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Values - Moral, Religious and Spiritual

Today the word 'values' is gaining importance especially in the field of education. But what do we mean by values or higher values? Do all values come under one head? Broadly speaking, values can be categorized into three types: moral, religious and spiritual. Frequently, the tendency is to confuse one with the other. Generally, moral laws have only a very relative value from the point of view of Truth. Besides they vary considerably according to country, climate and period.

"Morality is a part of the ordinary life; it is an attempt to govern the outward conduct by certain mental rules or to form the character by these rules in the image of a certain mental ideal. The spiritual life goes beyond the mind; it enters into the deeper consciousness of the Spirit and acts out of the truth of the Spirit..."

Sri Aurobindo, 'Letters on Yoga I', Pg. 137.

Morality lifts up one artificial standard contrary to the variety of life and the freedom of the spirit. It does not admit a variation within itself. All are to be moulded according to its single ideal pattern. But spiritual values work towards diversity in oneness and for perfection in that diversity. Moral values create something mental, fixed and limited. They are not of the Divine but human. They take for their basic element a fixed division into the good and the bad. These are relative values but made into absolutes. But we have no right to dispense with morality unless we submit ourselves to a law that is higher and much more rigorous than any moral law.

Religious values are generally based on tenets and rules of some sect or creed which claims to have found the way out of the bonds of the earth-consciousness into some beatific Beyond. Often it revolves around dogmas, rites, ceremonies and practices. They do attempt to modify nature but usually only on the surface. Whereas spiritual values aim at a change in consciousness, a change from the ordinary consciousness to a greater consciousness in which one finds one's true being and comes first into direct and living contact and then into union with the Divine.

As we can see, moral and religious values have been created by the human mind for an ordered structuring of society, to prevent evil or falsehood from getting out of hand. But to contain is not to eliminate. And to eliminate one has to go to the very root of the problem—that of the human consciousness which is based on ignorance and separateness. Religious values can be the first step towards spiritual values but not necessarily so. Religion as such is any concept of the world or the universe which is presented as the exclusive Truth in which one must have absolute faith, generally because this Truth is declared to be the result of a revelation.

But it is not in the mental consciousness that there can be a harmony and synthesis of different concepts. For this, it is necessary to rise above and find the idea behind the thought. It is in the Spirit that the integrality of approach can be found.

"The meaning of spirituality is a new and greater inner life of man founded in the consciousness of his true, his inmost, highest and largest self and spirit by which he receives the whole of existence as a progressive manifestation of the self in the universe and his own life as a field of a possible transformation in which its divine sense will be found, its potentialities highly evolved, the now imperfect forms changed into an image of the divine perfection, and an effort not only to see but to live out these greater possibilities of his being."

Sri Aurobindo, SABCL Vol. 9; Pg. 25.

Do we then choose the limited moral or religious values or try to inculcate spiritual values which will give to us the vastness and fullness and freedom that are inherently ours?

Editor

Prayer

The Mother

What are these powerful gods whose hour of manifestation upon earth has come, if not the varied and perfected modes of Thy infinite activity, O Thou Master of all things, Being and Non-Being and What is beyond, Marvellous Unknowable One, our sovereign Lord...?

What are these manifold brilliant intellectual activities, these countless sunbeams illumining, conceiving and fashioning all forms, if not one of the modes of being of Thy infinite Will, one of the means of Thy manifestation, O Thou Master of our destinies, sole unthinkable reality, sovereign Lord of all that is and all that is not yet....

And all these mental powers, all these vital energies, and all these material elements, what are they if not Thyself in Thy outermost form, Thy ultimate modes of expression, of realisation, O Thou whom we adore devotedly and who escapest us on every side even while penetrating, animating and guiding us, Thou whom we cannot understand or define or name, Thou whom we cannot seize or embrace or conceive, and who art yet realised in our smallest acts....

And all this enormous universe is only an atom of Thy eternal Will.

In the immensity of Thy effective Presence all things blossom!

Prayers and Meditations
2 August, 1914

A Preface on National Education

Sri Aurobindo

The necessity and unmixed good of universal education has become a fixed dogma to the modern intelligence, a thing held to be beyond dispute by any liberal mind or awakened national conscience, and whether the tenet be or not altogether beyond cavil, it may at any rate be presumed that it answers to a present and imperative need of the intellectual and vital effort of the race. But there is not quite so universal an agreement or common attainment to a reasoned or luminous idea on what education is or practically or ideally should be. Add to this uncertainty the demand—naturally insistent and clamorous with the awakening of the spirit of independence in a country like our own which is peculiarly circumstanced not only by the clash of the Asiatic and the European or occidental consciousness and the very different civilisations they have created and the enforced meeting of the English and the Indian mind and culture, but by a political subjection which has left the decisive shaping and supreme control of education in the hands of foreigners,—add the demand for a national type of education, and in the absence of clear ideas on the subject we are likely to enter, as we have in fact entered into an atmosphere of great and disconcerting confusion.

For if we do not know very clearly what education in general truly is or should be, we seem still less to know what we mean by national education. All that appears to be almost unanimously agreed on is that the teaching given in the existing schools and universities has been bad in kind and in addition denationalising, degrading and impoverishing to the national mind, soul and character because it is overshadowed by a foreign hand and foreign in aim, method, substance and spirit. But this purely negative agreement does not carry us very far: it does not tell us what in principle or practice we desire or ought to put in its place. There may be much virtue in an

epithet but to tag on the word 'national' to a school or college or even a Council or Board of Education, to put that into the hands of an indigenous agency, mostly of men trained in the very system we are denouncing, to reproduce that condemned system with certain differences, additions, subtractions, modifications of detail and curriculum, to tack on a technical side and think we have solved the problem does not really change anything. To be satisfied with a trick of this kind is to perform a somersault round our centre of intellectual gravity, land ourselves where we were before and think we have got into quite another country,—obviously a very unsatisfactory proceeding. The institutions that go by the new name may or may not be giving a better education than the others, but in what they are more national, is not altogether clear even to the most willingly sympathetic critical intelligence.

The problem indeed is one of surpassing difficulty and it is not easy to discover from what point of thought or of practice one has to begin, on what principle to create or on what lines to map out the new building. The conditions are intricate and the thing that is to be created in a way entirely new. We cannot be satisfied with a mere resuscitation of some past principle, method and system that may have happened to prevail at one time in India, however great it was or in consonance with our past civilisation and culture. That reversion would be a sterile and impossible effort hopelessly inadequate to the pressing demands of the present and the far greater demands of our future. On the other hand to take over the English, German or American school and university or some variation on them with a gloss of Indian colour is a course attractively facile and one that saves the need of thinking and of new experiment; but in that case

there is no call for this loud pother about nationalising education, all that is needed is a change of control, of the medium of instruction, of the frame and fitting of the curriculum and to some extent of the balance of subjects. I presume that it is something more profound, great and searching that we have in mind and that, whatever the difficulty of giving it shape, it is an education proper to the Indian soul and need and temperament and culture that we are in quest of, not indeed something faithful merely to the past, but to the developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming self-creation, to her eternal spirit. It is this that we have to get clear in our minds and for that we must penetrate down to fundamentals and make those firm before we can greatly execute. Otherwise nothing is easier than to start off on a false but specious cry or from an unsound starting-point and travel far away from the right path on a tangent that will lead us to no goal but only emptiness and failure.

But first let us clear out of the way or at least put in its proper place and light the preliminary disabling objection that there is and can be no meaning at all or none worth troubling about in the idea of a national education and that the very notion is the undesirable and unprofitable intrusion of a false and narrow patriotism into a field in which patriotism apart from the need of a training in good citizenship has no legitimate place. And for that one purpose no special kind or form of education is needed, since the training to good citizenship must be in all essentials the same whether in the East or the West, England or Germany or Japan or India. Mankind and its needs are the same everywhere and truth and knowledge are one and have no country; education too must be a thing universal and without nationality or borders. What, for an instance, could be meant by a national education in Science, and does it signify that we are to reject modern truth and modern method of science because they come to us from Europe, and go back to the imperfect scientific knowledge of classical India, exile Galileo and Newton and all that came after and teach only what was known to Bhaskara,

Aryabhatta and Varahamihira? Or how should the teaching of Sanskrit or the living indigenous tongues differ in kind and method from the teaching of Latin or the living modern tongues in Europe? Are we then to fetch back to the methods of 'Tols' of Nadiya or to the system, if we can find out what it was, practised in ancient Takshashila or Nalanda? At most what can be demanded is a larger place for the study of the past of our country, the replacement of English by the indigenous tongues as a medium and the relegation of the former to the position of a second language,—but it is possible to challenge the advisability even of these changes. After all we live in the twentieth century and cannot revive the India of Chandragupta or Akbar; we must keep abreast with the march of truth and knowledge, fit ourselves for existence under actual circumstances, and our education must be therefore up to date in form and substance and modern in life and spirit.

