

SRI AUROBINDO
An Interpretation



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Edited by
V. C. JOSHI

Foreword by
DR. KARAN SINGH

*Issued under the auspices of
Nehru Memorial Museum and Library*



VIKAS PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT LTD
DELHI BOMBAY BANGALORE
KANPUR LONDON

VIKAS PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT LTD
5 Daryaganj, Ansari Road, Delhi-6
Savoy Chambers, 5 Wallace Street, Bombay-1
10 First Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Bangalore-9
80 Canning Road, Kanpur
17-21 Sunbeam Road, North Acton, London N.W. 10

922.9450954M72A

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SBN 7069 0251 3

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L31;1

NEHRU MEMORIAL MUSEUM AND LIBRARY
Acc. No. 45655
Date 9. 4. 1973

PRINTED IN INDIA

At Delhi Printers, 21 Daryaganj, Delhi-6 and published
by Mrs Sharda Chawla, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd.,
5 Daryaganj, Ansari Road, Delhi-6

Foreword

THE NEHRU Memorial Museum and Library is rapidly developing into a major repository of material not only on the life and work of Jawaharlal Nehru himself but also on modern Indian history starting with Raja Rammohun Roy. In order to bring before the general public, particularly the younger generation, various facets of our remarkable movement for national independence, the Museum arranges periodical exhibitions and lectures dealing with various outstanding events and personalities.

In the glittering spectrum of great leaders thrown up during the last century, none is more fascinating than Sri Aurobindo. Flaming patriot and prophet of Indian nationalism; poet and propagator of integral yoga; philosopher of tremendous power with a world-view astounding in its profundity and startling in its comprehensiveness, Sri Aurobindo was a unique personality. His life falls into three clearly demarcated phases—his early youth and education in England, his political phase in India from 1893 to 1910 which gathered intensity during the great agitation caused by the partition of Bengal in 1905, and his last forty years in Pondicherry where he developed into a seer whose works continue to inspire thinking men and women throughout the world. While these phases are physically different, it is clear that there is an underlying unity in his life which can be traced from his earliest years right up to his final fulfilment as harbinger of the life divine.

Sri Aurobindo's magnificent intellect and his yogic experiences combined to produce a number of remarkable works in prose and poetry which constitute a corpus that will become increasingly relevant to the human predicament

as this century moves on towards its close. Mankind today is at a crucial crossroad of its long and tortuous destiny. The divergence between knowledge and wisdom has grown increasingly perilous with every new technological innovation. Power man has in abundance; whether he has the wisdom to use that power for creative rather than destructive purposes is still an open question. While there are encouraging signs that the movement towards integration and world harmony is beginning to gather momentum, there is even more dramatic evidence that human folly has by no means exhausted itself. In this context Sri Aurobindo, with his glowing promise of a new leap in the very texture of consciousness, stands as a pathfinder pointing towards the dawns of the future.

This book, which includes a series of lectures by eminent speakers upon various aspects of Sri Aurobindo, is being brought out in the course of his birth centenary celebrations. The actual date of the centenary falls on 15 August 1972, which is also the Silver Jubilee day of Indian independence. This is an excellent opportunity, in the context of our growth and achievements over the last twenty-five years, to assess India's situation not only in terms of gross national product and economic growth but also in the deeper aspect of its inner capacities. The extraordinary events in the sub-continent during 1971 have shown that India is firmly based upon the principles underlying its polity, and is prepared to risk its very independence in defence of values which it considers sacred for humanity as a whole. It is my hope that the Sri Aurobindo centenary will be the occasion not only for an assessment and appreciation of what Sri Aurobindo himself stood for, but for a deeper and wider spiritual introspection covering India and, indeed, the entire human race.

May 17, 1972
New Delhi

KARAN SINGH

Preface

SRI AUROBINDO, poet and patriot, mystic and philosopher, writer and literary critic, was one of the most outstanding men of the twentieth century. His many-sided genius is reflected in his voluminous writings which provide the basis for a fuller understanding of the life and thought of this great seer, philosopher and political thinker of modern India.

