forms. The systemisation of these forms as they came progressively into being is a matter of historical interest. On our part, we would rather step into the continuing stream of this experience and see how it responds to our needs of today. We feel that it is likely to open up perspectives which can be invaluable.

The first thing that strikes us is the span of continuity that this experience has enjoyed. For 5000 years or more, men and women—across this long stretch of time and the vicissitudes of culture and civilisation—have made a fresh and independent experience of reality which has confirmed these original perceptions as they have come down to us. We are not referring here to the pundits and the scholars who, by their learning and scholarship, have ensured the continued existence of the various systematised forms into which this experience was cast. We think of those great and creative and exceptional beings who have set out to *know* man and reality and have arrived, on their own, at an experience which, in its essentials, remains similar. This fact thrills us and leads us to a profound reflection on the intrinsic value of this experience.

We think, in this context, of the great sages and seers of the Vedas and the Upanishads—names sacred in the Indian memory. Of Buddha and Shankara too, in spite of the differences of emphasis and perspective that we find in their respective experiences. Krishna and the galaxy of saints and poets that have crowded the centuries right up to our own times. Our modern period throws up a trinity of its own—in the figures of Sri Ramkrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. Each of them has been an innovator, a creator and bears the stamp of true originality—and, yet, on sounding the depths of reality, each one has arrived at a perception of it, in terms of concrete experience, that is similar in its essential elements and largely corroborative.



Science sets great store by verification in its pursuit of knowledge but it restricts its investigation to the field of nature. Here the investigation extends to a much vaster and infinitely more complex field but the fact of verification of experience still obtains. It is impossible not to be struck by the profound implications of this situation.

It is very interesting to note here that the work done by New Physics in recent decades offers further and extremely striking corroborative evidence in this regard. The experience of reality arrived at by an inner intuitive process stands confirmed by the investigation of science pursuing its own distinctive method. This single fact holds in itself the seed of an entire future curve of knowledge and culture. Patterns of wholeness begin to emerge....

In the early years of the century, Sri Aurobindo had made a prophetic comment: "Reason and Science can only help by standardising, by fixing everything into an artificially arranged and mechanised unity of material life. A greater whole-being, whole-knowledge, whole-power is needed to weld all into a greater unity of whole-life."<sup>1</sup> Are we stepping into that phase of our growth?

What does this experience reveal to us of the essential nature of reality?

- That the Spirit, one and unitary and whole, is foundational.
- That Man and Nature are its creations. They are not two distinct entities trying to relate to each other—they are both expressions of a reality that is greater than them and which transcends them. In *that* alone can they meet.
- That the structure of the cosmos determines the structure of that which is microcosmic.
- This structure is dimensional: a hierarchy of levels within an organic whole, a

whole in a state of evolution, making manifest what lies latent.

- There exists a complex inter-relationship of levels with one another and all of them together with the whole that englobes them.

- The motion and evolution of such a complex structure is what constitutes or what is known as the flux of the universe.

- It is like a web—delicate, fine, resilient—created, sustained in existence and moved by a breath of Something that is none other than itself. It is self-existent, it is conscious, it is dynamic. It is blissful.

- It is the Sat-Chit-Ananda,<sup>2</sup> the supreme experience of an eternal Consciousness—eternal in its stasis and in its motion: two images that we need in order to seize it. In itself, it is neither: but our words reach not there. This Consciousness is dynamic, Force is inherent in it: it is not a thing apart. This Self-existence is inalienably possessed of Joy: source of all creativity, all sustenance, all motion. This is the abiding oft-repeated experience of reality that comes across to us over the centuries.

Traditionally, the attempt was made, with whatever success or limitation or failure, to work this experience out in life and to remould life in the light of it. Life, in all its diversity and all its wealth of many-sided detail, was made the field of this endeavour. It would be interesting to indicate briefly the practical implications of such an attempt, in terms of attitudes to adopt or processes to work out. These could be of great help to us.

1. In our dealing with our own selves, with others around us and with the totality of life and nature, it is on this central perception of reality that we must take our stand. That is, we must be aware that there is a deeper self-existent level of consciousness in all that is and which alone

can serve as the right basis for an effective communication and relationship with all.