All these objections are only pertinent if directed against the travesty of the idea of national education which would make of it a means of an obscurantist retrogression to the past forms that were once a living frame of our culture but are now dead or dying things; but that is not the idea nor the endeavour. The living spirit of the demand for national education no more requires a return to the astronomy and mathematics of Bhaskara or the forms of the system of Nalanda than the living spirit of Swadeshi a return from railway and motor traction to the ancient chariot and the bullock-cart. There is no doubt plenty of retrogressive sentimentalism about and there have been some queer violences on common sense and reason and disconcerting freaks that prejudice the real issue, but these inconsequent streaks of fantasy give a false hue to the matter. It is the spirit, the living and vital issue that we have to do with, and there the question is not between modernism and antiquity, but between an imported civilisation and the greater possibilities of the Indian mind and nature, not between the present and the past, but between the present and the future. It is not a return to the fifth century but an initiation of the centuries to come, not a

reversion but a break forward away from a present artificial falsity to her own greater innate potentialities that is demanded by the soul, by the Shakti of India.

The argument against national education proceeds in the first place upon the lifeless academic notion that the subject, the acquiring of this or that kind of information is the whole or the central matter. But the acquiring of various kinds of information is only one and not the chief of the means and necessities of education: its central aim is the building of the powers of the human mind and spirit, it is the formation or, as I would prefer to view it, the evoking of knowledge and will and of the power to use knowledge, character, culture,—that at least if no more. And this distinction makes an enormous difference. It is true enough that if all we ask for is the acquisition of the information put at our disposal by science, it may be enough to take over the science of the West whether in an undigested whole or in carefully packed morsels. But the major question is not merely what science we learn, but what we shall do with our science and how too, acquiring the scientific mind and recovering the habit of scientific discovery—I leave aside the possibility of the Indian mentality working freely in its own nature discovering new methods or even giving a new turn to physical science—we shall relate it to other powers of the human mind and scientific knowledge to other knowledge more intimate to other and not less light-giving and power-giving parts of our intelligence and nature. And there the peculiar cast of the Indian mind, its psychological tradition, its ancestral capacity, turn, knowledge bring in cultural elements of a supreme importance. A language, Sanskrit or another, should be acquired by whatever method is most natural, efficient and stimulating to the mind and we need not cling there to any past or present manner of teaching: but the vital question is how we are to learn and make use of Sanskrit and the indigenous languages so as to get to the heart and intimate sense of our own culture and establish a vivid

continuity between the still living power of our past and the yet uncreated power of our future, and how we are to learn and use English or any other foreign tongue so as to know helpfully the life, ideas and culture of other countries and establish our right relations with the world around us. This is the aim and principle of a true national education, not, certainly, to ignore modern truth and knowledge, but to take our foundation on our own being, our own mind, our own spirit.

The second ground openly or tacitly taken by the hostile argument is that modern, that is to say, European civilisation is the thing that we have to acquire and fit ourselves for, so only can we live and prosper and it is this that our education must do for us. The idea of national education challenges the sufficiency of this assumption. Europe built up her ancient culture on a foundation largely taken from the East, from Egypt, Chaldea, Phoenicia, India, but turned in a new direction and another life-idea by the native spirit and temperament, mind and social genius of Greece and Rome, lost and then recovered it, in part from the Arabs with fresh borrowings from the near East and from India and more widely by the Renaissance, but then too gave it a new turn and direction proper to the native spirit and temperament, mind and social genius of the Teutonic, and the Latin, the Celtic and Slav races. It is the civilisation so created that has long offered itself as the last and imperative word of the mind of humanity, but the nations of Asia are not bound so to accept it, and will do better, taking over in their turn whatever new knowledge or just ideas Europe has to offer, to assimilate them to their own knowledge and culture, their own native temperament and spirit, mind and social genius and out of that create the civilisation of the future. The scientific, rationalistic, industrial, pseudo-democratic civilisation of the West is now in process of dissolution and it would be a lunatic absurdity for us at this moment to build blindly on that sinking foundation. When the most advanced minds of the occident are beginning to turn in this red evening of the West for the hope of a new

and more spiritual civilisation to the genius of Asia, if would be strange if we could think of nothing better than to cast away our own self and potentialities and put our trust in the dissolving and moribund past of Europe.

And, finally, the objection grounds itself on the implicit idea that the mind of man is the same everywhere and can everywhere be passed through the same machine and uniformly constructed to order. That is an old and effete superstition of the reason which it is time now to renounce. For within the universal mind and soul of humanity is the mind and soul of the individual with its infinite variation, its commonness and its uniqueness, and between them there stands an intermediate power, the mind of a nation, the soul of a people. And of all these three education must take account if it is to be, not a machine-made fabric, but a true building or a living evocation of the powers of the mind and spirit of the human being.

These preliminary objections made to the very idea of national education and, incidentally, the misconceptions they oppose once out of the way, we have still to formulate more positively what the idea means to us, the principle and the form that national education must take in India, the thing to be achieved and the method and turn to be given to the endeavour. It is here that the real difficulty begins because we have for a long time, not only in education but in almost all things, in our whole cultural life, lost hold of the national spirit and idea and there has been as yet no effort of clear, sound and deep thinking or seeing which would enable us to recover it and therefore no clear agreement or even clear difference of opinion on essentials and accessories. At the most we have been satisfied with a strong sentiment and a general but shapeless idea and enthusiasm corresponding to the sentiment and have given to it in the form whatever haphazard application chanced to be agreeable to our intellectual associations, habits or caprices. The result has been no tangible or enduring success, but rather a maximum of confusion and failure. The first thing needed is to make clear to our own minds what the national spirit, temperament, idea, need demands of

us through education and apply it in its right harmony to all the different elements of the problem. Only after that is done can we really hope with some confidence and chance of utility and success to replace the present false, empty and mechanical education by something better than a poor and futile chaos or a new mechanical falsity, by a real living and creative upbringing of the Indian manhood of the future.

But first it is necessary to disengage from all ambiguities what we understand by a true education, its essential sense, its fundamental aim and significance. For we can then be sure of our beginnings and proceed securely to fix the just place and whole bearing of the epithet we seek to attach to the word. I must be sure what education itself is or should be before I can be sure what a national education is or should be. Let us begin then with our initial statement, as to which I think there can be no great dispute that there are three things which have to be taken into account in a true and living education, the man, the individual in his commonness and in his uniqueness, the nation or people and universal humanity. It follows that that alone will be a true and living education which helps to bring out to full advantage, makes ready for the full purpose and scope of human life all that is in the individual man, and which at the same time helps him to enter into his right relation with the life, mind and soul of the people to which he belongs and with that great total life, mind and soul of humanity of which he himself is a unit and his people or nation a living, a separate and yet inseparable member. It is by considering the whole question in the light of this large and entire principle that we can best arrive at a clear idea of what we would have our education to be and what we shall strive to accomplish by a national education. Most is this largeness of view and foundation needed here and now in India, the whole energy of whose life purpose must be at this critical turning of her destinies directed to her one great need, to find and rebuild her true self in individual and in people and to take again, thus repossessed of her inner greatness, her due and natural portion and station in the life of the human race.

There are however very different conceptions possible of man and his life, of the nation and its life and of humanity and the life of the human race, and our idea and endeavour in education may well vary considerably according to that difference. India has always had her own peculiar conception and vision of these things and we must see whether it is not really, as it is likely to be, that which will be or ought to be at the very root of our education and the one thing that will give it its truly national character. Man has not been seen by the thought of India as a living body developed by physical Nature which has evolved certain vital propensities, an ego, mind and a reason, an animal of the genus *homo* and in our case of the species *homo indicus*, whose whole life and education must be turned towards a satisfaction of these propensities under the government of a trained mind and reason and for the best advantage of the personal and the national ego. It has not been either the turn of her mind to regard man pre-eminently as a reasoning animal, or let us say, widening the familiar definition, a thinking, feeling and willing natural existence, a mental son of physical Nature, and his education as a culture of the mental capacities, or to define him as a political, social and economic being and his education as a training that will fit him to be an efficient, productive and well disciplined member of the society and the State. All these are no doubt aspects of the human being and she has given them a considerable prominence subject to her large vision, but they are outward things, parts of the instrumentation of his mind, life and action, not the whole or the real man.

India has seen always in man the individual a soul, a portion of the Divinity enwrapped in mind and body, a conscious manifestation in Nature of the universal self and spirit. Always she has distinguished and cultivated in him a mental, an intellectual, an ethical, dynamic and practical, an aesthetic and hedonistic, a vital and physical being, but all these have been seen as powers of a soul that manifests through them and grows with their growth, and yet they are not all the soul, because at the summit of its ascent it arises to something greater than them all, into a spiritual being, and it is in this that she has found the

supreme manifestation of the soul of man and his ultimate divine manhood, his *paramārtha* and highest *purushārtha*. And similarly India has not understood by the nation or people an organised State or an armed and efficient community well prepared for the struggle of life and putting all at the service of the national ego,—that is only the disguise of iron armour which masks and encumbers the national Purusha,—but a great communal soul and life that has appeared in the whole and has manifested a nature of its own and a law of that nature, a Swabhāva and Swadharma, and embodied it in its intellectual, aesthetic, ethical, dynamic, social and political forms and culture. And equally then our cultural conception of humanity must be in accordance with her ancient vision of the universal manifesting in the human race, evolving through life and mind but with a high ultimate spiritual aim,—it must be the idea of the spirit, the soul of humanity advancing through struggle and concert towards oneness, increasing its experience and maintaining a needed diversity through the varied culture and life motives of its many peoples, searching for perfection through the development of the powers of the individual and his progress towards a diviner being and life, but feeling out too though more slowly after a similar perfectibility in the life of the race. It may be disputed whether this is a true account of the human or the national being, but if it is once admitted as a true description, then it should be clear that the only true education will be that which will be an instrument for this real working of the spirit in the mind and body of the individual and the nation. That is the principle on which we must build, that the central motive and the guiding ideal. It must be an education that for the individual will make its one central object the growth of the soul and its powers and possibilities, for the nation will keep first in view the preservation, strengthening and enrichment of the nation-soul and its Dharma and raise both into powers of the life and ascending mind and soul of humanity. And at no time will it lose sight of man's highest object, the awakening and development of his spiritual being.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother
On Education

Conception of Education

in Indian Tradition and Culture and its Contemporary Relevance

Kireet Joshi

Introductory Questions:

At the outset, let us ask the question as to why we need to explore the concept of education in the Ancient Indian Tradition, and why we want to ascertain the relevance of that concept to the present time. Justification for this exploration could arise if we ask a further question as to whether our present system of education is relevant to our own times, and if we are prepared to undertake a critique of the present system.

