

# PRĀGNA

A flame of aspiration  
for dynamic truth

# प्रज्ञा

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# CONTENTS

- 2 Love—Divine and Human ----- Editor
- 3 Man, the Despot of  
Contraries (poem) ----- Sri Aurobindo
- 4 The Spritual Aim and Life ----- Sri Aurobindo
- 9 On Love ----- Pavitra
- 12 Constitutional Aspet—  
A Consciousness Perspective ----- Dr. Soumitra Basu
- 17 Utopia - In Western Thought ----- Christof
- 20 In Quest of Reality ----- Nolini Kanta Gupta
- 25 Modern Art ----- The Mother

## Love—Divine and Human

Those who are seekers on the spiritual path sometimes find it difficult to know what the right attitude should be towards human relationships. Some paths advocate a total detachment bordering on asceticism. But that would repress the natural emotion in the human being. Rather, the aim should be to transform love into a higher form by bringing forward the psychic or soul element. By itself, human love is mostly vital and physical with a mental support. It can take an unselfish, noble and pure form and expression only if it is touched by the psychic.

Beyond human love, is love for the Divine, something transcendent. And it is when human love widens itself to become love for the Divine that the purpose of love on earth gets fulfilled.

"There is concealed behind individual love, obscured by its ignorant human figure, a mystery which the mind cannot seize, the mystery of the body of the Divine, the secret of a mystic form of the Infinite which we can approach only through the ecstasy of the heart and the passion of the pure and sublimated sense, and its attraction which is the call of the divine Flute-player, the mastering compulsion of the All-Beautiful can only be seized and seize us through an occult love and yearning which in the end makes one the Form and the Formless, and identifies Spirit and Matter. It is that which the spirit in Love is seeking here in the darkness of the Ignorance and it is that which it finds when individual human love is changed into the love of the Immanent Divine incarnate in the material universe."

*Sri Aurobindo, 'The Synthesis of Yoga'*

But to become conscious of Divine Love, all other human love need not be abandoned. One has to go deep within to find the origin of the feeling, beyond the outer form. To get rid of one to find another is almost impossible. And if one makes the effort to reject human love, one usually rejects the entire capacity for feeling love and dries up the heart. Even for those who are not spiritual aspirants, the first step in any form of love is to stop being selfish.

"For instance, love between human beings, in all its forms, the love of parents for children, of children for parents, of brothers and sisters, of friends and lovers, is all tainted with ignorance, selfishness and all other defects which are man's ordinary drawbacks; so instead of completely ceasing to love—which, besides, is very difficult as Sri Aurobindo says, which would simply dry up the heart and serve no end—one must learn how to love better: to love with devotion, with self-giving, self-abnegation, and to struggle, not against love itself, but against its distorted forms: against all forms of monopolising, of attachment, possessiveness, jealousy, and all the feelings which accompany these main movements. Not to want to possess, to dominate; and not to want to impose one's will, one's whims, one's desires; and not to want to take, to receive, but to give; not to insist on the other's response, but be content with one's own love; not to seek one's personal interest and joy and fulfilment of one's personal desire, but to be satisfied with the giving of one's love and affection; and not to ask for any response. Simply to be happy to love, nothing more."

*The Mother, 'Questions and Answers' 19 September 1956*

*Editor*

# **Man, the Despot of Contraries**

*Sri Aurobindo*

**I am greater than the greatness of the seas,**

**A swift tornado of God-energy:**

**A helpless flower that quivers in the breeze**

**I am weaker than the reed one breaks with ease.**

**I harbour all the wisdom of the wise**

**In my nature of stupendous Ignorance;**

**On a flame of righteousness I fix my eyes**

**While I wallow in sweet sin and join hell's dance.**

**My mind is brilliant like a full-orbed moon,**

**Its darkness is the caverned troglodyte's.**

**I gather long Time's wealth and squander soon;**

**I am an epitome of opposites.**

**I with repeated life death's sleep surprise;**

**I am a transience of the eternities.**

**Collected Poems**

# The Spiritual Aim and Life

*Sri Aurobindo*

A society founded upon spirituality will differ in two essential points from the normal human society which begins from and ends with the lower nature. The normal human society starts from the gregarious instinct modified by a diversity and possible antagonism of interests, from an association and clash of egos, from a meeting, combination, conflict of ideas, tendencies and principles; it tries first to patch up an accommodation of converging interests and treaty of peace between chords, founded on a series of implied contracts natural or necessary adjustments which become customs of the aggregate life and to these contracts as they develop it gives the name of social law. By establishing, as against the interests which lead to conflict, the interest which call for association and mutual assistance, it creates or stimulates sympathies and habits of helpfulness that give a psychological support and sanction to its mechanism of law, custom and contract. It justifies the mass of social institutions and habitual ways of being which it thus creates by the greater satisfaction and efficiency of the physical, the vital and the mental life of man, in a word, by the growth and advantages of civilisation. A good many losses have indeed to be written off as against these gains, but those are to be accepted as the price we must pay for civilisation.

The normal society treats man essentially as a physical, vital and mental being. For the life, the mind, the body are the three terms of existence with which it has some competence to deal. It develops a system of mental growth and efficiency, an intellectual, aesthetic and moral culture. It evolves the vital side of human life and creates an ever-growing system of economic efficiency and vital enjoyment, and this system becomes more and more rich, cumbrous and complex as civilisation develops. Depressing by its mental and vital overgrowth the natural vigour of the physical

and animal man, it tries to set the balance right by systems of physical culture, a cumbrous science of habits and remedies intended to cure the ills it has created and as much amelioration as it can manage of the artificial forms of living that are necessary to its social system. In the end, however, experience shows that society tends to die of man and its method of development do not correspond to all the reality of the human being and to the aim of life which that reality imposes.

There is then a radical defect somewhere in the process of human civilisation; but where is its seat and by what issue shall we come out of the perpetual cycle of failure? Our civilised development of life ends in an exhaustion of vitality and a refusal of Nature to lend her support any further to a continued advance upon these lines; our civilised mentality, after disturbing the balance of the human system to its own greater profit, finally discovers that it has exhausted and destroyed that which fed it and loses its power of healthy action and productiveness. It is found that civilisation has created many more problems than it can solve, has multiplied excessive needs and desires the satisfaction of which it has not sufficient vital force to sustain, has developed a jungle of claims and artificial instincts in the midst of which life loses its way and has no longer any sight of its aim. The more advanced minds begin to declare civilisation a failure and society begins to feel that they are right. But the remedy proposed is either a halt or even a retrogression, which means in the end more confusion, stagnation and decay, or a reversion to 'Nature' which is impossible or can only come about by a cataclysm and disintegration of society; or even a cure is aimed at by carrying artificial remedies to their acme, by more and more Science, more and more mechanical devices, a more scientific organisation of life, which means that the engine shall replace

life, the arbitrary logical reason substitute itself for complex Nature and man be saved by machinery. As well say that to carry a disease to its height is the best way to its cure.

It may be suggested on the contrary and with some chance of knocking at the right door that the radical defect of all our systems is their deficient development of just that which society has most neglected, the spiritual element, the soul in man which is his true being. Even to have a healthy body, a strong vitality and an active and clarified mind and a field for their action and enjoyment, carries man no more than a certain distance; afterwards he flags and tries for want of a real self-finding, a satisfying aim for his action and progress. These three things do not make the sum of a complete manhood; they are means of an ulterior end and cannot be made forever an aim in themselves. Add a rich emotional life governed by a well-ordered ethical standard, and still there is the savour of something left out, some supreme good which these things mean, but do not in themselves arrive at, do not discover till they go beyond themselves. Add a religious system and a wide-spread spirit of belief and piety, and still you have not found the means of social salvation. All these things human society has developed, but none of them has saved it from disillusionment, weariness and decay. The ancient intellectual cultures of Europe ended in disruptive doubt and sceptical impotence, the pieties of Asia in stagnation and decline. Modern society has discovered a new principle of survival, progress, but the aim of that progress it has never discovered,—unless the aim is always more knowledge, more equipment, convenience and comfort, more enjoyment, a greater and still greater complexity of the social economy, a more and more cumbrously opulent life. But these things must lead in the end where the old led, for they are only the same thing on a larger scale; they lead in a circle, that is to say, nowhere; they do not escape from the cycles of birth, growth, decay and death, they do not really find the secret of self-prolongation by constant self-renewal which is the principle of immortality, but only seem for a moment to find it by illusion of a series of

experiments each of which ends in disappointment. That so far has been the nature of modern progress. Only in its new turn inwards, towards a greater subjectivity now only beginning, is there a better hope; for by that turning it may discover that the real truth of man is to be found in his soul. It is not indeed certain that a subjective age will lead us there, but it gives us possibility, can turn in that direction, if used rightly, the more inward movement.

It will be said that this is an old discovery and that it governed the old societies under the name of religion. But that was only an appearance. The discovery was there, but it was made for the life of the individual only, and even for him it looked beyond the earth for its fulfilment and at earth only as the place of his preparation for a solitary salvation or release from the burden of life. Human society itself never seized on the discovery of the soul as a means for the discovery of the law of its own being or on a knowledge of the soul's true nature and need and its fulfillment as the right way of terrestrial perfection. If we look at the old religions in their social as apart from their individual aspect, we see that the use society made of them was only of their most unspiritual or at any rate of their less spiritual parts. It made use of them to give an august, awful and would-be eternal sanction to its mass of customs and institutions; it made of them a veil of mystery against human questioning and a shield of darkness against the innovator. So far as it saw in religion a means of human salvation and perfection, it laid hands upon it at once to mechanise it, to catch the human soul and bind it on the wheels of a socio-religious machinery, to impose on it in the place of spiritual freedom an imperious yoke and an iron prison. It saddled upon the religious life of man a Church, a priesthood and a mass of ceremonies and set over it a pack of watchdogs under the name of creeds and dogmas, dogmas which one had to accept and obey under pain of condemnation to eternal hell by an eternal judge beyond, just as one had to accept and obey the laws of society on pain of condemnation to temporal imprisonment or death by a mortal judge

below. This false socialisation of religion has been always the chief cause of its failure to regenerate mankind.