2. This would mean that we must first discover that level of existence in ourselves and then reach out to all other existences on that level. All other ways of reaching out will be limited, partial and inconclusive. A relationship of unity can be achieved only at the level where unity exists as an essential and abiding quality. At levels of being where discreteness, division and fragmentation are operative, to try to achieve unity would be a vain and impractical chimera. It is something like sounding the depths of the ocean—the stillness and calm is in the profundities, on the surface is the foam and the breaking of the waves. The various yogic practices, known in India, are an aid in this direction.

We now begin to see how the modern science of Human Ecology can find a certain relationship with the experience of reality that goes by the name of Hinduism, but we see also the great differences that obtain. In the former case, there is an attempt to reach out to nature and thus create a more total environment for man. It is a 'horizontal' extension that takes place, touching only one level of being and existence. It is a linear process. In the latter, the experience of reality reveals that Spirit is *foundational* to both man and nature and It transcends them at the same time as It is present in them. It is only by a movement 'inward' that this Source can be reached and in It alone resides the possibility of a dynamic unity of the two. The movement is thus not horizontal and linear but 'depthward' and dimensional.

The future of the science of Human Ecology lies, it seems to us, in opening up those frontiers which border on the realm of consciousness. If it continues to operate only in the direction of environment and seeks unity on the basis of a man and nature equation, then the gains, at best, will be in the form of a temporary relief. A relief from the extreme alienation that a heavy urbanised style of living has brought upon us.

Such relief will prove to be short-lived – for the measures adopted touch only the surface of the problem and a deeper, fuller and more far-reaching perspective of man and total reality is not there.

The model which this science has adopted is that of the natural sciences. But, today, these natural sciences themselves are undergoing a very profound and radical transformation. We think of the findings of New Physics, which are creating such a stir in everyone's mind but have as yet not reached the point, in their own investigation, where they can put forward, with complete coherence, a new vision of reality and offer too a new method for further exploring such reality.

Therefore, the science of Human Ecology should not hesitate to push ahead and deepen its understanding of the real. We feel that it has a 'spiritual' destination of which it is yet unaware. It must go into the question of the nature of the real. In the measure that it does so, it will come closer to the experience embodied in Hinduism and find in it great enrichment.

We live truly in an astounding moment of time—full of the wonder and amazement that perhaps characterises these rare moments. To witness and live through a span of time when centuries of human experience come full circle—what does it signify? Whither are we going?—all together as the human race? A perspective of wholeness begins to emerge on the horizon.

Commonwealth  
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# Woman and the War

## *The Mother*

You have asked me what I think of the feminist movement and what will be the consequences of the present war for it.

One of the first effects of the war has certainly been to give quite a new aspect to the question. The futility of the perpetual oppositions between men and women was at once made clearly apparent, and behind the conflict of the sexes, only relating to exterior facts, the gravity of the circumstances allowed the discovery of the always existent, if not always outwardly manifested fact, of the real collaboration, of the true union of these two complementary halves of humanity.

Many men were surprised to see how easily women could replace them in most of the posts they occupied before, and to their surprise was added something of regret not to have found sooner a real partner of their work and their struggles in her whom more often they had only considered as an object of pleasure and distraction, or at best as the guardian of their hearth and mother of their children. Certainly woman is that and to be it well requires exceptional qualities, but she is not only that, as the present circumstances have amply proved.

In going to tend the wounded in the most difficult material conditions, actually under the enemy's fire, the so-called weak sex has proved that its physical energy and power of endurance were equal to those of man. But where, above all, women have given proof of exceptional gifts is in their organizing faculties. These faculties of administration were recognized in them long ago by the Brahmanic India of before the Mohammedan conquest. There is a popular adage there which says: "Property governed by

woman means prosperous property." But in the Occident Semitic thought allied to Roman legislation has influenced customs too deeply for women to have the opportunity of showing their capacity for organisation.

It is true that in France one frequently sees the woman absolute mistress of the administration of her house even from the pecuniary point of view, and the so proverbial riches of the French *petite bourgeoisie* proves that system has a good side. It was rare however to see the feminine faculties utilized to direct undertakings of great importance, and until now the confidential posts of public administration had always been closed to them. The present war has shown that in refusing the co-operation of women the governments deprived themselves of precious help. I will cite you an event as example.