The seven essays in this volume, contributed by distinguished scholars belonging to diverse disciplines, are devoted to the interpretation of some of the significant aspects of the ideas of Sri Aurobindo. Four of these—‘Sri Aurobindo’s Philosophy’ by V. Madhusudan Reddy, ‘Sri Aurobindo — Poet As Seer’ by Sisirkumar Ghose, ‘Sri Aurobindo’s Interpretation of the Gita’ by A. K. Majumdar and ‘Sri Aurobindo’s Political Thought’ by Sanat Kumar Banerji — were originally delivered as lectures under the auspices of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in March 1972 as part of Sri Aurobindo’s birth centennial celebrations. The lectures were later revised and amplified for publication and to these have been added three papers on themes which were not covered by the lectures. Professor Vinayak Krishna Gokak has contributed an essay on ‘Sri Aurobindo on Applied Science in Savitri’ and Professor V. Madhusudan Reddy on ‘Sri Aurobindo’s Vision of Human Unity’. Shri B. R. Nanda has contributed a biographical sketch which serves as an introduction to the volume.

All the essays except that of Shri Nanda deal with the post-1910 phase of Sri Aurobindo’s life after he had retired from politics. I wish it had been possible to include in this volume an essay on the political thought of Sri Aurobindo

in the pre-Pondicherry phase. His brilliant exposition of spiritual nationalism and revolutionary politics contributed much to the political ferment in India in the first decade of the century. Though he gave up politics in 1910, Indian nationalists continued to draw inspiration from him. For those interested in the study of this subject Sri Aurobindo's early political writings are now available in two large volumes in the Centenary Library Edition published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. Dr. Karan Singh's *Prophet of Indian Nationalism* is invaluable for a study of Sri Aurobindo's political ideas in the early phase.

My thanks are due to all the contributors for their generous help and cooperation in the preparation of this volume. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Karan Singh for contributing the Foreword to this volume.

My colleague Dr. S. R. Bakshi has given valuable assistance in seeing this volume through the press.

V. C. JOSHI

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
New Delhi

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B. R. NANDA

Aurobindo Ghose

AMONG the many remarkable men born in the latter half of the 19th century who were to mould India's destiny there is hardly one who has the aura of heroism, romance, mystery and grandeur which surrounds Aurobindo Ghose. A contemporary of Gandhi, an admirer of Vivekananda, a colleague of Tilak, the idol of Rabindranath Tagore and C. R. Das, Aurobindo shot like a meteor through the Indian nationalist firmament in the wake of the partition of Bengal. His passionate and militant patriotism inspired the youth of India, but drove the older nationalist leaders to despair; it gave the British officials many a sleepless night. His abrupt withdrawal from politics seemed something of an anti-climax at the time, but it was the starting point of a great spiritual odyssey, which was perhaps no less important than his brief incursion into the nationalist movement.

Curiously enough, there was little in Aurobindo's ancestry and early environment to suggest that he would shape into a fiery rebel or a great *yogi*. He came from a family which was more anglicised than even most upper class Bengali *bhadralok* of that period. His father, Dr. K. D. Ghose, had studied medicine in England and learnt to admire everything British. At the age of five Aurobindo was admitted to an Irish nuns' school at Darjeeling. Two years later he and his two elder brothers were taken to England and placed in the care of the Rev. Drewitt, an Anglican clergyman of Manchester, with strict instructions that they should not be

allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or be exposed to any Indian influence.

Aurobindo received a good grounding in French and Latin (English was his 'mother-tongue') and when he joined St. Paul's School at the age of twelve he struck his teachers as a prodigy. He learnt Greek and German and read Homer, Aristophanes, Dante, Goethe and the French poets. Indeed, he ranged over the whole field of European thought. He won a scholarship which enabled him to go to King's College, Cambridge. In his first year he took away all the prizes for Greek and Latin verse, but his interest had already switched on to Joan of Arc, the American Revolution and Mazzini. These were years of deep study and reflection, but also of great hardship. Aurobindo's mother was suffering from a serious mental illness, and his father had run out of funds and was unable to support his sons. Remittances from India ceased, and Aurobindo's scholarships could hardly support him and his two brothers in England. Luckily, as it seemed at the age of eighteen, Aurobindo passed the competitive examination for entry into the Indian Civil Service. With its tangible material rewards and the prestige of belonging to the ruling caste, the I.C.S. was then—and for many years later—the El Dorado of brilliant and ambitious young men. For Aurobindo, however, the charm of a bureaucratic career wore off even while he was undergoing his probation; he realised that his real interest lay in 'poetry and literature and study of languages and patriotic action'.¹ He had no desire to become a limb of the alien administration in India, but he knew how much store his family set by his success in the I.C.S.; if he resigned it would break his father's heart. Aurobindo sought a way out of his dilemma by a devious route. He failed to appear for the riding test, which was compulsory for the I.C.S. probationers and was disqualified. The India Office in London was not sorry to see him out of the I.C.S.; it already had suspicions that he harboured dangerous thoughts which would not easily fit him into the imperial mould. 'I should much doubt,' the Secretary of State for India, Lord Kimberley, wrote, 'whether Mr.