For nothing can be more fatal to religion than for its spiritual element to be crushed or formalised out of existence by its outward aids and forms and machinery. The falsehood of the old social use of religion is shown by its effects. History has exhibited more than once the coincidence of the greatest religious fervour and piety with darkest ignorance, with an obscure squalor and long vegetative stagnancy of the mass of human life, with the unquestioned reign of cruelty, injustice and oppression, or with an organisation of the most ordinary, unaspiring and unraised existence hardly relieved by some touches of intellectual or half-spiritual light on the surface, the end of all this a wide-spread revolt that turned first of all against the established religion as the key-stone of a regnant falsehood, evil and ignorance. It is another sign when the too scrupulously exact observation of a socio-religious system and its rites and forms, which by the very fact of this misplaced importance being to lose their sense and true religious value, becomes the law and most prominent aim of religion rather than any spiritual growth of the individual and the race. And a great sign too of this failure is when the individual is obliged to flee from society in order to find room for his spiritual growth; when, finding human life given over to the unregenerated mind, life and body and the place of spiritual freedom occupied by the bonds of forms, by Church and Shastra, by some law of the ignorance, he is obliged to break away from all these to seek for growth into the spirit in the monastery, on the mountain-top, in the cavern, in the desert and the forest. When there is that division between life and the spirit, sentence of condemnation is passed upon human life. Either it is left to circle in its routine or it is described as worthless and unreal, a vanity of vanities, and loses that confidence in itself and inner faith in the value of its terrestrial aims, *shraddhā*, without which it cannot come to anything. For the spirit of man must strain towards the heights; when it loses its tension of endeavour, the race must become immobile and stagnant or even sink towards

darkness and the dust. Even where life rejects the spirit or the spirit rejects life, there may be a self-affirmation of the inner being; there may even be a glorious crop of saints and hermits in a forcing-soil of spirituality, but unless the race, the society, the nation is moved towards the spiritualisation of life or move forward led by the light of an ideal, the end must be littleness, weakness and stagnation. Or the race has to turn to the intellect for rescue, for some hope or new ideal, and arrive by a circle through an age of rationalism at a fresh effort towards the restatement of spiritual truth and a new attempt to spiritualise human life.

The true and full spiritual aim in society will regard man not as a mind, a life and a body, but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfilment upon earth, not only in heavens beyond, which after all it need not have left if it had no divine business here in the world of physical, vital and mental nature. It will therefore regard the life, mind and body neither as ends in themselves, sufficient which have only to be dropped off for the rescued spirit to flee away into its own pure regions, but as first instruments of the soul, the yet imperfect instruments of an unseized diviner purpose. It will believe in their destiny and help them to believe in themselves, but for that very reason in their highest and not only in their lowest or lower possibilities. Their destiny will be, in its view, to spiritualise themselves so as to grow into visible members of the spirit, lucid means of its manifestation, themselves spiritual, illumined, more and more conscious and perfect. For, accepting the truth of man's soul as a thing entirely divine in its essence, it will accept also the possibility of his whole being becoming divine in spite of Nature's first patent contradictions of this possibility, her darkened denials of this ultimate certitude, and even with these as a necessary earthly starting-point. And as it will regard man the individual, it will regard too man the collectivity as a soul-form of the Infinite, a collective soul myriadly embodied upon earth for a divine fulfilment in its manifold relations and its multitudinous activities. Therefore it will hold sacred all the different parts of man's life which correspond to the parts of his being, all his physical, vital, dynamic, emotional, aesthetic,

ethical, intellectual, psychic evolution, and see in them instruments for a growth towards a diviner living. It will regard every human society, nation, people or other organic aggregate from the same standpoint, subsouls, as it were, means of a complex manifestation and self-fulfilment of the spirit, the divine Reality, the conscious Infinite in man upon earth. The possible godhead of man because he is inwardly of one being with God will be its one solitary creed and dogma.

But it will not seek to enforce even this one uplifting dogma by an external compulsion upon the lower members of man's natural being; for that is *nigraha*, a repressive contraction of the nature which may lead to an apparent suppression of the evil, but not to a real and healthy growth of the good; it will rather hold up this creed and ideal as a light and inspiration to all his members to grow into the godhead from within themselves, to become freely divine. Neither in the individual nor in the society will it seek to imprison, wall in, repress, impoverish, but to let in the widest air and the highest light. A large liberty will be the law of a spiritual society and the increase of freedom a sign of the growth of human society towards the possibility of true spiritualisation. To spiritualise in this sense a society of slaves, slaves of power, slaves of authority, slaves of custom, slaves of dogma, slaves of all sorts of imposed laws which they live under rather than live by them, slaves internally of their own weakness, ignorance and passions from whose worst effect they seek or need to be protected by another and external slavery, can never be a successful endeavour. They must shake off their fetters first in order to be fit for a higher freedom. Not that man has not to wear many a yoke in his progress upward; but only the yoke which he accepts because it represents, the more perfectly the better, the highest inner law of his nature and its aspiration, will be entirely helpful to him. The rest buy their good results at a heavy cost and may retard as much as or even more than they accelerate his progress.

The spiritual aim will recognise that man as he grows in his being must have as much free space

as possible for all its members to grow in their own strength, to find out themselves and their potentialities. In their freedom they will err, because experience comes through many errors, but each has in itself a divine principle and they will find it out, disengage its presence, significance and law as their experience of themselves deepens and increases. Thus true spirituality will not let a yoke upon science and philosophy or compel them to square their conclusions with any statement of dogmatic religious or even of assured spiritual truth, as some of the old religions attempted, vainly, ignorantly, with an unspiritual obstinacy and arrogance. Each part of man's being has its own *dharma*, which it must follow and will follow in the end, put on it what fetters you please. The Dharma of science, thought and philosophy is to seek for truth by the intellect dispassionately, without prepossession and prejudgment, with no other first propositions than the law of thought and observation itself imposes. Science and philosophy are not bound to square their observations and conclusions with any current ideas of religious dogma or ethical rule or aesthetic prejudice. In the end, if left free in their action, they will find the unity of Truth with Good and Beauty and God and give these a greater meaning than any dogmatic religion or any formal ethics or any narrower aesthetic idea can give us. But meanwhile they must be left free even to deny God and Good and Beauty if they will, if their sincere observation of things of things so points them. For all these rejections must come round in the end of their circling and return to a larger truth of the things they refuse. Often we find atheism both in individual and society a necessary passage to deeper religious and spiritual truth; one has sometimes to deny God in order to find him; the finding is inevitable at the end of all earnest scepticism and denial.

The same law holds good in Art; the aesthetic being of man rises similarly on its own curve towards its diviner possibilities. The highest aim of the aesthetic being is to find the Divine through beauty; the highest Art is that which by an inspired use of significant and interpretative form unseals the doors of the spirit. But in order that it may



come to do this greatest thing largely and sincerely, it must first endeavour to see and depict man and Nature and life for their own sake, in their own characteristic truth and beauty; for behind these first characters lies always the beauty of the Divine in life and man and Nature and it is through their transformation that what was at first veiled by them has to be revealed. The dogma that Art must be religious or not be at all, is false dogma, just as is the claim that it must be subservient to ethics or utility or scientific truth or philosophic ideas; Art may make use of these things as elements, but it has its own *svadharma*, essential law, and it will rise to the widest spirituality by following out its own natural line with no other yoke than the intimate law of its own being.

Even with the lower nature of man, though here we are naturally led to suppose that compulsion is the only remedy, the spiritual aim will seek for a self-rule and development from within rather than a repression of his dynamic and vital being from without. All experience shows that man must be given a certain freedom to stumble in action as well as to err in knowledge so long as he does not get from within himself his freedom from wrong movement and error; otherwise he cannot grow. Society for its own sake has to coerce the dynamic and vital man, but coercion only chains up the devil and alters at best his form of action into more mitigated and civilised movements; it does not and cannot eliminate him. The real virtue of the dynamic and vital being, the Life Purusha, can only come by his finding a higher law and spirit for his activity within himself; to give him that, to illuminate and transform and not to destroy his impulse is the true spiritual means of regeneration.

Thus spirituality will respect the freedom of the lower members, but it will not leave them to themselves; it will present to them the truth of the spirit in themselves, translated into their own fields of action, presented in a light which illumines all their activities and shows them the highest law of their own freedom. It will not, for instance, escape from scientific materialism by a barren contempt for physical life or a denial of matter but pursue rather the sceptical mind into its own affirmations

and denials and show it there the Divine. If it cannot do that, it is proved that it is itself unenlightened or deficient, because one-sided, in its light. It will not try to slay the vitality in man by denying life, but will rather reveal to life the divine in itself as the principle of its own transformation. If it cannot do that, it is because it has itself not yet wholly fathomed the meaning of the creation and the secret of the Avatar.

The spiritual aim will seek to fulfil itself therefore in a fullness of life and man's being in the individual and the race which will be the base for the heights of the spirit,—the base becoming in the end of one substance with the peaks. It will not proceed by a scornful neglect of the body, nor by an ascetic starving of the vital being and an utmost bareness or even squalor as the rule of spiritual living, nor by a puritanic denial of art and beauty and the aesthetic joy of life, nor by a neglect of science and philosophy as poor, negligible or misleading intellectual pursuits—though the temporary utility even of these exaggerations as against the opposite excess need not be denied; it will be all things to all, but in all it will be at once their highest aim and meaning and the most all-embracing expression of themselves in which all they are and seek for will be fulfilled. It will aim at establishing in society the true inner theocracy, not the false theocracy of a dominant Church or priesthood, but that of the inner Priest, Prophet and King. It will reveal to man the divinity in himself as the Light, Strength, Beauty, Good, Delight, Immortality that dwells within and build up in his outer life also the kingdom of God which is first discovered within us. It will show man the way to seek for the Divine in every way of his being, *sarvabhāvena*<sup>1</sup>, and so find it and live in it, that however—even in all kinds of ways—he lives and acts, he shall live and act in that,<sup>2</sup> in the Divine, in the Spirit, in the eternal Reality of his being.