A few months after the outbreak of war, when the Germans had almost entirely occupied the Belgian territory, the inhabitants of the invaded regions were in indescribable misery. Fortunately, thanks to the initiative of several rich American men and women, a Society was founded to supply the most urgent needs of the sorely tried populations. As the result of certain military operations a fairly large group of small villages were suddenly deprived of all food. Famine was imminent. The American Society sent a message to some similar English Societies asking that five vans of the most indispensable supplies should be dispatched immediately. These vans must reach their destination in three days. The men to whom this request was addressed replied that it was quite impossible to comply with it. Luckily a woman heard of the matter. It seemed terrible to her that in such tragic circumstances one could use the word

“impossible”. She belonged to a group of women who aided the wounded and sufferers of the war. Immediately they promised the American Society they would satisfy it and in three days the numerous obstacles were overcome though some of the difficulties, especially those concerning transport, seemed truly unsurmountable. A powerful organizing mind, an ardent will, had done the miracle: the provisions arrived in time and the dreadful misery of famine was thus avoided.

This is not to say that only woman’s exceptional qualities have been revealed by the present war. Her weaknesses, her faults, her pettiness have also been given the opportunity of display, and certainly if women wish to take the place they claim in the governing of nations they must progress much further in the mastery of self, the broadening of ideas and points of view, in intellectual suppleness and oblivion of their sentimental preferences in order to become worthy of the management of public affairs.

It is certain that purely masculine politics have given proof of incapacity; they have foundered too often in their search of strictly personal interest, and in their arbitrary and violent action. Doubtless women’s politics would bring about a tendency to disinterestedness and more humanitarian solutions. But unfortunately, in their present state, women in general are creatures of passion and enthusiastic partisanship: they lack the reasoning calm that purely intellectual activity gives; the latter is undoubtedly dangerous because hard and cold and pitiless, nevertheless it is unquestionably useful to master the overflow of sentiment which cannot hold a predominant place in the ruling of collective interests.

These faults which would be serious if the activity of women had to replace that of men, could form, on the contrary, by a collaboration of the two sexes, an element of compensation for the opposite faults of men. That would be the best means of leading them gradually to mutual perfecting. To reduce the woman’s part to solely interior and

domestic occupations, and the man’s part to exclusively exterior and social occupations, thus separating what should be united, would be to perpetuate the present sad state of things, from which both are equally suffering. It is in front of the highest duties and heaviest responsibilities that their respective qualities must unite in a close and confident solidarity.

Is it not time that this hostile attitude of the two sexes facing one another as irreconcilable adversaries should cease? A severe, a painful lesson is being given to the nations. On the ruins piled up now, new constructions more beautiful and more harmonious can be erected. It is no longer the moment for frail competitions and self-interested claims; all human beings, men or women, must associate in a common effort to become conscious of the highest ideal which asks to be realized and to work ardently for its realisation. The question to be solved, the real question is then not only that of a better utilization of their outer activities, but above all that of an inner spiritual growth. Without inner progress there is no possible outer progress.

Thus the problem of feminism, as all the problems of the world, comes back to a spiritual problem. For the spiritual reality is at the basis of all others; the divine world, the Dhammata of Buddhism, is the eternal foundation on which are built all the other worlds. In regard to this Supreme Reality all are equal, men and women, in rights and in duties; the only distinction which can exist in this domain being based on the sincerity and ardor of aspiration, on the constancy of the will. And it is in the recognition of this fundamental spiritual equality that can be found the only serious and lasting solution for this problem of the relation of the sexes. It is in this light that it must be placed, it is at this height that must be sought the focus of action and new life, around which will be constructed the future temple of humanity.

*Words of Long Ago*  
7 July 1916

# The Cosmic Spirit

*Sri Aurobindo*

I am a single Self all Nature fills.  
Immeasurable, unmoved the Witness sits:  
He is the silence brooding on her hills,  
The circling motion of her cosmic might.

I have broken the limits of embodied mind  
And am no more the figure of a soul.  
The burning galaxies are in me outlined;  
The universe is my stupendous whole.

My life is the life of village and continent,  
I am earth's agony and her throbs of bliss;  
I share all creatures' sorrow and content  
And feel the passage of every stab and kiss.

Impassive, I bear each act and thought and mood;  
Time traverses my hushed infinitude.

*'Collected Poems'*