Do We Need to Change the Present System of Education?

There is a view that the present system of education is, after all, quite reasonable and what we need is to make it a little more sophisticated, much more polished, with some modifications here and there like vocationalisation and job-orientation, and what we further need is to ensure accountability of teachers and educational institutions. It has even been prominently asked, in defence of the present system, if we ourselves are not the products of that system and whether we are not, more or less, quite well-equipped to deal with our responsibilities.

There is, on the other hand, a more progressive view, which does not admit that we, the products of the system of education, are what we ought to be, that a better system could have made of us better equipped, in terms of both personality and skills, and capable of meeting the demands and challenges of our times. The spectrum of this view is quite wide, and at one end, it advocates some major reforms, and at the

other end, it advocates a number of radical reforms. In any case, this view argues that education must aim at the integral development of personality and that we need to have complete education for the complete human being. Analysing the concept of the integral development of the personality, it pleads for the harmonisation of the physical, vital and mental personality. It also recognises that the mental personality itself requires harmonisation of the rational, the ethical and the aesthetic. Two further propositions are also added: first, that the personality develops best when the educational atmosphere provides to every student a good deal of freedom;—freedom in pursuing inner inclinations, freedom in regulating pace of progress, and freedom in determining directions of education; and secondly, that education should be so child-centred that it not only puts the child in the centre of the classroom but also in the centre of the society itself.

Implications of these contentions are momentous. They require major changes in the attitudes of teachers, parents and educational administrators, even of the students themselves. They demand application of new methodologies of education and transformations in the classroom situation, teaching-learning materials and in the established routine of the educational institutions; they also demand radical reviews of curricula, syllabi and the current examination system.

Closely connected with these demands, life-long education is also being underlined.

Correspondingly, great expansion of non-formal education and open system of education is also being advocated. Finally, the concept of learning society is being increasingly proposed as the right setting for all the innovations and reforms of education.

Difficulties:

The major difficulty in implementing these important proposals is threefold: (i) as noted above, these reforms call for great changes in the attitudes among all the partners of education and these changes are not at all easy and facile; (ii) they also imply difficult structural changes, which need to be conceived, designed and implemented on a sustainable basis and there are no agencies that could accomplish these tasks; and (iii) they require not only major funding but also prudent planning, prioritisation and delicate balancing between the act of modifying or dismantling the old and that of creation of the new.

Need For Bolder Reforms:

It is in the context of this situation that serious and sincere educationists feel hesitant to make some further and bolder proposals, particularly in the context of the Indian system of education,—the proposals which are indispensable and which can be postponed only at the peril of risking loss of cultural identity and even of crippling the very soul of India.

Let us examine this aspect in some detail.

We are all aware that the current Indian system of education was designed by the Britishers for their narrower purposes and for promoting in our country the Western view of India,—her past and her period of decline or backwardness and the cure by which they thought India could occupy some place among those countries, which could tolerably be described as 'civilised'.

Unfortunately, what the Britishers designed has hardly been altered even after our attainment of Independence, and whatever changes have occurred can only be regarded as cosmetic in character. Worst of all, those institutions which had come up under the influence of the nationalist movement, came to be closed down or they were obliged to fall in line with the 'normal' system of education, designed by the Britishers. And the financial allocations made to the education departments were distributed among the increasingly multiplying number of institutions belonging to the 'normal' pattern. Free India's money was thus pumped more and more vigorously to spread in India on a vast scale that very system which the nationalist leaders had dreamt to demolish once Independence was won. This situation is continuing with increasing vigour, and unless we bestir ourselves vehemently to think afresh, and design afresh, one does not see how else we shall be able to redress the harm that we are inflicting on generations upon generations and to the cause of Indian renaissance.

Free India's Faliure:

It is noteworthy that the greatest representatives of the Indian renaissance, from Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati to Sri Aurobindo, had perceived in the ancient Indian system of education such an uplifting and inspiring model that they had all advocated for free India a national system of education rooted in the ancient Indian conception of education, which would, at the same time, cater to the ideals of internationalism and universality. They had all dreamt of free India where students would relive the presence and guidance of the wise and benign and courageous Rishis who had sown in the soil of India the seeds of perennial inspiration. They wanted to recreate sanctuaries of living souls who could be fostered by teachers who would,

like Vashistha and Vishwamitra, Vamadeva and Bhardwaj, remain unfettered by dogma or any restraining force of limitation or obscurantism. They wanted perfect harmony between the human and the natural, between the individual and the universal, between the mundane and the supramundane. Their message was clear that the ancient Indian concept of education should not only be revisited by free India but should also be resurrected, renovated and perfected by the aid of all that is modern and useful, by all that is Indian and universal.

Let Us Do the Needful:

There is no point in crying over the fact that free India has so far failed in giving shape to the dreams and aspirations of these great pioneers. But is it not overdue that we try to understand them, get into the heart of the ancient Indian system of education, evaluate it in the light of the needs of today and tomorrow and design for our children something new that will give to them the best fruits of their heritage and also the best fruits of modern advancement?

II

Three Characteristics of the Ancient Indian Concept of Education:

If we study the Vedas and the Upanishads, and the related literature from where we can get some glimpses of the ancient Indian concept of education, we shall find that there were three special characteristics of that conception. The first characteristic stresses the fact that the educational process had resulted from the understanding of the fullness of life, its own methods of instruction and how these methods can be employed by teachers to secure acceleration of progress of students. The second characteristic is related to the astonishing fund of integral knowledge that could serve as the foundation of the contents of education. And the third emerges from the

ancient pursuit of individual and collective perfectibility in the light of their laborious experiments related to the human potentialities.

Let us briefly elucidate them.

Education and Life—Methods of Education—Role of Teachers and Students:

Education was conceived as something springing from life itself, and it was conceived as a part of the organisation of life and it was designed to relate education with life and its highest possible fulfilment.

It was observed that life itself is the great teacher of life, that life which is in its outer movement a series of shocks of meeting between individuals and circumstances, has in its inner heart a secret method of progression from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality. It was further observed that this process of life can be systematically organised and methods can be built by which the intended progression can be accelerated. Accordingly, education came to be conceived as a methodised organisation of life in which threads of progression are so woven that each individual can be aided to bring about judicious acceleration of the rate of his growth and development.

In this conception, the home of the teacher represented the fabric of life in which educational process was subtly and methodically intertwined in such a way that all life was education and all educational activities throbbed with life-experience.

The home of the teacher, which came to be called the *āshrama* or *gurukula*, was centred on students, and each student received individual attention. The teacher looked upon his task as that of an observer, as a helper, as a guide,—not as that of a

taskmaster. He taught best, not so much through instruction, as through the example of his wisdom and character and through his personal and intimate contact with the soul of each student. He had no rigid or uniform methods; but he applied every possible method in a varying manner in regard to every student. For Satyakama, the teacher would apply the simple method of learning through the activities connected with grazing the cattle; for Shvetaketu, the teacher would apply the method of meaningful questioning and demonstration through apt examples; Pippalada asked his pupils to dwell for one year in holiness and faith and askesis before they could put their questions; and Bhrigu was asked by his father and the teacher, Varuna, to concentrate himself in thought and discover the truth of Matter, of Life, of Mind, and of the Supermind and of the Bliss by successive and higher and higher meditations. Often the teacher communicated through silence so as to destroy the doubts in the minds of the pupils; the teacher taught students in groups but also individually; the teacher, in fact, utilised every incident of life for imparting knowledge and experience.

The student was looked upon as a seeker, not to be silenced by any dogmatic answers but to be uplifted in higher processes of thought, meditation and direct experience or realisation. In the educational process, student's enthusiasm, *utsāha*, was of utmost importance. Swadhyaya was the cornerstone of the learning process. Nothing was imposed upon the student except the willing acceptance of the discipline. The pupil was the *brahmācharin*, devoted to self-control and askesis; he was asked to obey the command of the teacher, knowing very well that the teacher asked nothing arbitrary and only laid down the path by which self-perfection can be attained. The teacher was the Rishi who knew the inmost

needs of the growth of the soul of the student, and he had the knowledge and the power to place each student on the right road to perfection. It was left to the student to walk or run on that road, according to his ability, inclination and rate of progression.

The teacher and the pupil lived a joint life, a life of joint prayer, of joint endeavour, of joint conquest of knowledge. Just as the student sought the teacher, even so, the teacher, too, sought the student. As a teacher in the Taittiriya Upanishad announces: "May the Brahmacharins come unto me. From here and there, may the Brahmacharins come unto me."