Reference:

1. Gita
2. Gita. *Sarvathā vartamano 'pi sa yogi mayi vartate*

## On Love

*Pavitra (P. B. Saint-Hilaire)*

If there is a problem difficult to solve for the young of both the sexes, it is that of love. Sooner or later, as they grow from childhood to adult age, they meet love, feel or observe the vehemence of the crises it raises in the human heart, and try to understand its nature and discover a line of conduct. Adults are hardly wiser; they are as much the plaything of the force that possesses them and seek for a compromise behaviour that would avoid disturbing too much their own existence and society's.

One of the peculiarities of the problem of love for the child is that he (or she) is left almost alone to solve it. He does not find in his class-books any indication about it, and when he turns to a parent, a teacher or an elderly person, the answers that he gets can only puzzle him more. Either he is signed to silence and told not to busy himself with such things: "the less one speaks or thinks of it the better it is." Or he is told that he will understand when 'bigger'—which is a false promise; grown-ups are not wiser than children, they are only less struck by the newness and strangeness of love's manifestations. As to his talks with classmates, it is best not to say anything!

At times, rarely, a mother or a father will try to help the child out, but the answers they give are hardly understandable by the child. They raise new questions and the child is drawn along to a strange world, invisible but revealed by its effects in him and around him.

In short, it seems as if everything were conspiring to stifle or repress the silent force, a force that no one can explain or master, but with which one has to come to terms and live.

As the child grows, he realises that the problem of love is among the greatest concerns of the world. He sees that famous writers have heaped up volumes about it, in praise of its sweetness, or in blame of its violence or simply in describing its vagaries. His teachers have been obliged to speak of it, but none understands its nature.

Later on, the child may come across a book pretending to throw some light on the problem. He is asked to analyse his dreams and make the Unconscious conscious. A dark sink opens before him; explanations do not satisfy him, they only bring him harassing and disconcerting thoughts.

Finally, the child is led to acknowledge, as a fact, the existence in him, as in every living being, of a secret force that seems to originate and develop from the animal world. He has to control it, as best as he can, and hide away its effects, whatever storms may rage within.

And yet it ought to be relatively easy for us, disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, to give to such problems as children and adults meet in that domain an explanation which would satisfy them and throw light on what happens within them.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have in several places of their works spoken of Love as one of the essential aspects of the Divine and as a fundamental principle of the universe—although still in large part veiled. The fact that Love is only partly revealed hides perhaps from us the role assumed by love in the evolution of the universe and of each individual being of the universe. A small key is required.

The Divine—simultaneously One and Many—manifests himself in the universe through separate centres of consciousness. Without Love, these centres would remain eternally separate. Each would evolve in its own way, without deep contact with the others. What would be lacking to it is the consciousness of its identity with the Divine and of its underlying connection with the other centres.

The aspect of the Divine that has taken upon itself the task of bridging this eternal opposition is Love. And love is, in the evolution of the universe, the hidden force that will accomplish the work.

The careful observer—and such is the child—sees manifestations of this force everywhere. He marks its elementary forms in insects and the lower animals. They are then mechanical and reflex: sexual instinct and associative instinct (ants, bees); hunger is also a manifestation of love (one devours what one loves).

Later on, his science books will teach him that attractive forces (and repulsive forces that are complimentary) are indispensable to build up matter—the matter of physics and chemistry. Molecules, and even atoms and their constituents, exist only owing to the presence of certain forces that ensure their cohesion. Does not the Mother say that love exists—with consciousness—even in the stone?

In the higher animals—birds, mammals—the mechanical and reflex action is modified by a nascent psychic element (rearing of offspring, faithfulness to a mate, devotion to the pack). Between the higher animal and man, the difference in this sphere is not large; it is in the growth of the mental element (reasoning capacity) that man differs mostly from the animal.

Separation of sexes is but a device used by nature to reach her own ends. It is not indispensable to the propagation of the species—many species are asexual or bisexual. But this separation is convenient and efficient.

Now each human being—everyone of us—is evolving in the universe through a succession of many lives upon earth, and as the object of this evolution is the progressive awareness of our essential identity with the Divine—One and Many simultaneously—everyone of us will progressively become aware of the essential Love that is in him and of his bonds of love with the other beings.

Then, instead of opposing, eternally, all others, each of us will feel a natural affinity with this one or that one. All throughout the ages consciousness grows as evolution progresses. One day, the individual being is at last ready to recognise in others the same consciousness that exists in him. He recognises others as his other selves; he recognises himself in others and in all. He can at long last understand the meaning of this passage of the Upanishad about the One Self or Spirit everywhere:

“It is not for the sake of the husband that the husband is dear, but for the sake of the *ātman*<sup>1</sup> [which is in him]; it is not for the sake of the wife that the wife is dear but for the sake of the *ātman* [which is in her]...”

*Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad*

With the help of these powerful and significant words it is possible to classify the individual human beings in one or the other of two groups. Those of the first group—the *outward path*—find in an association with another individual a real help. For them, no problem; they follow instinctively the reactions of Nature in them, and it would be at once unwise and vain to try to change their reactions by advocating a higher path; they would not understand.

Those of the second group—the *return path*—are more advanced in their evolution and feel strongly the attraction of the divine pole in them. For them, a long-standing association with another individual would be contrary to their spiritual destiny and to indulge in it would cause delay in the progress

of their soul. They cannot commit themselves and alienate their deep-seated freedom.

But the borderline between the two groups is not clearly drawn. There is a large category of men and women evolving in a margin of incertitude. These become the seats of a prolonged and painful conflict between the two poles of their being, the human and the divine. But they have to move forward, at whatever cost.

Yoga is a process that accelerates individual evolution. Through yoga those that are treading *the return path*, and even those that are struggling in the zone of incertitude, may clear in one life a great part of the way and reach divine union. The fact of aspiring to yoga is a proof that one is treading *the return path*, or is quite close to it.

With this in mind we understand clearly why Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, speaking to all who follow yoga or aspire to it, repeat constantly that a 'vital' or sexual relationship with another individual is one of the greatest obstacles in the way.

This explains also why persons from outside—who do not follow yoga—get an impression, when reading the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, that they reject human love, vital and sexual, for the whole of mankind. It is now clear that this is a wrong impression. If someone of *the outward path* consults the Mother in order to ascertain whether it is advisable to marry or not, the answer will, in general, not be negative. And her approval would hold all the more for the innumerable millions of men and women to whom the idea will never come to consult a spiritual leader about their marriage.

These explanations should enable anyone of us, if he observes and studies himself attentively, to ascertain, at least roughly, where he stands on the long scale of evolution. He will not only be able to understand his instinctive reactions, but will also know that, whatever place he has now reached, he will tread the entirety of the scale and attain liberation. Fear drops out of him—that fear of standing forever condemned, contemptible, imperfect. He will be able to look at himself without losing strength and come to decisions accordingly.

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*Love is one of the great universal forces; it exists by itself and its movement is free and independent of the objects in which and through which it manifests.... Men think that they have suddenly fallen in love; they see their love come and grow and then it fades—or, it may be, endures a little longer in some who are more specially fitted for its more lasting movement.... Love does not manifest in human beings alone; it is everywhere. Its movement is there in plants, perhaps in the very stones; in the animals it is easy to detect its presence.... Love divine gives itself and asks for nothing. What human beings have made of it, we do not need to say; they have turned it into an ugly and repulsive thing. And yet in human beings the first contact of love does bring down something of its purer substance; they become capable for a moment of forgetting themselves, for a moment its divine touch awakens and magnifies all that is fine and beautiful. But afterwards there comes to the surface the human nature, full of its impure demands, asking for something in exchange, bartering what it gives, clamouring for its own inferior satisfactions, distorting and soiling what was divine.*

*The Mother*  
*'Conversations with the Mother, IX'*

# Constitutional Aspects-A Consciousness Perspective

*Dr. Soumitra Basu*

If we are to look at the (Indian) Constitution from Sri Aurobindo's viewpoint, we have to consider 'consciousness' as the framework of reference. In the Sri Aurobindonian parlance, consciousness—the essence of all existence—is a pluridimensional reality that is manifested in an evolutionary movement along several dimensions. An inner spiritual evolution supports an outer evolution of forms proceeding along myriad dimensions viz. biological, social, cultural, psychological. Through all these forms, Nature attempts to progress, in spite of resistance of all kinds. Just as, at the individual level, man tries to harmonise the discordant aspects of his being around a central principle and then tries to move from a lower to a higher harmony; so also, at the social level, nature tries to harmonise diverse individual idiosyncrasies in more complex aggregates and then attempts to re-harmonise such aggregates around a higher principle.

Such a hierarchical framework needs to be sustained on certain psychological principles:

- (1) Nature works through free variation and individual progress and any attempt to thwart this movement of self-determination, either in individual life or in regional life, leads to a disruptive situation. However, individual self-determination must also harmonise with a common self-determination.
- (2) As all individuals do not progress similarly, the mass consciousness always lags behind the individual consciousness.
- (3) It is not only the individual who evolves but, also the collectivity, as man is a communal being. The collectivity moves towards perfection through more and more

complex aggregates (family, commune, class, city-state and nation). It is this evolutionary trend that has created the national aggregate. It also seeks to outgrow the national ego and proceed towards internationalism based on a unification of the human race.