¹ A. B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry, 1964), p. 43.

Ghose would be a desirable addition to the Service.”²

Aurobindo's decision to opt out of the Indian Civil Service showed that he had a mind and a will of his own. The fourteen impressionable years he had spent in England had not turned him into a brown sahib. Indeed, St. Paul's School and King's College did to Aurobindo what Harrow and Trinity were to do to young Jawaharlal twenty years later: they sowed the seeds of a nostalgic patriotism. Aurobindo imbibed love of English literature, but not of English rule. In the privacy of his room at Cambridge, he pored over the pages of the *Bengalee* and other nationalist papers from India. He eagerly followed the course of Irish politics, read the history of revolutions in Europe and America, and dreamt of the day when India would be independent.

II

Before leaving England, Aurobindo secured a job in Baroda. The salary of two hundred rupees a month was modest, but Maharaja Sayaji Rao was a progressive, and (as far as discretion allowed) a patriotic ruler. Aurobindo worked in various departments of the State Government: Surveys and Settlement, Stamp and Revenue, and the Secretariat. He prepared memoranda and reports, 'ghosted' speeches for the Maharaja, and occasionally accompanied him on tour. The work could hardly have been exciting for him; with his innate reticence and aloofness from the social life of the court and the city, he did not shine as a civil servant. Fortunately his talents found a more congenial outlet when he was asked to take French classes in Baroda College of which he became in turn a full-time professor, vice-principal and acting principal. He made good use of his time, learnt not only Bengali (of which he was ignorant on his return to India) but Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and Sanskrit.

Aurobindo was not destined to end up as a brilliant scholar or even as a great educationist. Academic pursuits and family obligations (he had married in 1901) did not wholly absorb

² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

him. Soon after his return to India in 1893, he had anonymously contributed a series of articles to the *Indu Prakash*, a bi-lingual paper of Bombay, in which he had made a scathing attack on the aims, methods and leadership of the Indian National Congress. 'I say of the Congress,' Aurobindo wrote, 'that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not the spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts, are not the right sort of men to be the leaders, in brief that we are at present led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed.'³

Aurobindo ridiculed the declared principles, the well-known jargon and the unstated assumptions of the Congress leaders:

The bare-faced hypocrisy of our enthusiasm for the Queen-Empress—an old lady so-called by way of courtesy, but about whom few Indians can really know or care anything—could serve no purpose but to expose us to the derision of our ill-wishers. There was too a little too much talk about the blessings of British rule, and the inscrutable Providence which has laid us in the maternal, or more properly, the step-motherly bosom of a just and benevolent England. Yet, more appalling was the general timidity of the Congress, its glossing over of hard names, its disinclination to tell the direct truth, its fear of too deeply displeasing our masters.⁴

Aurobindo agreed that the Indian National Congress was a 'standard-bearer of liberty', that it had provided a banner under which people of different races and creeds could gather. It was, however, premature to claim that the Congress had taught the Indian people to act together: at best it had taught them to 'talk together'.⁵ The Congress seemed to him too unwieldy a body for any sort of 'executive' work. Its claim to be 'national' was presumptuous: it drew its support almost wholly from 'our new middle class', consisting of

³ *Indu Prakash* (Bombay), 8 August 1893, p. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 August 1893, p. 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 May 1893, p. 4.

journalists, barristers, doctors, officials, graduates and traders with a sprinkling of rich farmers. It was no more 'national' than the Liberal Party in England would be if it were to hold annual meetings and call itself the English National Congress.