An important element in the organisation of education was that of Time, *kāla*. The teacher knew that everything in life has a rhythm of germination and flowering, and every process of life has a rhythm of development, which can be measured in terms of time. The teacher, therefore, combined the methods that required patience with those that ensured perfection. He knew how the student can be enabled to arrive at progression, neither too quickly nor too slowly, but by slow building up of foundation and rapid process of the blossoming of the faculties. Each student was, therefore, helped to obtain judicious rate of progression and judicious rate of acceleration.

The most important element in the educational process was the illumined condition of the teacher, —his state of knowledge, his command over different domains of life, his ripe experience, his wisdom, his realisation.

This brings us to the second characteristic of the ancient Indian concept of education.

Integral Knowledge—Importance of the Intellect—Exploration and Realisation of the Superconscious:

As we study the Vedas and the Upanishads, we are struck by the profundity and loftiness of the knowledge that the Rishis had attained. The Vedas and the Upanishads can rightly be regarded as the records of 'integral knowledge',—the synthesis of God-knowledge, self-knowledge and world-knowledge. The Rishis, the composers of these great compositions, had arrived at the secret methods of attaining deeper and higher states of consciousness; and they had formulated various forms of concentration, which served as the key to knowledge. They had discovered that what the world revealed to us in response to our seeking and questioning depended on the state of sincerity, of impartiality, of complete identity between the subject and the object of knowledge. Thus they knew the secret of intuition, revelation, inspiration and discrimination. But they knew very well also the knowledge by separative means of knowledge, knowledge that can be attained by senses, and the knowledge that can be obtained by reasoning and intellectual thought.

The famous Gayatri mantra of Vishwamitra singles out one faculty of the human being as of singular importance, without whose cultivation and concentration, the best or the highest cannot be attained. This is the faculty of *dhi*, the pure intellect. This mantra indicates that it is only when the intellect can be trained in the system of meditation and contemplation that the major step in the process of knowledge can be taken. This Gayatri mantra also indicates that Vishwamitra had discovered the highest domain of luminous knowledge, which is symbolised as Savitri. He had further discovered that intellect can be so trained that it can succeed in concentrating upon that higher Light. Finally, it indicates that the intellect can be properly directed when it joins itself with Savitri, with the most beautiful form of creative Light.

The Vedas and the Upanishads abound with thousands of statements and indications that the world can best be known when its source is known and only when its relationship with the individuals is known,—individuals who take it as a field of their experience, their enjoyment, their bondage and their liberation. The modern psychologist takes great pride in his discovery of the unconscious and the subconscious, but the Rishi, the Vedic teacher, had discovered even the inconscient that which was wrapped darkly in the shroud of darkness. He had discovered also how the inconscient awakens and becomes the subconscious and how the subconscious and the conscient are related to each other. He had also the assured knowledge of the deeper and the deepest domains of consciousness that lie behind (not below) the outer layers of consciousness. He had also scaled the heights of the superconscient, and not stopping anywhere, he had declared that as one rises the ladder higher and higher, more and more becomes clear as to what still remains to be known. The Vedic Rishi declares his own state of knowledge where all darkness gets shattered and where his soul, like the falcon, liberates itself from the hundred chains of iron and soars above in the wide sky of consciousness in liberation, to the unmixed truth and to the unmixed bliss. The Vedic Rishi tells of the secret of immortality and of the great path by which that secret can be attained by every human being.

The ancient Indian concept of education had its foundations in the Vedic and the Upanishadic integral knowledge. Its aim was to transmit to the new generations this knowledge and to develop it further by means of fresh quest and experimentation.

Human Potentialities and Pursuit of Individual and Collective Perfectibility:

The third characteristic of the ancient

concept of education was its emphasis on harmonisation of different aspects of personality so that the physical being of the individual is made a strong base for sustaining the growth and perfection of the vital, mental, and higher aspects of personality. The Taittiriya Upanishad speaks of five sheaths in the human being, all of which need to be integrated,—*annamaya*, the physical, *prānamaya*, the vital, *manomaya*, the mental, *vijnānamaya*, the supramental, and *ānandamaya*, the bliss that is conscious and self-existent. The Vedic and the Upanishadic Rishis had made a thorough study of the problem of integration and come to the conclusion that the mental being, *manomaya*, is the leader of the physical and the vital,—*prāna sharira netā*, and that it is by developing the mental powers that the vital and the physical can be controlled and mastered, although the real and lasting integration can come about only when one develops higher degrees of consciousness which transcend the mental consciousness.

According to the ancient Indian psychology, the physical, the vital, and the mental can be uplifted to their higher perfection when the Spirit is made to manifest its four powers, the power of wisdom, the power of heroism, the power of harmony and the power of skill in works. The Purusha Sukta of the Rigveda makes it clear that these four powers are all spiritual in character and that it is when all of them are fully manifested that the deepest divinity can become operative in our dynamic life. At the same time, the concept of *swabhāva* and *swadharma* was developed on this basis, a full exposition of which we get in the Bhagavadgita. Each individual has, according to this system of knowledge, a predominant force which gives rise to a special tendency in the being, either of wisdom or of heroism or of harmony or of skill. This predominant tendency is what

is called *swabhāva* and each individual needs to be given the freedom to develop on the lines of one's own *swabhāva*. The Indian system of education made a special provision so that each *swabhāva* receives the necessary aid and framework of development as also the system of culture and the system of developing those qualities which can ultimately foster and nourish the totality of the personality. It was a later corruption of this great psychological principle of *swabhāva* that led to the development of caste system, where *swabhāva* was the least to be considered and its inner truth was sacrificed in favour of the system of determination by birth and system of privileges and handicaps—a parody of the ancient insights of profound psychology.

Nonetheless, the ancient system of education in India, in its peak period, produced amazing results in terms of development of faculties and capacities, and their integration, a supreme example of which is to be found in the personality of Sri Krishna who was at once a spiritual teacher, a heroic warrior, a great harmoniser, and skilful worker, who could excel in the task of a charioteer in the field of Kurukshetra. If we consider the spiritual history of India and also its history of dynamic activities that built up great edifices of mathematics and natural sciences, medical sciences, numberless philosophies, teeming *dharmashāstras*, profusion of literature, art and architecture, and powerful administration and system of governance, we shall find that these great achievements were traceable to the ancient system of education. This system, though spiritual in character, did not reject the life on earth but laid it down that the higher achievements are to be attained in the life of the earth,—here itself, *iha eva*.

This system put forward the conception of *shreshtha*, and pointed out various qualities

that we should expect in the ideal personality. This conception was emphasised because it was consciously recognised that people tend to follow the best and distribution of the best qualities among the people at large can be effected only by encouraging and fostering the best.¹

In the heart of the *shreshtha*, these qualities blossomed: benevolence, love, compassion, altruism, long suffering, liberality, kindness and patience; in his character, the qualities of courage, heroism, energy, loyalty, continence, truth, honour, justice, faith, obedience, and reverence. These qualities included also a fine modesty and yet noble pride, and power to govern and direct.

The *shreshtha* was required to develop in his mind wisdom and intelligence and love of learning, openness to poetry, art and beauty, and dedicated capacity and skill in works. In his inner life, he had the urge to seek after the highest and nourish the spiritual turn. In his social relations and conduct, he was strict in his observance of all social responsibilities as father, son, husband, brother, kinsman, friend, ruler, master or servant, prince or warrior, or worker, king or sage. *Shreshtha*, the best, was an ideal seeker of the spirit endowed with robust rationality, both spirit-wise and world-wise, nobility, and devotion to *dharma*. He was tolerant of life's difficulties and human weaknesses, but arduous and self-disciplined.

The ancient system of education at once indulged and controlled man's nature, it fitted him for his social role, it stamped on his mind the generous ideal of an accomplished humanity, refined, harmonious in all capacities and noble in all its endeavours; and above all, it placed before him the theory and practice of Yoga, the theory and practice of a higher change, and it familiarised him with the concept of a spiritual existence and encouraged in him hunger for the divine and infinite.

The scope of the ancient system of education was comprehensive; it rejected no discipline of knowledge, no means of expression,—literary or artistic,—no craft, and technology that could make for best utility of matter and substance. The Indian tradition speaks of sixty four sciences and arts, and it catered to the education of women in such a liberal way that we still speak of great examples of Lopamudra, Gargi, and Maitreyi. In the courses of study, apart from the study of the Veda, which was in itself a great science and art of living, emphasis was laid on comprehensive training of all that could equip each one for the role that was suitable to each individual on the lines of *swabhāva* and *swadharma*. Study of healthcare and Ayurveda was also an important part of the programme of study. In course of time, six Vedangas had developed as also four Upavedas and a number of other sciences and *shāstras*. With the development of Buddhism, a different system of education developed which laid great emphasis on practices of asceticism, rules of *dharma* and studies of philosophy, medicine and other sciences. This had also effect on the orthodox system of education, and in due course of time, different systems of education developed. But the history of this development does not concern us here.