- (4) A nation must have a natural body (based on a common bond of descent and a common habitat), a common life, vital interests (expressed through economic and political unity) and, lastly, a conscious mind or a sense of unity. A true sense of unity is not based upon uniformity. It is, rather, an inner oneness that permits a play of diversity.
- (5) The evolutionary nusus presses to progress from nationalism to internationalism. If this trend is allowed to develop, we can visualise an eventual world-state or world-union which could take the form of a federation of free nations or distribution of the earth into a few great hegemonies or a practical combination of the two. Whatever the form, it can only be durable if it is organised around a new psychological principle of unity that is still in a nascent stage of development. Our main psychological failure, to stabilise human collectivities and to secure a balanced relationship between individual freedom and social responsibility, is because, at the present level of organisation of social consciousness, we have been unable to harmonise liberty and equality. This can only be possible by shifting the lever of consciousness beyond not only the individual ego, but also of the collective ego. The principle of fraternity exists only in the soul and by the soul. It is this soul-comradeship which is the

foundation of the future gnostic collectivity where liberty and equality are perfectly harmonised.

## II

Our constitution makers and policy framers have to be sensitive to this perspective of consciousness of both individual and social growth. Some areas that deserve attention and need thinking about are enumerated.

### (A) At the individual level

The human being must develop his individuality in a way that is unique to him. The basic requisite for such an endeavour is the free access of the individual to education and health. A fundamental right to education and health care has not been adequately achieved. The former is in the process of consideration as a bill that is yet hanging in the parliament. The latter, except for primary-level action, is still elusive for the masses. (How many can afford an Intensive Care Unit if the need arises?)

The child is a soul meant to grow and not a brute psychological stuff to be shaped into a fixed mould by the teacher. That is why, Sri Aurobindo advocated that while education should be provided to all, we must also be aware of the dangers of State-controlled education where individual initiative and growth stand a risk of being hampered.

In the field of health, it is not enough to define health only in terms of physical, psychological and social variables. The WHO itself has taken up the domain of spiritual health—a domain which deals with the essence of ourselves and others, with our relations with the world as a whole and with that which transcends it. It has not the same importance for all but, for most of humanity, it has a deep impact on all aspects of life and, certainly, on health and well-being. It has a profound influence on how we deal with illness, on the speed of recovery and on our ability to cope with illness and death. Unless we consider this dimension, not only can we

not perfect our vision of health but also at the practical and legal level, we will be unable to draft satisfactory legislation and recommendations for ethical issues like abortion, suicide and euthanasia.

### (B) At the national level

Sri Aurobindo explains that the nation is the largest natural unit which humanity has been able to create and maintain for collective living though it might not be the ultimate and actually give way, one day, to a greater global aggregate. In fact, the Time-Spirit is already pressing for supra-national aggregates. It would, therefore, be a retrograde step if disruptive sub-national forces, in the guise of regional autonomies or religion, are allowed to have their sway. We see such disruptive forces disturbing the national life of India. Evidently, such a problem can only be ideally solved by the development of a psychological sense of unity with the mainstream of national life—a phenomenon that has to be built up through education. The question is, until that psychological unity develops, should the Constitution allow 'Force' to be used to tackle centrifugal trends, albeit temporarily? This is a question that not only needs a moral answer but also psychological thought. Even rational man is not free from the roots of irrationality—he has his taboos, dogmas, prejudices and *sanskāras*. Until the inner reasons for war and discord are removed, war remains as much a psychological necessity as peace. A certain amount of force to tackle disruptive forces cannot, perhaps, be eliminated until a sufficient psychological sense of unity develops. This is an area that needs thinking.

However, Sri Aurobindo also stressed that a rigorous unification, with a standardised and uniform administration, language, literature, culture, art and education, all carried on through the agency of one national tongue, would not only be impracticable but also might not be desirable for India. The idea of a federation of states and regional people would be more desirable. In fact, the patriotic unity achieved in India would be endangered by refusing to allow the natural play

of life of the sub-nations than by satisfying their legitimate aspirations. Sri Aurobindo even warned that an annulment of the partition of India might modify, but would not materially alter, the general tendency of regional people demanding the right to a self-governing existence. That is why he commented, "A Union of States and regional peoples would again be the form of a united India." In consonance with this view, reappraisals of our Centre-State relations have to be worked out.

### (C) Political structure

Sri Aurobindo stressed that an effective political structure should have a living contact with the people. The Parliamentary system alone has been insufficient in this regard. Sri Aurobindo felt that, in the Indian psyche, the Panchāyat system was more representative of the grass-roots. They represented the people's ideas. In fact, the partial success of the Panchayat Raj in West Bengal, in recent times (inspite of its infiltration by undesirable elements), is a case in point. However, even in West Bengal, the legislators have been unable to be in a continuum with the Panchayat administrators. Already a dispute has arisen—who is more important: the Zillā Sabhādhipati (at the apex of the Panchāyat hierarchy) or the Member of the Legislative Assembly (at the lower end of the parliamentary hierarchy). The dispute itself shows how far the parliamentary system has moved from its living contact with the people.

It must be admitted that we live in a mutable world and it is unwise to stick to dogmatic forms. However, we should now give a serious thought to effecting a restructuring of our political hierarchy so that the system does not lose its living contact with the people.

### (D) Language

Sri Aurobindo considered that, "Nothing has stood more in the way of the rapid progress in India, nothing has more successfully prevented her self-finding and development under modern conditions than the long overshadowing of the

Indian tongues as cultural instruments by the English language.... Language is the sign of the cultural life of a people.... Diversity of language is worth keeping ... because without that diversity life cannot have full play." However, Sri Aurobindo cautions that it is necessary to differentiate the 'great tongues' from dialects and aboriginal survivals of tribal speech.

It is evident, therefore, that the importance of the mother tongue in primary education cannot be ignored. However, we also need a national link language and a global link language—the last being served by English. It is the question of a national link language that has not attained unanimity. That Hindi has not been wholeheartedly accepted by the Southern States need not be exaggerated. Instead of harping on the same old issue, can we think of devising a simplified Sanskrit, which would be very close to Hindi and, also, be simultaneously acceptable to the Southern tongues? Can we spare a thought for this issue?

### (E) The caste system

It is interesting that while civilizations, empires, nations and other social edifices continue to rise and fall, the Indian Caste System still continues to persist. It is therefore necessary to go beyond the social forms of the Caste System and seek to know why it is deeply imprinted in the psyche of the race. In India, all psychological and social constructs seek to associate themselves with spiritual ideas. Thus, together with the social, economic, political and cultural perspectives, there is *paripassu*, a spiritual seed-idea that seemed to justify Chaturvarna. Now that the Caste System has lost its social relevance, the original Vedic seed-idea can be used for another novel and innovative synthesis.

The four orders of the Chaturvarna, figuratively, sprang from the limbs of the creative deity—the cosmic godhead—from his head, arms, thighs and feet. Ordinarily this is construed to indicate that Brāhmins were men of knowledge, Kshatriyas were men of power, Vaishyas were the producers and support of the society and the Shudras were

its servants. But this is too superficial a reading of the imagery which actually tried to depict how the Divine expresses itself in man and his myriad activities—the Divine as knowledge in man, the Divine as power, the Divine as production, enjoyment and mutuality and the Divine as service, obedience and work. These divisions correspond to the four cosmic principles whose efflorescence needs the help of the four great powers of the Divine Shakti—

- (a) The Wisdom that conceives the order and principle of things and is manifested by Maheshwari, Goddess of supreme knowledge;
- (b) The Power that sanctions, upholds and enforces it, aided by Mahākālī, Goddess of the supreme strength;
- (c) The Harmony that creates the arrangements of its parts with the help of Mah-ākashmi, the Goddess of love and beauty; and
- (d) The Work that carries out what the rest directs with the sanction of Mahāsaraswati, Goddess of skill and perfection.

These four principles justified the four-fold order of the society. They can also be used to justify and build up an ideal four-fold personality as the same Reality expresses itself equally in man and the collectivity. Sri Aurobindo describes that the very nature of our life is such that it is at every moment subject to the influence of these four principles at work—“Our life itself is at once an inquiry after truth and knowledge, a struggle and battle of our will with ourselves and surrounding forces, a constant production, adaptation, application of skill to the material of life and a sacrifice and service.”

Sri Aurobindo explains that the crude external idea that a man is born into a particular caste is not a psychological truth of our being. “The psychological fact is that there are these four active powers and tendencies of the Spirit and its executive Shakti within us and the predominance of one or the other in the more well-formed part

of our personality gives us our main tendencies, dominant qualities and capacities, effective turn in action and life. But they are more or less present in all men, here manifest, there latent, here developed, there subdued and depressed or subordinate, and in the perfect man will be raised up to a fullness and harmony.... the most outward psychological form of these things is the mould or trend of the nature towards certain dominant tendencies, capacities, characteristics, form of active power, quality of the mind and inner life, cultural personality or type.”

The greater perfection of man comes when he enlarges his repertoire to include all the four qualities even though one of them may lead the others. These four qualities correspond to the head and limbs that spring from the body of the creative deity in the original Vedic imagery. The head and the limbs are dependent on the body but the body exceeds its parts as the latter can remain either quiescent or active. Similarly, the four-fold powers of man must have a base (analogous to the body of the creative deity) to which they relate but which in turn is not exhausted by them. This is the soul-force presiding over and filling the powers of its nature. It is something “impersonal in the personal form, independent and self-sufficient even in the use of the instrumentation, indeterminable though determining both itself and things, something that acts with a much greater power upon the world and uses particular power only as one means of communication and impact on man and circumstance.” The four-fold powers have to be harmonised and integrated around this soul-force which surpasses the ego.