Aurobindo questioned the wisdom of trying to persuade Anglo-India to subordinate its own interests to 'the sole good of the Indian people'. Such a conduct could not reasonably be expected, he wrote

save from men of the most exalted and chivalrous character; and the sort of people England sends out to us are not as a rule exalted and chivalrous. They are really very ordinary men—and not only ordinary men, but ordinary Englishmen—types of the middle class Philistines, in the graphic English phrase, with the narrow hearts and commercial habit of mind peculiar to that sort of people. Our appeal, the appeal of every high-souled and self-respecting nation, ought not to be to the opinion of the Anglo-Indians, no, nor yet to the British sense of justice, but to our own reviving sense of manhood, to our sincere fellow-feeling so far as it can be called sincere—with the silent and suffering people of India.⁶

Aurobindo's analysis of the Indian politics in 1893 was ruthless, his logic irrefutable and prose evocative, but he was wholly out of tune with the Indian political elite which composed not only the readership of the *Indu Prakash*, but the rank and file of the Congress. His view of the future of British imperialism and Indian nationalism was remarkably incisive and perceptive but it was at least a quarter of a century ahead of his time. Indeed, only a young man reared on western political theory and completely innocent of the facts of political life in his own country could have dared in 1893 to question the very premises of nationalist politics in India, ask embarrassing questions and suggest startling answers.

After the first two articles had been published in the *Indu Prakash*, Aurobindo, it is alleged, was exhorted by M. G. Ranade to exercise greater discretion. It is doubtful

⁶ *Ibid.*, 21 August 1893, p. 4.

if Aurobindo's articles, despite their literary flavour and patriotic ardour, made many converts. The Indian National Congress had been founded only eight years before; its votaries had yet no obvious cause for pessimism. Indeed the passage of the Indian Councils Act in 1892 and a resolution passed by the House of Commons in favour of simultaneous examinations for the I.C.S. in India and England in the following year had temporarily boosted the morale of the Congress leaders.

III

During the next twelve years while Aurobindo was in Baroda State service, Indian politics remained in a low key and he took little interest in them. During his visits to Bengal, he had noticed the cynicism of the middle classes, whose one aim in life seemed to be 'the happiness of the relatives and the family', and who were unable 'to listen to profound subjects; they laugh at and make fun of everything—Dharma, philanthropy, high aspiration, great endeavour, liberation of the country: with a grin they want to dismiss anything serious, all that is high and noble'.⁷ This was hardly a propitious period for struggle against the Raj, but Aurobindo established contacts with the revolutionary underground in Maharashtra and Bengal. These dangerous forays gave him some satisfaction, but his real chance came in 1905 in the wake of the partition of Bengal. His scene of activity changed from Baroda to Calcutta. He started a Bengali paper, *Yugantar* and joined B. C. Pal in running the *Bande Mataram*. His articles in the latter expounded the philosophy of Indian nationalism with a sharpness, daring and eloquence Indian journalism had never yet known. He amplified what he had hinted at in his *Indu Prakash* articles. He ridiculed the ideal of colonial self-government for India as a political monstrosity; the only ideal which India could accept was absolute autonomy, 'unqualified swaraj'. All talk about expansion of legislative councils, appointment of Indians to executive councils of the Viceroy and the

⁷ Aurobindo Ghose to Mrinalini Ghose, 30 August 1905, quoted by A. B. Purani, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

Governors struck him as meaningless. It was foolish to expect reforms from the British Government. Indeed the worse the government, the better it would be for Indian nationalism: disaffection could only hasten the day of liberation.

Aurobindo's prose was like a heady wine to the young radicals of Bengal. He organised Extremists, or Nationalists as they called themselves, in the Bengal Congress, and promoted an alliance between them and the Extremists of Maharashtra led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak. He set out to radicalise the policies and programmes of the Congress. He advocated boycott not only of British goods but of government aided schools and indeed of the whole alien administration. A militant ideology and a militant programme were to be supported with a militant strategy. The result was that the annual Congress sessions became trials of strength between the Moderates and Extremists. A compromise was patched up at the Banaras session in 1905 and at Calcutta in 1906, but by the time the Congress met at Surat at the end of 1907, a split had become inevitable. Aurobindo was in the thick of the fray at Surat; indeed he precipitated the final tumultuous scenes in which the Congress broke up.