Image of the Ancient Indian System of Education:

Of the ancient Indian system of education that flourished for a considerable period of time, we have in our mind an inspiring image as it is described in a few pages of the Upanishads. This image has been presented to us by Sri Aurobindo in the following words:

“The sages sitting in their groves ready to test and teach the comers, princes and learned Brahmins and great landed nobles going about in search of knowledge, the king's son in his chariot and the illegitimate son of the servant-

girl, seeking any man who might carry in himself the thought of light and the word of revelation, the typical figures and personalities, Janaka and the subtle mind of Ajatshatru, Raikwa of the cart, Yajnavalkya militant for truth, calm and ironic, taking to himself with both hands without attachment worldly possessions and spiritual riches and casting at last all his wealth behind to wander forth as a houseless ascetic, Krishna son of Devaki who heard a single word of the Rishi Ghora and knew at once the Eternal, the Ashramas, the courts of kings who were also spiritual discoverers and thinkers, the great sacrificial assemblies, where the sages met and compared their knowledge."

Sri Aurobindo:
The Foundations of Indian Culture,
 Centenary Edition, p. 280

III

Question of Relevance:

It is not possible to go into greater details and delineate a more precise and comprehensive description of the ancient Indian conception of education. But while considering the question of the relevance of this concept to the needs and demands of our own times, we should distinguish between the essence and outer forms in which that concept was made operative in the ancient times. It is evident that we have to concentrate on essence rather than on outer forms.

Ideal Teachers:

In the first place, it is not easy to find in our current times Rishis like Vashishtha and Vishwamitra and Yajnavalkya around whom the ancient system was built. But still, we can make use of the ideal and consider as to how that ideal can be brought nearer to actuality and what conditions of atmosphere, conception, vision, and equipment would be necessary to

create among our teachers a new aspiration to embody in themselves those qualities and concerns which dominated the ideal teachers of that antiquity. It is not entirely impossible to build up a new system of teachers' training through which new roles of teachers can be visualised and imparted to the coming generations of teachers.

That the task of the teacher is not primarily to teach but to observe the students and to guide them on the proper lines which are suitable to their potentialities, inclinations and capacities can be emphasised. That the teacher's instruments are not confined only to methods of instruction but include also the example of the inner character of the teacher and his capacity to enter into the depths of students' inner souls can also be stressed. That the teacher must concentrate and embody vast and true knowledge and continue to learn more and more can also be underlined. In any case, the country can take a major decision to create such conditions where the image of the ideal teacher is made vividly visible, so that we can have in the coming decades a growing number of teachers who can approximate in their qualities and in their character as also in their knowledge and skills to the ideal teacher of our ancient times.

This we should strive to do, not only to maintain our continuity of cultural development but also because the ancient Indian pedagogy was extremely sound, and India will stand to gain if that pedagogy can be brought back to life, and can be further enriched by applications of the results of various progressive educational experiments which have been conducted in India and in different parts of the world during the last two centuries.

Child-Centred Education—Integral Education on the Lines of Swabhava and Swadharma:

Modern emphasis on child-centred education is consonant with the care that was bestowed upon the child and the *brahmācharin* in the home of the teacher in our ancient system. And there is no doubt that the more will this emphasis be translated into practice, the more will our modern system begin to resemble our ancient system in spirit, although not in outer form.

Among the idea-forces which have powerfully emerged in the modern world and which will determine the future, there are two which will stand out for the universal acceptance. The first among these is the conception of the right of all individuals as members of the society to the full life and the full development of which they are individually capable. No ideal will persist which will allow an arrangement by which certain classes of society should arrogate development and full social fruition to themselves while assigning a bare and barren function of service to others. And the second idea is that of individualism, which proclaims that the individual is not merely a social unit, that he is not merely a member of the human pack, but he is something in himself, a soul, a being, who has to fulfil his own individual truth and law as well as his natural or assigned part in the truth and the law of collective existence. The individual thus demands freedom, space, initiative for his soul, for his nature, for his *swabhāva* and *swadharma*, to use the Indian terms. These two ideas together are bound to force contemporary system of education to undergo such a radical change that the ideal of the integral development of personality is given highest importance and, considering that the concepts of integral personality are getting increasingly enriched under the stress of modern search of the inner soul, the ancient Indian concept of education, in which integration of human personality was sought to be effected by the fourfold powers of the soul will be found directly relevant and useful.

It is increasingly recognised that the human beings of the present day are so acutely torn by the inherent conflicts between the rational, the ethical and the aesthetic that they are obliged to look for something else, something higher than the rational and the pragmatic, something spiritual and much more truly effective in solving the problems of life.

It is often contended that the Indian system of education had for long been instrumental in sustaining the pernicious caste system and therefore, in the new atmosphere where casteless and classless society is being envisaged, the Indian system will be found to be entirely irrelevant. But this is a misreading of Indian history, and it commits the error of attributing what happened at one stage during the period of decline to the entire long history of Indian education. There was in the early times of Indian history, a system of four *varnas*, but this system was quite different from its degenerated and distorted caricature that the later caste system represents. In any case, without going into disputes regarding the ancient *chaturvarnya* and the later caste system, two things can be safely stated that the individual develops best when he develops on the lines of inherent propensities, potentialities, capacities and predominant interests; and secondly, that the individual develops perfection only when all the potentialities are developed and integrated into a harmony. This is now being increasingly acknowledged in the modern educational psychology, and this was already acknowledged and practised to a greater or a lesser degree in the ancient system of education. The Indian educational theory and practice laid special emphasis on *swabhāva* and *swadharma* and on the idea of fourfold personality which can be perfected by developing the individual soul, conceived not as an ego but as a harmonious entity which has its own uniqueness and which yet lives by mutuality and harmony with the totality. This

theory and practice will be found most relevant to the task of rebuilding a new system of education.

Teacher Education:

It is also increasingly recognised that corresponding to the aim of the integral development of personality, the teacher also must have a personality that is very well developed and integrated. Our present system of teacher education is not only superficial but also mechanical and uninspiring. The time that we have allotted to the programme of teacher education, which practically comes to eight months, is hopelessly inadequate, and the wiser counsel that we are now hearing in our country is that we should institute an integrated course of teacher education, which can extend over four to five years. This wise counsel seems destined to succeed, and we shall, therefore, be in a better position to design a comprehensive programme of teachers' education. In that design, all the valuable aspects of the ancient concepts of education and the ancient concept of the role of the teacher will find some kind of rebirth and renewal.

Environment:

It is often contended that one of the most salutary aspects of the ancient Indian system of education was the setting that was provided to the Gurukula, —the setting of a forest, which was remote from the hustle and bustle of worldly life. It is, however, argued that this condition is hardly feasible in our times and this reduces the relevance of the ancient system. The argument has some force, although it must be stressed that a large number of universities which have come to be developed in India after independence have been provided with beautiful settings, but unfortunately, many of them have been ruined by human misuse. Many private schools are also being developed in our country in beautiful settings. In any case, it is true that with the

development of modern media, the isolation which was sought for the educational institutions in the ancient times has now become almost impossible. But these practical difficulties do not contradict the truth that the educational institution must be set up in such a beautiful environment that the harmony between human being and Nature can become a part of the organisation of life and, therefore, a powerful medium of education. If this truth is kept in view, it will serve a great purpose when our country will be required to build increasing number of educational institutions, even in remote villages and groups of hamlets. The importance of environment, of surroundings full of vegetation, flowers and fruits, can never be underestimated, and the fact that our ancient system of education had underlined this important aspect will remain a permanent contribution to the higher causes of civilisation.

Contemporary Crisis —Value-Education— Spiritual Education:

It is important to note that there is an increasing awareness both in India and the world that the contemporary crisis is fundamentally the crisis of the disbalancement, of an exaggerated development of the outer structures and organisations and means of physical and vital satisfactions, on the one hand, and the neglect of the ethical and spiritual dimensions of human life, on the other. One, therefore, hears of the crisis of character, crisis of values and crisis of spiritual evolution. Gripped as we are in this crisis, we are bound to look for the knowledge of ethics and spirituality, of values and of the knowledge that can bridge the gulf between the life of matter and the life of spirit. In the West, increasing number of leaders are now speaking of return to basics, and in India we have begun to conceive of programmes of value-education. This subject has not yet received the attention that it deserves, but there is no doubt that under the pressure of circumstances or of our

enlightened foresight, when we shall explore this subject, we are bound to raise three important questions, helpful answers of which will largely be found in our ancient Indian concept of education.

Meaning of Values:

The first question will be related to the meaning of values, particularly when they are not to be restricted only to the domain of morality but will also expand to the domain of aesthetics, rationality, and even to the domain of supra-rationality. This question will become complex when we come to consider values of physical education, vital education, and mental education in the context of integral development of the personality and of the perfectibility of the individual and the collectivity.

Science and Values:

The second question will be related to science and values, particularly when humanity is awakening to the necessity of directing scientific knowledge towards the goal of higher welfare of humanity. This question will again become complex when we examine the claim of scientific knowledge that knowledge by its very nature has to be scientific and that the knowledge of values is not strictly speaking knowledge. The question will be whether this claim is sustainable in view of the growing idea that knowledge is not a matter merely of inductive or deductive process of thought but that even instincts, desires, emotions, aspirations, faith and intuition give clues to knowledge and are themselves imbued with knowledge. This will necessarily lead us to the question of harmonising positive knowledge with axiological knowledge and of developing an integral system of knowledge.