The four-fold personality perfected around an integrating soul-force is the synthesis perceived by Sri Aurobindo. This new synthesis is built from the same seed-ideas that gave birth to the Chaturvarna. The Chaturvarna was an expression of the Universal Spirit as a four-fold social hierarchy. With the passage of time the form lost its significance and became a burden—something that occurred when the Chaturvarna became a diseased caste system. But the spirit of the original seed-ideas born from an intuitive seer-vision



outlives the forms and can always be used for a new synthesis. The four-fold personality featuring Wisdom, Strength, Harmony and Service integrated around the soul-force is such a new synthesis made from the same seed ideas that produced the Chaturvarna. This would be more acceptable to the Indian psyche to whom the Vedas, Upanishads and Gitā continue to be living spirit.

(F) At the international level

The evolutionary nirus tends to move towards internationalism beyond all natural egos. It is here that India, with its unique cultural and spiritual heritage has a great role to play. There are diverse directions in which India can take the lead. One such is the step towards a world citizenship. The Mother planted the seeds of this movement in her famous speech of 15 August 1964 when she made known her ardent desire to become an Indian citizen without relinquishing her French citizenship... "I am French by birth and early education, I am Indian by choice and predilection. In my consciousness there is no antagonism between the two, on the contrary, they combine very well and complete one another. I know also that I can be of service to both equally, for my only aim in life is to give a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's great teaching and in his teaching he reveals, that all nations are essentially one and meant to express the Divine Unity upon earth through an organised and harmonious diversity."

This is a concrete step that can be taken up by India. Not only Non-Resident Indian's, but selected people in difficult countries (viz. academicians, sportsmen, musicians) can be given double/multiple citizenship. If such an exchange could occur between the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) countries it would automatically result in goodwill. A similar facility provided to selective individuals in Western countries would itself be a starting point for a change of their governmental professional lobbying which anyway brings limited gains.

Another important idea that should be taken up for discussion is whether a confederation of

SAARC countries can be developed and strengthened. If this could be achieved, we would go a long way in solving our communal problems. Such a confederation would, of course, serve a greater purpose and bring real prosperity to this part of Asia. Very recently, in an article titled 'Seeking a Diplomatic Revolution' by M. A. Niazi in the Pakistani newspaper 'The Nation', a concept of an 'alliance' between India and Pakistan has been forwarded. A few politicians have also mooted the idea of a 'confederation' type of arrangement between India and Pakistan to end the existing proxy war or cold. It is significant that the Mother herself hinted at such an idea. Sri Aurobindo has prophesied: "... The partition must go. Let us hope that that (it) may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action, by the practice of common action and the creation of means for that purpose. In this way, unity may finally come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance...."

Finally, India has to take an important step, when the need arises, for reshaping the Constitution of the United Nations Organisation (U.N.O.). Indeed, Sri Aurobindo viewed that, "... The present organisation cannot be itself final, it is only an imperfect beginning, useful and necessary as a primary nucleus of that larger institution in which all the peoples of the earth can meet each other in a single international unity...." Each nation represents a unique aspect of Truth, which must be expressed in a new world-order on a principle of equality into which considerations of size and strength will not enter. Instead of the present bias in the balance of power represented in the U. N. O., the future would prefer a well-ordered harmony of the world's peoples safeguarded by the law of a new international order. "A sure justice, a fundamental equality and combination of rights and interests must be the law of this world-state and the basis of its entire edifice."

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

# Utopia-In Western Thought

Christof

There is enough evidence in the social and political works of Sri Aurobindo to count him among the 'utopia thinkers'. In *The Ideal of Human Unity* he envisages the future political order on our planet developing his utopian projections out of an historical analysis. Based on self-determination, peace and economic co-operation, his picture of a free world union of mankind embodies the ideal of 'diversity in oneness'.<sup>1</sup> He depicts a situation in which the present egoism and aggressiveness among individuals, groups and nations are replaced by a 'religion of humanity', acknowledging the universal value of the human right of self-development of all man's potentialities in peace and indiscrimination.<sup>2</sup> By mentioning that these ideals originated with the French Utopians of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the English-educated Sri Aurobindo puts himself in the tradition of Western Utopism,<sup>3</sup> a tradition which, by his unique synthesis of knowledge, he leaves far behind in many ways.

'Utopia' is a Greek word, meaning 'no land' or 'no place' and the term has been commonly used, since the publication of Thomas More's book on the imaginary island 'utopia', to denote fictional descriptions of an ideal state, remote either in space or time. Utopian thought is fictional because it has generally no empirical foundation—it is a mind-game giving the author all the possibilities of displaying his phantasy and imagination. Nonetheless a line can be drawn separating mere belletristic novels of past or future societies from—let's call it—the scientific utopia which tries to develop ideal standards for social arrangements and moral conduct on the basis of an intellectual reflection on the history and nature of man.

Genuine Utopia aims at an improvement of the human condition on earth, and even if it is sometimes coated with religious ideas, it is a secular affair, trying to establish the 'kingdom of heaven on earth'. In the sense, utopian thought is social theory and its theme is the social and political organisation of a community, a city, a nation, or the world.

In spite of many fulfilled prophecies a basic problem of all Utopias remains the relation between theory and practice. In most Utopias the ideal is so remote from the actual state of affairs that its immediate practical realisation encounters almost insurmountable impediments. The French and Russian Revolutions might serve as examples for the implementation of utopian ideals on a large scale, destroying the previous order and establishing the new one. The establishment of small communities within the existing social order, like Owen's 'New Harmony' in Indiana, USA, the anarchistic villages in Italy, Spain and Russia during the thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or the contemporary counter-culture settlements in America and New Zealand, is a method to materialize Utopia without revolutionary upheaval. The underlying hope is that the growth of the community and its living example of a better world will ultimately transform the whole environment. Neither the revolutionary ideology, nor the small-scale community approach have very encouraging perspectives: the history of after-revolutionary France and Russia shows that a transformation of a society can hardly be achieved overnight and that old patterns of behaviour resurrect only too easily under new names. Utopian settlements have to face the notion that it is unlikely that smaller units will

solve the problems the bigger units cannot cope with.

The scientific or philosophical Utopia wants to be a remedy and a solution for contemporary evils and problems and the utopian authors set up a blue print for a better future world. Naturally their blueprints vary in form and temper according to the specific historical situation in which they were written: Plato's Spartan 'Republic' opposed the decline of the ancient Greek city-states; in the models of the 'citta felice' (happy city), composed by the Italian humanist during the Renaissance, one feels the need of the newly-emerging class of educated merchants and city-aristocrats to express their world-view of a materially successful life within the boundaries of a peaceful city-republic; Thomas More's 'communism' is set against his anti-utopian description of the evils resulting from the unscrupulous exploitation of the country side by the English nobility in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; Francis Bacon's 'New Atlas' can be seen as a model for the institutionalization of the new sciences as it was done shortly afterwards with the foundation of the Royal Society in 1661; Tommaso Campanella's theocratic 'City of the Sun' is at least partly an answer to the detrimental fragmentation of Europe into small principalities during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, principalities constantly at war with each other; Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideal of a simple, natural life according to one's real needs is certainly a reaction against the hypocritical moralism of the French monarchy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; violent class-conflicts should be overcome by Turgot's and Condorcet's idea that constant social and moral progress inevitably materialises the ideals of equality, brotherhood and freedom. Saint Simon's and Fourier's emphasis on the necessary satisfaction of the emotional dimension of man can be interpreted as a reaction against the prevailing rationalism. Robert Owen's

foundation of a small egalitarian township based on agriculture and small-scale industry in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is not only one of the first examples of an 'applied Utopianism' which failed; it can also be seen as the outcome of Owen's experiences of the miserable working-class conditions when he was a rich cotton-mill owner in Scotland. With Marx and his followers Utopia became definitely a political program for a new society which had to be achieved here and now through violent revolutionary action against the capitalistic organised industrialism.

In opposition to the Marxist dogmatic stands the anarchic Utopia of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin who did not want to demolish one system just to erect another one. In their eyes independence of the individual conscience is the only needed guarantee for a free association of individuals according to mutual interest. The 'commune' is favoured as the ideal unit for production and consumption and every member is expected to contribute according to his abilities and allowed to take according to his needs. Society would just be a loose federation of unions without any central power.

With Darwin's theory of evolution and Freud's psychoanalysis, new and eventually crucial insights for Utopia have emerged.

Darwin's notion that man himself is nothing other than an historical product of the terrestrial evolution destroyed the image of the static nature of man and made him subject to possible physical and mental transformation. This prospect animated not only the phantasy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century science fiction writers; the possibility of direct manipulation of the gene-pool of mankind is also technically a feasible option. So contemporary utopia thought envisages not only alterations of social and technical conditions, but also manipulations of the physical appearance of man.

The idea of changing the nature of man finds a correlate in the Eastern traditions, especially in the idea of man's transformation through different techniques of yoga. At this meeting point of West and East one can clearly see the entirely different approaches of the two cultures to the same issue; while Western rationalism is trying to effectuate a transformation from outside employing sophisticated technical equipment, Eastern mysticism is relying on man's inner potentialities for a willed mutation of the species.

The Utopia stands at a similar crossroad when he considers Freud's discoveries of the psychic structure of man. According to Freud all cultural achievements are a product of the repression of his basic desires—love and destruction. That means the collective body of civilisation and culture exists only at the expense of the individual's happiness. Under these premises the very idea of a peaceful, harmonious and happy utopian society becomes an absurdity. Followers of

Freud, like Reich and Marcuse, maintain that the repression of the libido in order to construct civilisation had been necessary in previous steps of civilisation building, but that it had lost its meaning in economically and technically advanced societies, where the satisfaction of basic needs are easily fulfilled. For advanced societies the main problem is not any more on the economic and material levels, where Utopia has theoretically already been achieved, but on the psychic and spiritual plane where man is searching for a meaning of life and for satisfaction in his work. But still, if the Freudian image of man is accepted, even this more optimistic view has to face the same problem on the higher level: also in the psychic and spiritual dimensions of collectivity the loving and destructive desires have to be repressed to secure cohesion among the members of the post-industrial society.