Inevitably Aurobindo's activities earned him the implacable hostility of the British authorities. 'He is the most dangerous man we now have to reckon with,' the Viceroy, Lord Minto, told Secretary of State Morley.⁸ The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal pleaded with the Viceroy to deport Aurobindo: 'He is regarded and spoken of by all as the disciples regard a great Master. He has been in the forefront of all.... But he has kept himself, like a careful and valued general, out of sight of "the enemy"'. We cannot get evidence against him such as would secure his conviction in a Court.'⁹ The Viceroy refused to agree to deportation; he knew how allergic Morley was to deportations without trial after the Lajpat Rai case in 1907. The arm of the law was, however, long enough to reach a fiery journalist and politician. Aurobindo was prosecuted

⁸ Minto to Morley, 25 May 1910, quoted by M. N. Das in *India Under Morley and Minto* (London, 1964), p. 145.

⁹ Fraser to Minto, 19 May 1908, quoted by M. N. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

twice, first in 1907, and again in 1908-9. The latter prosecution in which Aurobindo was one of the thirty-five accused in the Maniktola Bomb Conspiracy Case, was a serious matter, but he was acquitted after a magnificent defence by Chittaranjan Das. Aurobindo resumed his political activities, started a new weekly, *Karmayogin*, but after a few months, to the surprise of friends and foes alike, he suddenly withdrew from the Indian political stage. In February 1910 he left for the French settlement of Chandernagore, and in April next moved on to Pondicherry, where he was to spend the next forty years. The British authorities, who were about to re-arrest him, felt they had been outwitted. Aurobindo's adherents were stunned but continued to cherish the hope that he would return to lead them again. Aurobindo had, however, said a final good-bye to politics.

IV

Aurobindo's own mood after renunciation of politics was neither one of elation nor of disappointment. He felt he was in the hands of a Higher Power which knew what was best for him and for his country. He denied that he had withdrawn from politics in despair. 'I came away,' he explained 'because I did not want anything to interfere with my *yoga* and because I got a very distinct *adesh* (command) in the matter. I have cut connection entirely with politics, but before I did so, I knew from within that the work I had begun there was destined to be carried forward, on lines I had foreseen, by others, and that the ultimate triumph of the movement I had initiated was sure without my personal action or presence.'¹⁰

Nothing could persuade Aurobindo to leave Pondicherry which he described as 'my place of retreat, my cave of *tapasya*'.¹¹ He was not tempted to join the Home Rule movement headed by his friend and hero, Tilak. Nor did he accept the presidency of the Nagpur Congress in December

¹⁰ *Sri Aurobindo on Himself And on The Mother* (Pondicherry, 1953), p. 314.

¹¹ Aurobindo Ghose to Joseph Baptista, 5 January 1920, Tilak Papers (microfilm), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

1920. In the mid-twenties his admirer and former counsel in the Maniktola case, C. R. Das, headed the Swaraj party, but Aurobindo stood aloof. The iron will with which he had spurned the I.C.S. in 1892, cut professional and domestic ties in 1906, enabled him to turn a deaf ear to the siren calls of politics. In retrospect, it seems as if England, Baroda and Calcutta were only stop-overs in a journey of which the destination was Pondicherry.

V

To his contemporaries Aurobindo's switch from politics to Pondicherry seemed an anti-climax. There is no doubt that early in 1910 the tide was flowing against his party. The Surat split had proved a disaster for the Extremists. They had been expelled from the Congress, and were being persecuted by the Government. Their most important leader Tilak had been locked up in Mandalay fort in Burma; another leader, Bipin Chandra Pal, had slipped away to England. The anti-partition agitation had lost its momentum. In 1909 Aurobindo noticed after his release from jail a perceptible lack of enthusiasm among the people; his own meetings in Calcutta, which two years before were thronged by thousands, were attended, as he himself noted, by no more than 'about a hundred persons, that too mostly passers-by'.¹² The Extremists were consigned to the political limbo for nearly a decade. To this dismal and somewhat unexpected denouement Aurobindo had himself contributed in no small measure.

Aurobindo had played an important role in stirring the youth of Bengal, bringing together the radical Congressmen of Bengal and Maharashtra and shaking the complacency of Anglo-India. The ideal of Indian nationalism which he expounded in the *Bande Mataram* was remarkable for its comprehensiveness, clarity and courage. No politician in the warm glow of the Victorian sunset or the Edwardian decade had dispelled more illusions about the British Raj, or attained a clearer vision of India's political destiny than

¹² A. B. Purani, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-3.