Values and Self-Knowledge:

The third question will be related to relationship between self-knowledge and pursuit of values, particularly when it is seen

that pursuit of values demands increasing self-control and self-mastery, which in turn, are related to self-knowledge. For, as it was realised by the ancient Rishis, the Self cannot be known except through self-discipline, and self-discipline cannot become perfect without the true knowledge of the self. Again, this question will become complex when it is realised that self-knowledge is intimately related to world-knowledge and God-knowledge. It will be seen that these questions will oblige us to converge upon the profound psychological, ethical and spiritual knowledge which was so central to the ancient Indian concept of education.

Modern Knowledge—Physical, Supraphysical and Spiritual Knowledge:

We realise that modern knowledge is expanding at a tremendous rate of progression; in course of this rapid movement, materialism of yesterday is being increasingly surpassed. Philosophical inadequacy of materialism has become obvious when we see that the advanced materialists of today refrain from making any metaphysical propositions, including those regarding materialism. The argument that science can deal only with matter is also being overpassed. The development of life sciences, psychological sciences and humanistic sciences has shown that what is important in science is the scientific method but not the unsustainable assumption that this method can be applied only in the domain of Matter. As a matter of fact, the boundaries between the physical and the supra-physical are being broken up quite rapidly, and as against the earlier assumption of materialism that only that is real which can be physically verified, it is clearly proved that the basic sub-atomic substratum of matter is physically invisible although real. Even in technological matters, dependence on material means alone is being increasingly substituted by inventions which reduce dependence on material means, such as in the case of wireless telegraphy.

Increasing Importance of the Yogic Knowledge: With these developments, we can see that the knowledge of the physical will gradually or rapidly begin, for its further development or completion, to knock at the doors of the supraphysical knowledge. And, in that context, the importance of the knowledge—physical and supraphysical—that constituted the contents of the ancient Indian system of education will come to be underlined.

And this will lead also to the study of Yoga as a science. As Swami Vivekananda had declared, Yoga is science *par excellence*, since it proceeds by the scientific method of observation, experimentation and verification, of repetition and of rectification as also of continuous expansion. And with the admission of the Yogic knowledge, it appears that the entire body of discoveries made by the Vedic and Upanishadic Rishis and by the subsequent numberless Yogic explorers will become the central focus of advancing research. Already some Western scientists are turning to the knowledge that Yoga can provide, and we can foresee that this movement is bound to move forward. And this will enhance the relevance of the heritage that we possess of the ancient Indian conception of knowledge and education.

Renewal of the Old Spiritual Knowledge—Need for Developing New Knowledge:

This is not to say that all that we need today and tomorrow was already contained in the ancient Indian system; although loftiest and central discoveries of the secret of the Spirit were made in those ancient times, there is still much more to be done in the coming days. New knowledge of matter and new knowledge of spirit are likely to be the preoccupation of the seekers all over the world. It is also possible that the older synthesis of knowledge will be replaced by newer synthesis. But still old foundations will always be found to be not only relevant but of basic value.

As we visualise these future developments,

we can see at once how they will affect our present day curricula and our entire present system of educational aims, educational methods and educational contents. Radical changes will be required; and we shall need to revisit the ancient Indian concept of education and derive from it valuable insights, which can guide us in the right direction, provided we also take care to embrace the latest results of the latest educational research and experimentation that has been conducted in India and elsewhere.

Upanishadic Secret of Embracing Unending Knowledge:

We have to realise that our present Indian curricula hardly provide to our students any adequate idea of the unbroken history of Indian culture, which extended in the past at least beyond five thousand years. If we are to give even a faint idea of this vast canvas of Indian culture,—which incidentally, is indispensable if we want to sustain our cultural identity,—and if we are to add, as we must, also the new and expanding horizons of knowledge, which are vastly developing, we shall be obliged to consider ways and means by which our entire system of curriculum-making and our system of educational methodology can undergo radical changes. We shall have to find a central answer to the question as to how to master knowledge when it is very vast and when it is expanding at an exponential rate. And shall we not be tempted to listen seriously to the Upanishadic declaration that there is a kind of knowledge having acquired which all can be known?

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- 1 As Sri Krishna points out in the Gita: "Whatsoever a great man does, the same is done by others as well. Whatever standard he sets, the world follows the same." (Bhagavadgita 3.21)

Indian Judiciary as an Agent of Social Change: An Analysis from the Aurobindonian View-Point

Amalendu De

In a changing socio-political scenario, the judiciary in India has been asserting its position as a great defender of representative democracy and Parliamentary Government. Immediately after the enforcement of the Indian Constitution in 1950, the Supreme Court categorically stated that "the Court would have the power to declare any enactment which transgresses a fundamental right as invalid."¹ Besides functioning for dispensing justice in the traditional liberal way, the Judiciary in India "has addressed the problems of development, welfare and human rights pertinent to our society."² The President of India, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, in one of his speeches, recently observed: "It has unavoidably been one of the agencies of change in our changing and developing society, and has treated social justice as a Fundamental Right."³ He also expressed his satisfaction at observing the new role of Judiciary in a vital region of our country like the North-East where the High Court has been attaching 'paramount importance' to the developmental and social welfare questions."⁴ Here the High Court "had tried to match the cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity of this region with laws that are in tune with the diverse traditions of the people of the region." The President also said that "the administration of law as the maintenance of order and the general operations of government in such a sensitive region, have to be characterized by sympathy and understanding."⁵ The President observed that "the system has to ensure the preservation of the fine traditional institutions, customs and values of the people, and at the same time bring changes in the ways of their living as well as in the standards of their living. This changing and modifying have to be accomplished not harshly, suddenly, but slowly, gently and with sympathy,"⁶ Reminding that "the Sixth Schedule of the

Constitution seeks to respect customs without fossilizing it and which seeks to conserve tradition without denying it the life-breath of progress", the President stated that "the guidelines for the evaluation of a policy for the tribal areas of the North-East were in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Schedule."⁷

Mr. A. S. Anand, Chief Justice of India, stated that "a bold and independent judiciary was a prerequisite for a free society and rule of the law." He said "what the High Court should do was introspection and an exercise in soul-searching." He also "asked the judges to exercise restraint while deciding on a dispute or a controversy and emphatically stated that 'judicial authoritarianism' cannot be permitted in a free society." The Chief Justice said that the "policy matters, fiscal or otherwise, should be left to the executive, adding that the duty of the judges was to interpret the law and not to behave like despots."⁸ He emphasized "the need to adapt itself to the changing need of the people." At the same time he pointed out that "no legislatures on earth can frame laws that last forever and no society was stagnant." Mr. Anand stated that the "erosion of faith in the judiciary poses a serious threat" and he "exhorted the lawyers and bar associations to remain vigilant against any fall in professional standards."⁹

Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Chief Minister of Assam, said "the task of administration of justice in the region was by no means easy as there were a large number of tribes in different stages of growth and civilization with their own methods of administering justice and were highly sensitive of their cultural and social identity".¹⁰ Mr. S. C. Jamir, Chief Minister of Nagaland, said "the

Court has shown legal acumen in interpreting the customary laws of the diverse ethnic groups of the region by identifying and formulating principles in consonance with the Constitution and rule of law".¹¹

It is to be noted that "in many ways and on numerous recent occasions, the judiciary has compelled the executive and the legislature to wake up to their responsibilities to the country and to society and pulled them up at times for having failed to discharge their social obligations." But this praiseworthy role of the judiciary was not appreciated by a section of legislature and politicians outside, who accused it of 'judicial activism' or 'judicial authoritarianism'.¹²

Appreciating the role of the judiciary as an agent of social change, a conscientious student of jurisprudence may ask, are the judges, lawyers, legislatures, executives and politicians making any concerted effort to realize the philosophy contained in the Preamble of our Constitution? The makers of our Constitution were aware of the fact that mere "justiciable rights may not be enough to maintain the dignity of an individual if he is not free from wants and misery". For this several Directives were incorporated in Part IV of the Constitution, declaring "all citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood" [Art. 39 (a)] "just and humane conditions of work" [Art. 42], and "a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities" [Art. 43]. Accordingly, these Directives exhorted the State "to shape its social and economic policies".¹³

There is no doubt that certain steps were taken by the State to move in that direction. However, we are far away from removing 'poverty' or assuring the 'dignity of the individual'. Moreover, we could not generate a congenial atmosphere in our country for achieving freedom, equality and brotherhood as inscribed in the Constitution. We are, in fact, confronted with a pertinent

question: How to achieve them? It is difficult to get a proper answer to this question from the existing organs of our body politic. Sri Aurobindo dealt with this particular question and he observed: "Freedom, equality, brotherhood are three godheads of the soul; they cannot be really achieved through the external machinery of society or by man so long as he lives only in the individual and communal ego".¹⁴ He said that individual not only "wants freedom", but individual also "wants security and a richer life in collectivity, for man is a social and communal being too". At the same time he stated that "a reconciliation between the two divergent desires hasn't been easy."¹⁵