Obviously in the end the problem of peaceful, harmonious and happy society lies more in the nature of man than in the construction of ideal social conditions.

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### CHARTER OF AUROVILLE

- 1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.*
- 2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.*
- 3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.*
- 4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.*

*The Mother*  
*28 February 1968*

# In Quest of Reality

*Nolini Kanta Gupta*

This is, they say, the age of Positivism - no mystic obfuscation, but clear light in the open sun. Let us enquire a little into the nature of this modern illumination.

Positivists are those who swear by facts. Facts to them mean naturally facts attested in the end by sense-experience. To a positivist the only question that matters and that needs to be answered and can be answered is whether a thing is or is not physically: other questions are otiose, irrelevant, misleading. So problems of the Good, of the Beautiful, of God are meaningless. When one says this is good, that is bad, well, it is a proposition that cannot be related to any fact, it is a subjective personal valuation. In the objective world a thing simply is or is not, one cannot say it is good or it is bad. The thing called good by one is called bad by another, the same thing that is good to you now will appear bad at another time. This is a region absolutely of personal and variable idiosyncrasy. The same with regard to the concept of beauty. That a thing is beautiful or ugly is a subjective judgment; it is not and cannot be an objective statement. Beauty is a formula in your mind and imagination, it is a changing mode of your apprehension. The concept of God too fares no better. God exists: it is a judgment based upon no fact or facts of sense-experience. However we may analyse it, it is found to have no direct or even indirect but inevitable rapport with the field of actual reality. There is between the two an unbridgeable hiatus. This is a position restated in a modern style, familiar to the Kantian Critique of Pure Reason.

There are two ways of facing the problem. First, the Kantian way which cuts the Gordian knot. We say here that there are two realms in which man lives, but they are incommunicable: the truths and categories of one cannot be judged and tested

by those of the other. Each is *sui generis*, each is valid in its own right, in its own dominion. God, Soul, Immortality - these are realities belonging to one section of our nature, seizable by a faculty other than the Pure Reason, viz., the Practical Reason; while the realities given by the senses and the judgments of the logical mind are of another section. It may be said one is physical, the other metaphysical. The positivists limit their field of enquiry and knowledge to the physical: they seek to keep the other domain quite apart as something imaginary, illusory, often unnecessary and not too often harmful to true human interest.

To a more detached and impartial view this may appear very much like the ostrich-policy. If a thing really exists, one cannot negate it by simply closing one's eyes. This involves a dichotomy which the logical mind may like to impose and live by, but man cannot be thus artificially segmented. And if both the worlds are found in him both have to be accepted and if they are found together, there must be some sort of commensurability between the two.

Indeed the second way of approach to the problem is the positivist's own way. That is to say, let us take our stand on the *terra firma* of the physical and probe into it and find out whether there are facts there which open the way or point to the other side of nature, whether there are signs, hints, intimations, factors involved there that lead to conclusions, if not inevitable, at least conformable to supraphysical truths. It is usually asserted, for example, that the scientist - the positivist par excellence - follows a rigid process of ratiocination, of observation, analysis and judgment. He collects facts and a sufficient number of them made to yield a general law - the probability of a generic fact - which is tested or exemplified by other correlate facts. This is however an ideal, a

theoretical programme not borne out by actual practice, it is a rationalisation of a somewhat different actuality. The scientist, even the most hard-headed among them, the mathematician, finds his laws often and perhaps usually not by a long process of observation and induction or deduction, but all on a sudden, in a flash of illumination. The famous story of Newton and the falling apple, Kepler's happy guess of the elliptical orbit of the planets - and a host of examples can be cited as rather the rule than the exception for the methodology of scientific discovery. Prof. Hadamard, the great French mathematician, - the French are well-known for their intransigent, logical and rational attitude in Science, - has been compelled to admit the supreme role of an intuitive faculty in scientific enquiry. If it is argued that the so-called sudden intuition is nothing but the final outburst, the cumulative resultant of a long strenuous travail of thinking and reasoning and arguing, Prof. Hadamard says, in reply, that it does not often seem to be so, for the answer or solution that is suddenly found does not lie in the direction of or in conformity with the conscious rational research but goes against it and its implications.

This faculty of direct knowledge, however, is not such a rare thing as it may appear to be. Indeed if we step outside the circumscribed limits of pure science instances crowd upon us even in our normal life, which would compel one to conclude that the rational and sensory process is only a fringe and a very small part of a much greater and wider form of knowing. Poets and artists, we all know, are familiar only with that form: without intuition and inspiration they are nothing. Apart from that, modern inquiries and observations have established beyond doubt certain facts of extra-sensory, suprarational perception - of clairvoyance and clairaudience, of prophecy, of vision into the future as well as into the past. Not only these unorthodox faculties of knowledge, but dynamic powers that almost negate or flout the usual laws of science have been demonstrated to exist and can be and are used by man. The Indian yogic discipline speaks of the eight Siddhis, supernatural powers attained by the Yogi when he learns to

control nature by the force of his consciousness. Once upon a time these facts were challenged as facts in the scientific world, but it is too late now in the day to deny them their right of existence. Only Science, to maintain its scientific prestige, usually tries to explain such phenomena in the material way, but with no great success. In the end she seems to say these freaks do not come within her purview and she is not concerned with them. However, that is not for us also the subject for discussion for the moment.

The first point then we seek to make out is that even from a rigid positivist stand a form of knowledge that is not strictly positivist has to be accepted. Next, if we come to the content of the knowledge that is being gained, it is found one is being slowly and inevitably led into a world which is also hardly positivistic. We have in our study of the physical world come in close contact with two disconcerting facts or two ends of one fact - the infinitely small and the infinitely large. They have disturbed considerably the normal view of things, the view that dominated Science till yesterday. The laws that hold good for the ordinary sensible magnitudes fail totally in the case of the infinite magnitudes (whether big or small). In the infinite we begin squaring the circle.

Take for instance, the romantic story of the mass of a body. Mass, at one time, was considered as one of the fundamental constants of nature: it meant a fixed quantity of substance inherent in a body, it was an absolute quality. Now we have discovered that this is not so; the mass of a body varies with its speed and an object with infinite speed has an infinite mass - theoretically at least it should be so. A particle of matter moving with the speed of light must be terribly massive. But - *mirabile dictu!* - A photon has no mass (practically none). In other words, a material particle when it is to be most material - exactly at the critical temperature, as it were - is dematerialised. How does the miracle happen?

In fact, we are forced to the conclusion that the picture of a solid massive material nature is only a mask of the reality; the reality is that matter is a

charge of electricity and the charge of electricity is potentially a mode of light. The ancient distinction between matter and energy is no longer valid. In fact energy is potentially a mode of light. The ancient distinction between matter and energy is no longer valid. In fact energy is the sole reality, matter is only an appearance that energy puts on under a certain condition. And this energy too is not mechanical (and Newtonian) but radiant and ethereal. We can no longer regret with the poet: They have gone into the world of light

For, we all are come into a world of light and we ourselves, the elements of our physical frame are made of the very texture of light.

So far so good. But it is evidently not far enough, for one can answer that all this falls within the dominion of Matter and the material. The conception of Matter has changed, to be sure: Matter and energy are identified, as we have said, and the energy in its essential and significant form is light (which, we may say, is electricity at its highest potential). But this does not make any fundamental change in the metaphysical view of the reality. We have to declare in the famous French phrase *plus ça change, plus ça reste le meme* (the more it changes the more it remains the same). The reality remains materials for light, physical light is not something spiritual or even immaterial

Well, let us proceed a little further. Admitted the universe is a physical substance (although essentially of the nature of light - admitted light is a physical substance, obeying the law of gravitation, as Einstein has demonstrated). Does it then mean that the physical universe is after all a dead inert insentient thing, that whatever the vagaries of the ultimate particles composing the universe, their structure, their disposition is more or less strictly geometrical (that is to say, mechanical) and their erratic movement is only the errantry of a throw of dice - a play of possibilities? There is nothing even remotely conscious or purposive in this field.

Let us leave the domain, the domain of inorganic matter for a while and turn to another set of facts,

those of organic matter, of life and its manifestation. The biological domain is a freak in the midst of what appears to be a rigidly mechanistic material universe. The laws of life are not the laws of matter, very often one contravenes the other. The two converging lenses of the two eyes do not make the image twice brighter than the one produced by a single lens. What is this alchemy that forms the equation  $1^2 = 1$  (we might as well put it as  $1+1=1$ )? Again, a living whole - a cell-fissured and divided tends to live and grow wholly in each fragment. In life we have thus another strange equation: part = whole (although in the mathematics of infinity such an equation is a normal phenomenon). The body (of a warm-blooded animal) maintaining a constant temperature whether it is at the Pole or at the Equator is a standing miracle which baffles mere physics and chemistry. Thirdly, life is immortal - the law of entropy (of irrevocably diminishing energy) that governs the fate of matter does not seem to hold good here. The original life-cells are carried over physically from generation to generation and there is no end to the continuity of the series, if allowed to run its normal course. Material energy also, it is said, is indestructible; it is never destroyed, but changes form only. But the scientific conception of material energy puts a limit to its course, it proceeds, if we are to believe thermodynamics, towards a dead equilibrium - there is no such thing as "perpetual movement" in the field of matter.