Aurobindo. It is true that he gave a religious, or rather a spiritual complexion to the struggle for Indian emancipation; his idiom was derived from the imagery of the Hindu epics and folklore. There was, however, nothing obscurantist or sectarian about Aurobindo; it would be difficult to find a passage in his writings which smacks of prejudice against other religions. His writings do not, however, indicate that he was aware of other religions or communities in India, and of the problem of communicating with them.

Aurobindo was undoubtedly a brilliant theoretician of Indian nationalism, but if politics are the art of the possible, he was not a skilful or successful politician. His logical mind, missionary ardour and impatience for results drove him to make frontal attacks on political opponents in the Congress and on the British Raj. It is obvious that in a conflict, head-on collision is not always the only or the ideal strategy; indeed calculated patience and compromise may be as important for success as militancy. Aurobindo's hard-hitting editorials in the *Bande Mataram* delighted his young adherents, but they infuriated the Indian political elite and deepened the image of the Extremists as irresponsible hot-heads, and 'wild young men', especially in provinces other than Bengal and Maharashtra where they were still a tiny minority. The Banaras and Calcutta Congress sessions had revealed the growing influence of the Extremists. If the Extremists had acted with restraint in 1907, they might have retained and even strengthened their foothold in the Congress. But they preferred, largely under Aurobindo's inspiration, the policy of increasing pressure and provocation, which by 1907 drove the Moderate leaders to the conviction that the two factions could not co-exist in the Congress party.

The Moderates' position in the Congress party and in the country was not really so weak as the Extremists believed. It was not easy to push men like Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Surendranath Banerjea and Gopal Krishna Gokhale off the high pedestals they occupied in public imagination. Most Extremist leaders, and Aurobindo in particular, failed to see that the middle class which at that time had to bear the brunt of any collision with the Raj—did not have the stamina to stand up to a serious and prolonged

assault by the British Government. This was proved in the Punjab by the aftermath of Lajpat Rai's deportation in 1907, and of the arrests of Aurobindo and his colleagues in 1908-9 in Bengal: the result was not a quickening but a paralysis of political activity.

As the war of nerves between the Extremists and the Moderates went on in 1907, Aurobindo made no secret of his preference for an open breach to a patched-up compromise. Indeed, the word compromise did not exist in his dictionary at this time. Were it not for Tilak, the parting of the ways, which occurred at the Surat Congress in December 1907, would have come even earlier. At Surat, Aurobindo's part (on his own admission), in precipitating the final crisis which led to a break-up of the Congress was much greater than his contemporaries and even colleagues knew. Unfortunately, the real beneficiaries of the Surat split were neither the Moderates nor the Extremists, but the British authorities.

From this it must not be inferred that Aurobindo's contribution to the nationalist movement was not significant in its own way. His analysis of British imperialism, and the predicament of nationalist India at the turn of the century was remarkably prescient. He saw clearly—what was not obvious to most of his contemporaries—that to wrest power from Britain the nationalist leadership had to be much more objective, that there were definite limits even to the checks which 'British democracy' could exercise on its agents in India, that the Indian middle class was too small in size and too vulnerable to official displeasure to pit itself against the alien Government, that only the induction of the urban proletariat and the rural poor into the nationalist struggle could make it irresistible, that the key to success was to be sought in boycott and passive resistance rather than in constitutional agitation for concessions. All this of course presupposed a complete transformation of the aims, methods and composition of the nationalist movement. This transformation could not be achieved even by Tilak, who had been in politics for twenty-five years before the partition of Bengal, much less by young Aurobindo who was still in his late thirties, and a relative late-comer to politics.

It is important to remember that until 1905 Aurobindo had remained in the backwaters of Baroda, and kept himself aloof from overt political agitation, that his active political career lasted no more than four years of which nearly one third was spent as an under-trial prisoner. His famous Uttarpara speech after his release from jail in 1909 showed that he was already under the spell of supernatural forces which were soon to lift him out of political affairs. His influence was largely confined to the English knowing *bhadralok* in Bengal, and the only other province on which he made some impression was Maharashtra. Aurobindo thus did not have the aptitude, the training or even the time to create a mass movement. Shy, stern, silent and introspective, he was more of an inspirer through the written word, than an organiser of men. He was Marx of anti-imperialism, not its Lenin. It is difficult to say whether his devoted followers were aware of his limitations, but Aurobindo himself came to recognise them clearly at least in retrospect. In 1920, in the critical year of the non-cooperation movement, when he was invited to preside over the Nagpur Congress, in a remarkably candid piece of self-analysis he described himself as an 'idealist to the marrow', recalled the qualities of Tilak who had 'combined suppleness, skill and determination', and confessed: 'I have not the suppleness and skill.'¹³