We are, therefore, confronted with another question: Is this reconciliation possible? Referring to the arguments of the prophets of historical materialism, Marx and Engels, Sri Aurobindo has developed his own theme, throwing more light on the issue relating to the "dissolution of the individual in the totality or the convergence of the totality in the individual."¹⁶ Marx and Engels wrote thus in the Communist Manifesto: "In the place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all".¹⁷ However, till date, this 'Communist dream' was not realized though attempts were made in the socialist orbit since the post-First World War period. In fact, the results of the socio-political structure erected in this orbit were quite different. Sri Aurobindo posed the possibility of Communist principle becoming a means "at once of the fulfilment of the individual and the perfect harmony of a collective being". But in order to give a proper shape to this principle, Sri Aurobindo said, "it must be on a foundation of soul's brotherhood and the death of egoism. A forced association and a mechanical comradeship would end in a world-wide fiasco".¹⁸ Socialism is "a worthy ideal", "but it is impossible of complete realisation so long as man remains a slave to his own inveterate egoism". But "as matters stand,

we cannot think of a political or social order that will be altogether free from the depredations of egoism, and the destructive play of selfishness, jealousy, division and strife".¹⁹ Then, how does one overcome this situation? Drawing our attention, Sri Aurobindo observed: "A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfound law of love, is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution, no other can replace it."²⁰ Sri Aurobindo admitted that Marx and Lenin made "significant milestones in the history of social evolution" but, the future must go beyond them. It must "ordain and carry out a spiritual revolution that may crack the ego, end the malignant fever of the ages, and bind man and society and humanity into a single brotherhood conscious of its spiritual unity."²¹

Sri Aurobindo thoroughly analysed "the question of a truly subjective or spiritual turn to individual and communal life in ampler elaboration." Here he had thrown light on Marx's views on religion and forwarded his own argument. Commenting on religion once, Karl Marx had said, "it is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation". Marx also stated that in course of time religion became the "opium of the people".²² But Sri Aurobindo differed with Marx and observed that "true religion, grounded on spirituality, would prove to be, not the opium, but the elixir of the people." Sri Aurobindo said that "when religion learns to equate the love of God with the love of one's fellow human beings", then "religion can be passive no more in the face of antagonism of interests, clash of egos, man becoming wolf to man, but will fight all evil with the infallible weapon of the deeper law of love by identity". "Not science merely, not the vague notion of 'progress', not formalised dogmatic creed, not regimentation or computerisation, but the bold cultivation of spiritual thought and the progressive experience of psychological and spiritual oneness can achieve the conquest of

the kingdom of God and the establishment of the reign of the spirit over mind and life and body". In fact, "freedom and unity—desirable things both and apparently incompatible—can be reconciled only in God or at the level of spiritual consciousness."²³ Both for the individual and collective man, "there is one common work, one supreme goal—namely, the finding of the divine Self and its realisation here upon earth in all segments and directions of life". The coming of such 'a spiritual age' would depend upon those "who by their self-evolution or self-transcendence into a higher mould have qualified to be leaders of the spiritual march".²⁴ Then, the ground will be prepared for "the transition of human life from its present limits into those larger and purer horizons."²⁵

Throwing light on the role of the State, Sri Aurobindo wrote that 'Society', it must be remembered, is not the same thing as 'State', for the latter is a more deliberate, and hence a more artificial, contrivance or creation because, "the 'State' idea has been trying to live with or contain or suppress individualist urges and stances."²⁶ Sri Aurobindo observed: "The organised State is neither the best mind of the nation, nor is it even the sum of the communal energies.... It is a collective egoism much inferior to the best of which the community is capable. What that egoism is in its relation to other collective egoisms we know.... the State is an entity which, with the greatest amount of power, is the least hampered by internal scruples or external checks. It has no soul or only a rudimentary one. It is a military, political and economic force.... the chief use it makes of its undeveloped intellect is to blunt by fictions, catchwords and recently by State philosophies, its ill-developed ethical conscience."²⁷

Sri Aurobindo said that the individual "has a soul, an intellect, a sensibility, a conscience, a vibrating life" and it would be unreasonable to ask the individual "to immolate himself at the altar of the

State". "State egoism" is "a larger, a more powerful and ruthless egoism, but not a superior one", "rather in many ways inferior to the best individual egoism". Sri Aurobindo referred to the egoism of Socrates as an example. His egoism "was far, far superior to that of the State that condemned him to death". Sri Aurobindo said that "man lives by the community, he needs to develop himself individually as well as collectively." The chief role of the State should be "to provide all possible facilities for co-operative action, to remove obstacles, to prevent all really harmful waste and friction".²⁸

Let us analyse the role of Indian judiciary in the light of the observations of Sri Aurobindo on the individual and the State egoism. The judiciary has the scope to attach importance to the development of the individual "individually as well as collectively." Moreover, the judiciary should make the executive and the legislature more conscious about the role of the State so that it can really promote co-operative action for building up a new socio-economic structure in the country. It should be noted that Sri Aurobindo viewed "the social revolution of the human race as a development of the relations between the three constant factors—individuals, communities and mankind."²⁹ The Indian judiciary, in spite of its laudable role, could not look at the issues from

this viewpoint or to come out with a concrete proposal for restructuring the Indian polity.

Aspects of the Constitution of India—Some Aurobindonian Perspectives Seminar held in Baroda on 28-29 November 1998

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- 19 Ibid., p.460.
- 20 Ibid.
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The first marked sign of a rational evolution is the tendency of code and constitution to prevail over custom. But still there are codes and codes. For first there are systems that are unwritten or only partly written and do not throw themselves into the strict code form, but are a floating mass of laws, decreta, precedents, and admit still of a large amount of merely customary law. And again there are systems that do take the strict code, like the Hindu Shastra, but are really only an ossification of custom and help to stereotype the life of the society but not to rationalise it. Finally there are those deliberately ordered codes which are an attempt at intelligent systematisation; a sovereign authority fixes the cadres of the law and admits from time to time changes that are intelligent accomodations to new needs, variations that do not disturb but merely modify and develop the intelligent unity and reasonable fixity of the system. The coming to perfection of this last type is the triumph of the narrower but more self-conscious and self-helpful rational over the larger but vaguer and more helpless life-instinct in the society. When it has arrived at this triumph of a perfectly self-conscious and systematically rational determination and arrangement of its life on one side by a fixed and uniform constitution, on the other by a uniform and intelligently structural civil and criminal law, the society is ready for the second stage of its development. It can undertake the self-conscious, uniform ordering of its whole life in the light of the reason which is the principle of modern socialism and has been the drift of all the Utopias of the thinkers.

Sri Aurobindo, The Ideal of Human Unity, Pg. 432

Art - Japan and Europe

The Mother

What is the difference between Japanese art and the art of other countries, like those of Europe, for example?

The art of Japan is a kind of directly mental expression in physical life. The Japanese use the vital world very little. Their art is extremely mentalised; their life is extremely mentalised. It expresses in detail quite precise mental formations. Only, in the physical, they have spontaneously the sense of beauty. For example, a thing one sees very rarely in Europe but constantly, daily in Japan: very simple people, men of the working class or even peasants go for rest or enjoyment to a place where they can see a beautiful landscape. This gives them a much greater joy than going to play cards or indulging in all sorts of distractions as they do in the countries of Europe. They are seen in groups at times, going on the roads or sometimes taking a train or a tram up to a certain point, then walking to a place from where one gets a beautiful view. Then at this place there is a small house which fits very well into the landscape, there is a kind of small platform on which one can sit; one takes a cup of tea and at the same time sees the landscape. For them, this is the supreme enjoyment; they know nothing more pleasant. One can understand this among artists, educated people, quite learned people, but I am speaking of people of the most ordinary class, poor people who like this better than resting or relaxing at home. This is for them the greatest joy.

And in that country, for each season there are known sites. For instance, in autumn leaves become red; they have large numbers of maple-trees (the leaves of the maple turn into all the shades of the most vivid red in autumn, it is absolutely marvelous), so they arrange a place near a temple, for instance, on the top of a hill, and the entire hill is covered with maples. There is a stairway which climbs straight up, almost like a ladder, from the

base to the top, and it is so steep that one cannot see what is at the top, one gets the feeling of a ladder rising to the skies—a stone stairway, very well made, rising steeply and seeming to lose itself in the sky—clouds pass, and both the sides of the hill are covered with maples, and these maples have the most magnificent colours you could ever imagine. Well, an artist who goes there will experience an emotion of absolutely exceptional, marvelous beauty. But one sees very small children, families even, with a baby on the shoulder, going there in groups. In autumn they will go there. In springtime they will go elsewhere.

There is a garden quite close to Tokyo where irises are grown, a garden with very tiny rivulets, and along the rivulets, irises—irises of all possible colours—and it is arranged according to colour, organised in such a way that on entering one is dazzled, there is a blaze of colour from all these flowers standing upright; and there are heaps and heaps of them, as far as the eye can reach. At another time, just at the beginning of spring (it is a slightly early spring there), there are the first cherry-trees. These cherry-trees never give fruit, they are grown only for the flowers. They range from white to pink, to a rather vivid pink. There are long avenues all bordered with cherry-trees, all pink; they are huge trees which have turned all pink. There are entire mountains covered with these cherry-trees, and on the little rivulets bridges have been built which too are all red: you see these bridges of red lacquer among all these pink flowers and, below, a great river flowing and a mountain which seems to scale the sky, and they go to this place in springtime.... For each season there are flowers and for each flower there are gardens.