Again the very characteristic of life is its diversity, its infinite variety of norms and forms and movements. The content and movement of material nature is calculable to a great extent. A few mathematical equations or formulae can after all be made to cover all or most facts concerning it. But the laws of life refuse systematisation. A few laws purporting to govern the physical bases of life claim recognition, but they stand on precarious grounds. The laws of natural selection, of heredity of genetics are applicable within a very restricted frame of facts. The variety of material substances revolves upon the gamut of 92 elements based upon 4 or 5 ultimate types of electric unit - and that is sufficient to make us wonder. But the variety in life-play is simply incalculable-form

the amoeba or virus cell to man, what a bewildering kaleidoscope and each individual in each group is unique in its way! The few chromosomes that seem to be the basis of all diversity do not explain the mystery - the mystery becomes doubly mysterious: how does a tiny seed contain the thing that is to become a Banyan tree, how does a speck of plasma bring forth from within an object of Hamletian dimensions! What then is this energy or substance of life welling out irrepressively into multitudinous forms and modes? The chemical elements composing an organic body do not wholly exhaust its composition; there is something else besides. At least in one field, the life element has received recognition and been given an independent name and existence. I am obviously referring to the life element in foodstuff, which has been called vitamin.

Life looks out of matter as a green sprout in the midst of desert expanse. But is matter really so very different and distinct from life? Does Matter mean no Life? Certain facts and experiments have thrown great doubt upon that assumption. An Indian, a scientist of the first order in the European and modern sense, has adduced proofs that obliterate the hard and fast line of demarcation between the living and the non-living. He has demonstrated the parallelism, if not the identity, of the responses of those two domains: we use the term fatigue in respect of living organisms only, but Jagadischandra Bose says and shows, that matter too, a piece of metal for instance, undergoes fatigue. Not only so, the graph, the periodicity of the reactions as shown by a living body under a heightened or diminished stimulus or the influence of poison or drug is repeated very closely by the so-called dead matter under the same treatment.

It will not be far from the truth, if it is asserted that matter is instinct with a secret life. And because there was life secreted within matter, therefore life could come out of matter; there is here no spontaneous generation, no arbitrary fiat nor a fortuitous chance. The whole creation is a mighty stir of life. That is how the ancient Rishi of the Upanishad puts it: Life stirred and all came out.

Now, let us advance another step forward. Beyond matter there lies life and beyond life -

consciousness. Is consciousness too a mere epiphenomenon as life was once thought to be in the empire of matter? Or can it not be that consciousness is an extension - an evolute - of life, even as life is an extension, an evolute of matter? In other words consciousness is not a freak, even as life was not; it is inherent in life, life itself is a rudimentary movement of consciousness. The amoeba feeling or pre-sensing its way towards its food, the twig bending towards the direction in which it has the chance of getting more light, the sudden appearance of organs or elements in an organism that will be useful only in the future are indisputable examples of a purposiveness, a forward reference in the scheme of Nature. In other words consciousness is not a freak, even as life was not; it is inherent in life, life itself is a rudimentary movement of consciousness. The amoeba feeling or pre-sensing its way towards its food, the twig bending towards the direction in which it has the chance of getting more light, the sudden appearance of organs or elements in an organism that will be useful only in the future are indisputable examples of a purposiveness, a forward reference in the scheme of Nature. In the domain of life-play teleology is a fact which only the grossest brand of obfuscation can deny. And teleology means - does it not? - The stress of an idea, the pattern of a consciousness.

Consciousness or thought in man, we know, is linked with the brain: and sentience which is the first step towards thought and consciousness is linked with the nervous system (of which the brain is an extension). Now the same Indian wizard who first, scientifically speaking, linked up the non-living with the living, has also demonstrated, if not absolutely, at least to a high degree of plausibility, that the plant also possesses a kind of rudimentary nervous system (although we accept more easily a respiratory system there). All this, however, one has to admit, is still a far cry from any intimation of consciousness in Matter. Yet if life is admitted to be involved in matter and consciousness is found to be involved in life, then the unavoidable conclusion is that Matter too must contain involved in it a form of consciousness. The real difficulty in the way of attributing consciousness to Matter is our conception of



consciousness which we usually identify with articulate thought, intelligence or reason. But these are various formations of consciousness, which in itself is something else and can exist in many other forms and formulations.

One remarkable thing in the material world that has always attracted and captivated man's attention, since almost the very dawn of his consciousness, is the existence of a pattern, of an artistic layout in the composition and movement of material things. When the Vedic Rishi sings out: "These countless stars that appear glistening night after night, where do they vanish during the day?" he is awed by the inviolable rhythm of the Universe, which other sages in other climes sang as the music of the spheres. The presence of Design in Nature has been in the eyes of Believers an incontrovertible proof of the existence of a Designer. What we want to say is not that a watch (if we regard the universe as a watch) presupposes the existence of a watchmaker: we say the pattern itself is the expression of an idea, it involves a conception not imposed or projected from outside but inherent in itself. The Greek view of the artist's mode of operation is very illuminating in this connection. The artist, according to this view, when he carves out a statue for example, does not impose upon the stone a figure that he has only in his mind, but that the stone itself contains the figure, the artist has the vision to see it, his chisel follows the lines he sees imbedded in the stone. It is why we say that the geometry in the structure of a crystal or an atom or an astronomical system, the balance and harmony, the symmetry and polarity that govern the composition of objects and their relations, the blend of colour schemes, the marshalling of lines and the building of volumes, in a word, the artistic make-up, perfect in detail and in the ensemble that characterise all nature's body and limbs and finally the mathematical laws that embrace and picture as it were Nature's movements, all point to the existence of a truth, a reality whose characteristic marks are or are very much like those of consciousness and Idea-Force. We fight shy of the word-consciousness-for it brings in a whole association of anthropomorphism and pathetic fallacy. But in our anxiety to avoid a ditch let us not fall over a precipice. If it is blindness to see nothing but the spirit, it is not vision to see nothing but Matter.

A hypothesis, however revolutionary or unorthodox it may seem for the moment, has to be tested by its effective application, in its successful working out. All scientific discoveries in the beginning appear as inconveniences that upset the known and accepted order. Copernicus, Newton, Galileo, Kepler, Maxwell or Einstein in our day enunciated principles that were not obvious sense-given axioms. These are at the outset more or less postulates that have to be judged by their applicability.

Creation as a movement or expression of consciousness need not be dubbed a metaphysical jargon; it can be assumed as a scientific working hypothesis and seen how it affects our view, meets our problems and difficulties, whether it can give a satisfactory clue to some of the riddles of physical and psychical phenomena. A scientific supposition (or intuition) is held to be true if it can be applied invariable to facts of life and experience and if it can open up to our vision and perception new facts. The trend of scientific discoveries today is towards the positing of a background reality in Nature of which energy (radiant and electrical) is the first and overt form. We discarded ether, only to replace it by field and disposition. We have arrived at a point where the question is whether we cannot take courage in both hands and declare, as some have already done, that the substratum in Nature is consciousness-energy and on that hypothesis better explain certain movements of Matter and Life and Mind in a global unity. Orthodox and die-hard views will always protest and cry that it is a mesalliance, a misjoinder to couple together Matter and Consciousness or even Life and Consciousness. But since the light has touched the higher mind even among a few of the positivist type, the few may very well be the precursor of the order of the day.

After all, only one bold step is needed: to affirm unequivocally what is being suggested and implied and pointed to in a thousand indirect ways. And Science will be transformed. The scientist too, like the famous Saltimbanque (clown) of a French poet, may one day in turning a somersault, suddenly leap up and find himself rolling into the bosom of the stars.

*'Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta'*  
Vol. 1

## Modern Art

### *The Mother*

Mother reads a passage about art and yoga (*Questions and Answers 1929*, 28 July) then asks:

What is the relation between art and yoga? Can the artist and the yogi have the same source of inspiration? (*Mother turns to a disciple:* ) Amrita, will you tell us what relation there is between art and yoga?

*A beautiful relation.... Art can be a yoga and yoga is an art.*

That's very fine! I knew someone, an American lady, who said that spirituality was supreme good taste, the best possible good taste. This is quite similar.

*What do serpents signify in books and in dreams?*

That depends on the books! That depends on the dreams! If you give me an example from a dream I shall tell you what the nature of your serpent was, but just like that, 'serpents' is too vague.

*Why is modern art so ugly?*

I believe the chief reason is that people have become more and more lazy and do not want to work. They want to produce something before having worked, they want to know before having studied and they want to make a name before having done anything good. So, this is the open door for all sorts of things, as we see.... Naturally, there are exceptions.

I have known artists who were great artists, who had worked hard and produced remarkable things, classical, that is, not ultramodern. But they were not in fashion because, precisely, one had not to be classical. When a brush was put in the hands of an individual who had never touched a brush, and when a brush was put on a palette of colours and the man had never touched a palette before, then if this individual

had in front of him a bit of canvas on an easel and he had never done a picture before, naturally he daubed anything at all; he took the colours and threw them in a haphazard way; then everybody cried out 'admirable', 'marvellous', "it is the expression of your soul", "how well this reveals the truth of things", etc! This was the fashion and people who knew nothing were very successful. The poor men who had worked, who knew their art well, were not asked for their pictures any longer; people said, "Oh! This is old-fashioned, you will never find customers for such things." But, after all, they were hungry, you see, they had to pay their rent and buy their colours and all the rest, and that is costly. Then what could they do? When they had received rebuffs from the picture-dealers who all told them the same thing, "But try to be modern, my friend; look here, you are behind the times", as they were very hungry, what could they do?... I knew a painter, a disciple of Gustav Moreau; he was truly a very fine artist, he knew his work quite well, and then... he was starving, he did not know how to make both ends meet and he used to lament. One day, a friend intending to help him sent a picture-dealer to see him. When the merchant entered his studio, this poor man told himself, "At last! Here's my chance", and he showed him all the best work he had done. The art-dealer made a face, looked around, turned over things and began rummaging in all the corners; and suddenly he found... Ah! I must explain this to you, you are not familiar with these things: a painter, after his day's work has at times some mixed colours left on his palette; he cannot keep them, they dry up in a day; so he always has with him some pieces of canvas which are not well prepared and which he daubs with what are called 'the scrapings of palettes' (with supple knives he scrapes all the colours