Aurobindo's major contribution was that he gave a coherent and militant ideology to the agitation against the partition of Bengal. This militant ideology survived the agitation, and indeed the annulment of the partition in 1912. Aurobindo did not have the time, or the 'skill and suppleness', to translate this ideology into practice. But at the very time he was expounding it in the columns of *Bande Mataram*, another Indian leader only three years older than him was actually testing it in far-off South Africa. Gandhi had the advantage of fifteen years of practical work in the small Indian community in South Africa. Ten years after Aurobindo's retirement from politics, Gandhi was to try boycott and passive resistance on a continental scale and to

¹³ Aurobindo Ghose to B. S. Moonje, 30 August 1920. Tilak Papers (microfilm), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

evoke a response which was all the greater because Aurobindo and his valiant band had paved the way for him.

VI

Aurobindo's own spiritual odyssey transformed his way of looking at the world. He was no longer prepared to countenance violence for political, or indeed any ends; his attitude to Britain and the Commonwealth mellowed with the years. After the fall of France in 1940, he openly blessed the Allied cause. Two years later he favoured the acceptance of the Cripps proposals.

After 1910 his principal interest was in the realm of the spirit. This did not mean that he cut himself off from the problems of suffering humanity. The purpose of the old *yoga*, he wrote, had been to get away from life to the Divine; the purpose of the new *yoga* was to reach the Divine, and bring the fullness of what was gained into life.

At Pondicherry Aurobindo meditated constantly, was seen and heard rarely, but wrote copiously at least during the first decade of his stay there. The *Synthesis of Yoga*, the *Essays on the Gita*, the *Secret of the Veda*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, the *Human Cycle*, the epic poem *Savitri* were eloquent testaments of his profound insights into life and reality. He concerned himself not with religion, but with spirituality, with new visions of divine grace, inner freedom and joy, and of a society composed of men and women who had realised life at deep levels of consciousness. 'One of the greatest minds of his age', is how Jawaharlal Nehru described him.¹⁴ Aurobindo was, however, more than a philosopher; his writings were affirmations of spiritual truths and values which he wanted to make the heritage of mankind. Romain Rolland described him 'as the completest synthesis that has been realised to this day by the geniuses of Asia and geniuses of Europe'.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), 6 December 1950, p. 1.

¹⁵ *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 6 December 1950, p. 5.

V. MADHUSUDAN REDDY

Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy

BOTH Indian and Western thought have met in Sri Aurobindo. S. K. Maitra writes: 'This meeting is not mere handshaking, but that there is a real synthesis of these two types of thought in him. There is even something more, a fulfilment of what each of them aims at but has not been able to realise.'¹ The West aims at a fuller realisation of the evolutionary and cosmic character of its thought. But it is hampered by its intellectualism and its existential outlook. What it requires is the acceptance of a spiritual standpoint, leading to the abandonment of its existential outlook and a modification of its extreme intellectualism. Similarly, Indian thought is spiritual but individualistic and static. It must break its narrow walls of individualism and acquire a dynamic and cosmic character. There lies its fulfilment. Sri Aurobindo fulfils this function by dealing with three main problems of his philosophy: the problem of Evolution, the problem of Yoga and the problem of the nature of Reality.