And people travel by train as easily as one goes from house to house; they have a small packet like this which they carry; in it they have a change of clothes, that's quite enough for them; they wear on the feet rope or fiber sandals; when these get

worn out they throw them away and take others, for it costs nothing at all. All their life is like that. They have paper handkerchiefs, when they have used them they get rid of them, and so on—they don't burden themselves with anything. When they go by train, at the stations small meals are sold in boxes (it is quite clean, quite neat), small meals in boxes of white wood with little chopsticks for eating; then, as all this has no value, when one has finished, one puts them aside, doesn't bother about them or encumber oneself. They live like that. When they have a garden or a park, they plant trees, and they plant them just at the place where when the tree has grown it will create a landscape, will fit into a landscape. And as they want the tree to have a particular shape, they trim it, cut it, they manage to give it all the shapes they want. You have trees with fantastic forms; they have cut off the unnecessary branches, fostered others, contrived things as they liked. Then you come to a place and you see a house which seems to be altogether a part of the landscape; it has exactly the right colour, it is made of the right materials; it is not like a blow in your face, as are all those European buildings which spoil the whole landscape. It is just there where it should be, hidden under the trees; then you see a creeper and suddenly a wonderful tree; it is there at the right place, it has the right form. I had everything to learn in Japan. For four years, from an artistic point of view, I lived from wonder to wonder.

And in the cities, a city like Tokyo, for example, which is the biggest city in the world, bigger than London, and which extends far, far (now the houses are modernised, the whole center of the city is very unpleasant, but when I was there, it was still good), in the outlying parts of the city, those which are not business quarters, every house has at the most two stories and a garden—there is always a garden, there are always one or two trees which are quite lovely. And then, if you go for a walk.... it is very difficult to find your way in Tokyo; there are no straight streets with houses on either side according to the number, and you lose your way easily. Then you go wandering around—always one wanders at random in that country—you go wandering and all of a sudden you turn the corner of a street and come to a kind

of paradise: there are magnificent trees, a temple as beautiful as everything else, you see nothing of the city any longer, no more traffic, no tramways; a corner, a corner of trees with magnificent colours, and it is beautiful, beautiful like everything else. You do not know how you have reached there, you seem to have come by luck. And then you turn, you seek your way, you wander off again and go elsewhere. And some days later you want to come back to this very place, but it is impossible, it is as though it had disappeared. And this is so frequent, this is so true that such stories are often told in Japan. Their literature is full of fairy-lore. They tell you a story in which the hero comes suddenly to an enchanted place; he sees fairies, he sees marvelous beings, he spends exquisite hours among flowers, music; all is splendid. The next day he is obliged to leave; it is the law of the place, he goes away. He tries to come back, but never does. He can no longer find the place: it was there, it has disappeared!... And everything in this city, in this country, from beginning to end, gives you the impression of impermanence, of the unexpected, the exceptional. You always come to things you did not expect; you want to find them again and they are lost—they have made something else which is equally charming. From the artistic point of view, the point of view of beauty, I don't think there is a country as beautiful as that.

Now, I ought to say, to complete my picture, that the four years I was there I found a dearth of spirituality as entire as could be. These people have a wonderful morality, live according to quite strict moral rules, they have a mental construction even in the least detail of life: one must eat in a certain way and not another, one must bow in a certain way and not another, one must say certain words but not all; when addressing certain people one must express oneself in a certain way; when speaking with others, one must express oneself in another. If you go to buy something in a shop, you must say a particular sentence; if you don't say it, you are not served: they look at you quizzically and do not move! But if you say the word, they wait upon you with full attention and bring, if necessary, a cushion for you to sit upon and a cup of tea to drink. And everything is like that. However, not once do you have the feeling

that you are in contact with something other than a marvelously organised mental-physical domain. And what energy they have! Their whole vital being is turned into energy. They have an extraordinary endurance but no direct aspiration: one must obey the rule, one is obliged. If one does not submit oneself to rules there, one may live as Europeans do, who are considered barbarians and looked upon altogether as intruders, but if you want to live a Japanese life among the Japanese you must do as they do, otherwise you make them so unhappy that you can't even have any relation with them. In their house you must live in a particular way, when you meet them you must greet them in a particular way.... I think I have already told you the story of that Japanese who was an intimate friend of ours, and whom I helped to come into contact with his soul—and who ran away. He was in the countryside with us and I had put him in touch with his psychic being; he had the experience, a revelation, the contact, the dazzling inner contact. And the next morning, he was no longer there, he had taken flight! Later, when I saw him again in town after the holidays, I asked him, "But what happened to you, why did you go away?"—"Oh! You understand, I discovered my soul and saw that my soul was more powerful than my faith in the country and the Mikado; I would have had to obey my soul and I would no longer have been a faithful subject of my emperor. I had to go away." There you are! All this is authentically true.

Why are great artists born at the same time in the same country?

That depends on the person to whom you put the question. The explanation will be different accordingly. From the point of view of evolution, I think Sri Aurobindo has explained this very clearly in *The Human Cycle*. Evolution, that is to say, culture and civilisation, describes a more or less regular spiral movement around the earth, and the results of one civilisation, it may be said, slowly go to form another; then, when the total development is harmonious, this creates simultaneously the field of action and the actors, in the sense that at the time of the great artistic periods all the conditions were favourable to the development of art, and naturally, the fact that all

the circumstances were favourable, attracted the men who could use them. There have been concrete movements like that, great ages like that of the Italian Renaissance or the similar period in France, almost at the same time, when artists from all countries were gathered at the same place because the conditions were favourable to the development of their art. This is one of the reasons—a so-to-say external reason—for the formation of civilisations.

There is another, this is that from an occult point of view it is almost always the same forces and same beings which incarnate during all the ages of artistic beauty upon earth and that according to occultists, there are cycles of rebirth: beings return, group themselves through affinity at the time of birth; so it happens that regularly, almost all come together for a similar action. Some occultists have studied this question and given very precise numbers based upon the actual facts of the development of the earth: they have said that once in a hundred years, once in a thousand years, once in five thousand years, etc., certain cycles were repeated; that certain great civilisations appeared every five thousand years, and that it was (according to their special knowledge) the same people who came back. This is not quite exact, that is why I am not going into details, but in a sense this is true: it is the same forces which are at work. It is the same forces and they are grouped according to their affinities and, for a reason which may be quite material or for a mental or cyclic reason, they reunite at a certain place, and in this place there is a new civilisation or a special progress in a civilisation or a kind of effervescence, blossoming, flowering of beauty, as in the great ages in Greece, Egypt, India, Italy, Spain.... Everywhere, in all the countries of the world, there have been more or less beautiful periods.

If you put the question to astrologers, they will explain this to you by the position of the stars; they will say that certain positions of the stars have a certain effect on the earth. But, as I have told you, all these things are 'languages', a way of expression, of making oneself understood; the truth is

deeper, it is more complex, more complete. *Is the average Indian more advanced spiritually than the average man in other countries, like those of Europe, for instance?*

There is an essential difference, but generally if he has not been contaminated by European materialism, when someone speaks to him about spiritual things, he has an opening, he understands. In the countries of the West, if you are in touch with the average man and speak to him of spiritual things, he is absolutely closed up and into the bargain, if you speak to him of a possibility of relation with higher states of consciousness, he looks at you as though you were mad! If someone renounces the ordinary life to live an ascetic life, they think he is out of his senses!

There is a small minority among those who have kept the religious traditions, which understands, but understands only under the religious form. That is to say, if someone enters a monastery, they understand him more or less. But for the average man (I am not speaking of cultured people), if someone wants to lead a spiritual life independent of all religion, simply setting out in the personal quest of a higher truth, then surely he is ready to be put in a lunatic asylum! It would be better not to speak of it. There are those who have read a little, who are educated, who may think you a little eccentric, but still they understand what it means; but the ordinary man, no. I am speaking of fifty years ago, of course; now, after the Second [World] War, I don't know, I can't say if this has begun to change. But evidently, the educated classes of Europe are now in search of something higher because their life has been so tragic that they need to lean upon something else; and perhaps their effort is contagious, in a sense, and there are more people than one thinks who are seeking—it is possible. But fifty years ago it was not like that. While here, ordinary people, people of the 'lower' classes don't perhaps have any discernment, perhaps they cannot distinguish between the imposter and the sincere man, but it is understood that if somebody comes along in the yellow robe and with the beggar's bowl, he will be given something, he

won't be kicked out. If a man did that in Europe (naturally there is no question of the yellow robe), but if he came in sordid clothes, he would be immediately taken to the first police station and arrested for indigence. It is understood that in the so-called civilised countries, if you don't have the minimum money in your pocket, you are a vagabond, and the vagabond has no right to be on the streets, he is put into prison for vagabondage. That is the difference.

Do certain arts express more truth than others?

This is more or less a mental gymnastic! There are people who say that certain arts are physical. If you frequent artists, painters, they will tell you that sculpture, oh! It is laborious, because sculptors work with the very matter, and painting may be considered not much of an intellectual art by a musician. The truth is that in all arts everything depends upon the artist, and what he does depends upon the state of consciousness in which he is. A sculptor may be an extremely spiritual man and his production extremely spiritual also, if he knows how to express his experience. And a poet can be quite a commonplace materialist if he does not receive his inspiration from a higher state. It is the mind which makes little categories, this is more convenient for it, but that does not resemble the truth very much.

You have said that Wagner had an intuition of the occult and that to have spiritual power one must conquer sexuality. In fact, Wagner had the intuition of this victory to be achieved, for in 'The Ring of the Nibelungen' there is a treasure hidden at the bottom of a river. Three nymphs guard the treasure and to take it one must renounce all desire for love and woman.

This is an old tradition in Nordic countries. But in his story it ends badly: the one who had to renounce the love of woman is drowned and it ends with the twilight of the gods.

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Questions and Answers
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