from the palette and applies them on the canvases) and as there are many mixed colours, this makes unexpected designs. There was in a corner a canvas like that on which he used to put his palette-scrapings. The merchant suddenly falls upon that and exclaims, "Here you are! My friend, you are a genius, this is a miracle, it is this you should show! Look at this richness of tones, this variety of forms, and what an imagination!" And this poor man who was starving said shyly, "But sir, these are my palette-scrapings!" And the art-dealer caught hold of him: "Silly fool, this is not to be told!" Then he said, "Give me this, I undertake to sell it. Give me as many of these as you like; ten, twenty, thirty a month, I shall sell them all for you and I shall make you famous." Then, as I told you, his stomach was protesting; he was not happy, but he said, "All right, take it, I shall see." Then the landlord comes to demand his rent; the colour-man comes demanding payment of the old bill; the purse is quite empty, and what is to be done? So though he did not make pictures with palette-scrapings, he did something which gave the imagination free play, where the forms were not too precise, the colours were all mixed and brilliant, and one could not know overmuch what one was seeing; and as people did not know very much what they saw, those who understood nothing about it exclaimed, "How beautiful it is!" And he supplied this to his art-dealer. He never made a name for himself with his real painting, which was truly very fine (it was really very fine, he was a very good painter), but he won a world reputation with these horrors! And this was just at the beginning of modern painting, this goes back to the Universal Exhibition of 1900; if I were to tell you his name, you would all recognise it.... Now, of course, they have gone far beyond, they have done much better. However, he had the sense of harmony and beauty and his colours were beautiful. But at present, as soon as there is the least beauty, it won't do at all, it has to be outrageously ugly, then that, that is modern!

The story began with... the man who used to do

still-life and whose plates were never round.... Cézanne! It was he who began it; he said that if plates were painted round that would not be living; that when one looks at things spontaneously, never does one see plates round: one sees them like this (gesture). I don't know why, but he said that it is only the mind that makes us see plates as round, because one knows they are round, otherwise one does not see them round. It is he who began.... He painted a still-life which was truly a very beautiful thing, note that; a very beautiful thing, with an impression of colour and form truly surprising (I could show you reproductions one day, I must be having them, but they are not colour reproductions unfortunately; the beauty is really in the colour). But of course, his plate was not round. He had friends who told him just this, "But after all, why don't you make your plate round?" He replied, "My dear fellow, you are altogether mental, you are not an artist, it is because you think that the plate ought to be painted; it gives you an impact, you translate the impact, and it is this which is truly artistic. It is like this that modern art began. And note that he was right. His plates were not round, but he was right in principle.

What has made art what it is, do you want me to tell you this, psychologically?... it is photography. Photographers did not know their job and gave you hideous things, frightfully ugly, it was mechanical, it had no soul, it had no art, it was horrible. All the first attempts of photography until... not very long ago, were like that. It is about fifty years ago that it became tolerable, and now with gradual improvement it has become something good; but it must be said that the process is absolutely different. In those days, when your portrait was taken you sat in a comfortable chair, you had to sit leaning nicely and facing an enormous thing with a black cloth, which opened like this towards you. And the man ordered, "Don't move! Steady!" That, of course, was the end of the old painting. When the painter made something life-like, a life-like portrait, his friends said, "Why now, this is photography!"

It must be said that the art of the end of the last century, the art of the Second Empire, was bad. It was an age of businessmen, above all an age of bankers, financiers, and taste, upon my word, had gone very low. I don't believe that businessmen are

people necessarily very competent in art, but when they wanted their portrait, they wanted a likeness! One could not leave out the least detail, it was quite comic: "But you know I have a little wrinkle there, don't forget to put it in!" and the lady who said, "You know, you must make my shoulders quite round", and so on. So the artists made portraits which indeed turned into photography. They were flat, cold, without vision. I can name a number of artists of that period, it was truly a shame for art. This lasted till about the end of the last century, till about 1875. Afterwards, there started the reaction. Then there was an entire very beautiful period (I don't say this because I myself was painting) but all the artists I then knew were truly artists, they were serious and did admirable things which have remained admirable. It was the period of the impressionists; it was the period of Manet, it was a beautiful period, they did beautiful things. But people tire of beautiful things as they tire of bad ones. So there were those who wanted to found the 'Salon d'Automne'. They began to depreciate Rembrandt—Rembrandt was a dauber, Titian was a dauber, all the great painters of the Italian Renaissance were daubers. You were not to pronounce the name of Raphael, it was a shame. And all the great period of the Italian Renaissance was 'not worth very much'; even the works of Leonardo da Vinci; "You know, you must take them and leave them." They went a little further; they wanted something entirely new, they became extravagant. And then, from there, there was only one more step to take for the palette-scrapings and then it was finished.

This is the history of art as I knew it.

Now, to tell you the truth, we are climbing up the curve again. Truly, I think we had gone down to the depths of incoherence, absurdity, nastiness—of the taste for the sordid and ugly, the dirty, the outrageous. We had gone, I believe, to the very bottom.

*Are we really going up again?*

I think so. Recently I saw some pictures which truly showed something other than ugliness and indecency. It is not yet art, it is very far from being beautiful, but there are signs that we are going up again. You will see, fifty years hence

we shall perhaps have beautiful things to see. I felt this some days ago, that truly we had come to the end of the descending curve—we are still very low down, but are beginning to climb up. There is a kind of anguish and there is still a complete lack of understanding of what beauty can and should be, but one finds an aspiration towards something which will not be sordidly material. For a time art had wanted to wallow in the mire, to be what they called 'realistic'. They had chosen as 'real' what was most repulsive in the world, most ugly: all deformities, all filth, all ugliness, all the horrors, all the incoherence of colour and form; well, I believe this is behind us now. I had this feeling very strongly these last few days (not through seeing pictures, for we do not have a chance to see much here, but by 'sensing the atmosphere'). And even in the reproductions we are shown, there is some aspiration towards something which would be a little higher. It will need about fifty years; then... Unless there is another war, another catastrophe; because certainly, to a large extent, what is responsible for this taste for the sordid are the wars and the horrors of war. People were compelled to put aside all refined sensibility, the love of harmony, the need for beauty, to be able to undergo all that; otherwise, I believe, they would really have died of horror. It was so unspeakably foul that it could not be tolerated, so it perverted men's taste everywhere and when the war was over (admitting that it ever ended), they wanted only one thing, to forget, forget, forget. To seek distraction, not to think of all the horror they had suffered. Now there, one goes very low. The whole vital atmosphere is completely vitiated and the physical atmosphere is terribly obscure.

Hence, if we can escape another world war.... Because war is there, it has never stopped. It has been there from almost the beginning of this century; it began with China, Turkey, Tripolitania, Morocco—you are following?—the Balkans, it has never stopped, it has become worse, but each time it has become a world war, it has assumed altogether sordid proportions. All you my children, you have been born after the war (I am speaking of the First

[World] war), so you do not know much about this, and then you, have been born here, in a country which has been truly privileged. But the children born in Europe, latterly, these little ones, who were children of the war, carry something in them which will be very difficult to efface, a kind of horror, a fright. One could not have been mixed up with that without knowing what horror is. The first war was perhaps worse than the second. The second was so atrocious that all was lost.... But the first, oh! I don't know.... The last months I spent in Paris were truly fantastic. And it can't be told. The life in the trenches for example, is something that cannot be told. The new generations do not know.... But, you see, the children born now will not even know if this was true, all these horrors which are related to them. What happened in the conquered countries, in Czechoslovakia, in Poland, in France—the frightful things, unbelievable, unthinkable, which took place—unless one has been very close by, has seen, one cannot believe it. It was.... I was saying the other day that the vital world is a world of horrors; well, all the horrors of the vital world had descended upon earth, and upon earth they are still more horrible than in the vital world, because in the vital world, if you have an inner power, if you have the knowledge, if you have strength, you act upon them—you act, you can subdue them, you can show yourself stronger. But all your knowledge, all your power, all your strength is nothing in this material world when you are subjected to the horrors of a war. And this acts in the terrestrial atmosphere in such a way that it is very, very difficult to efface it.

Naturally, men are always very anxious to forget. There are already those who have begun to say, "Are you quite sure it was like that?" But those who have gone through that, do not want it to be forgotten; so the places of torture, massacre—hideous places which go beyond all the worst the human imagination can conceive—some of these places have been preserved. You can go and visit the torture-chambers the Germans built in Paris, and they will never be

destroyed, I hope, so that those who come and say, "Oh! You know, these things have been exaggerated" (for one does not like to know that such frightful things have happened), could be taken by the hand and told, "Come and see, if you are not afraid."

This forms character. If it is taken in the right way (and I think there are people who have taken it in the right way), this may lead you straight to yoga, straight. That is, one feels such a deep detachment for all things in the world, such a great need to find something else, an imperious need to find something which is truly beautiful, truly fresh, truly good... then, quite naturally, this brings you to a spiritual aspiration. And these horrors have, as it were, divided men: there was a minority which was ready and rose very high, there was a majority which was not ready and went down very low. These wallow in the mud at present, and hence, for the moment, one does not get out of it; and if this continues, we shall go towards another war and this time it will truly be the end of this civilisation—I don't say the end of the world, because nothing can be the end of the world, but the end of this civilisation, that is to say, another will have to be built. You will perhaps tell me that this would be very well, for this civilisation is in its decline, it is on the way to perish; but after all, there are very beautiful things in it, worthy of being preserved, and it would be a great pity if all this disappeared. But if there is another war, I can tell you that all this will disappear. For men are very intelligent creatures and they have found the means of destroying everything, and they will make use of this, for what's the good of spending billions to find certain bombs, if one might not use them? What is the use of discovering that one can destroy a city in a few minutes, if it is not for destroying it! One wants to see the fruit of one's efforts. If there is war, this is what will happen.

There we are, I am telling you things which are not very cheerful, but it is sometimes good to put a little ballast in the head to make one think.

9 April 1951

*Questions and Answers 1950-51*  
1950-51