The idea of Evolution is certainly more prominent in Western philosophy than in Indian philosophy. Greek philosophy is full of it. Although it was not given so much importance in Plato as in Aristotle, it did have a place in the antechamber of his philosophy, when he spoke of creation and dealt with natural philosophy, as in the *Timaeus*. In Aristotle evolution was teleological; it was the gradual transformation of the potential into the actual. The problem of

¹ S. K. Maitra, *The Meeting of the East and the West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy*, (Pondicherry, 1956), p. 32

creation has been in fact the stumbling block in Greek philosophy. 'Anaxagoras solved it by postulating the existence of the Soul or Nous which, being not of the nature of material objects, could impart motion to them. Parmenides cut the Gordian knot by saying that there is no creation at all, for there is only the one immovable eternal Being. Unlike Parmenides, however, Plato does not deny creation but assumes the existence of a second principle outside of the ideas but dependent upon them for the plan or scheme of creation. This second principle Plato calls God or the Creator.² Creation, according to Plato, is not a material process, but is mainly ideal and intellectual. Therefore, he speaks of the idea of creation existing prior to creation. We have in Plato, thus, a double set of creators—the Ideas which are the ultimate creators, and God. God evidently has not got the power to create without getting the pattern from the Ideas, and the Ideas cannot also create directly because they have no power of generation.

The Greek mind is always at first directed outward, and it is only at a later stage that it is directed inwards. Therefore, the approach from the standpoint of consciousness was never fully established in Greek philosophy. This is the reason why Plato could not interpret the grades of reality in terms of the grades of consciousness. Indian philosophy from the beginning turned inwards. The highest reality was always conceived as Atman or Self. The interpretation of the universe was, therefore, always from the standpoint of consciousness. The different grades of reality were explained in terms of the different grades of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo looks at the whole universe from the standpoint of the highest consciousness which he calls *Sachchidananda*.

Sri Aurobindo not only emphasises that all reality is consciousness, but he goes further and says that the measure of reality of anything is determined by the nature of consciousness that is revealed in it. The higher the position of anything in the scale of reality, the deeper and more unified is the consciousness that is revealed in it. His conclusion, therefore, is just the reverse of that of Plotinus. 'The Absolute,

² Plato, *Timaeus* (Jowett's Trans.), pp. 29-32.

far from being characterised by the total absence of consciousness, is, on the contrary, the Highest Consciousness. And the individual, if he is to attain union with the Absolute, must possess the broadest, deepest and most unified consciousness.' Unconsciousness is the characteristic of Matter in its grossest form. Evolution is from unconsciousness or nescience to Knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo's conception of Divine Descent has an outward similarity with Plotinus' theory of Emanations. Like Plotinus, he also looks upon creation as the emergence from God of a hierarchically graded world, the emergents being of all grades of reality. But the whole conception of creation and the relation of the created world to God are totally different in his philosophy from what they are in the system of Plotinus. In calling creation a descent of God, Sri Aurobindo wants to emphasise its double significance. First, that the created world, even in its lowest levels, exhibits on its face the stamp of its Divine origin. Secondly, that it is a descent for the sake of ascent, so that the lowest order of existence has the promise and potency of reaching the Divine status.

The individual soul in Plotinus' system no doubt realises God both as the immanent principle working within and also as the transcendent Source which the individual can reach by a long progression, through a series of stages. But for the rest of the universe God is only a transcendent principle, the Ultimate Source of all emanations. In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy both these aspects of Divinity are kept in mind from the very beginning. Even in the lowest forms of matter the Absolute is present as an indwelling principle—as the *Gita* puts it, a dweller within the heart, *hrddese arjuna tisthati*—pushing it continually forward. The impulse towards self-improvement, towards fuller and fuller self-expression, comes, therefore, from within. At the same time the progress is through a hierarchy of different grades of reality, the products of successive descents of the Absolute. It is not the individual alone who realises this double aspect of Divinity, but the whole universe shares this realisation. The only limitation which Sri Aurobindo places upon the cosmic realisation of the double aspect of Divinity is the circumstance

that it rests with the Divine Will to choose the time and occasion for the Divine Descent, without which this realisation is impossible. But this is an inevitable consequence of the Divine transcendence.

For Hegel, Being is Thought, and Thought is Being, and the essential feature of the world-view of Thought is Continuity. He, therefore, has banished all absolute contradictions from the real world. For him antitheses exist for the sake of a higher synthesis, negations for the purpose of establishing a higher affirmation. S. K. Maitra writes that Bradley, while trying to play Hegel against Hegel, 'has been instrumental in introducing a principle which offers a direct challenge to the Hegelian philosophy. This is the principle of Emergence. The fight on the philosophical front is no longer between Mechanical Evolution and Teleological Evolution, but between Continuous Evolution and Emergent Evolution'.³ Bergson's Creative Evolution is also a form of Emergent Evolution, because there lurk in his conception of creativity the ideas of surprise, uncertainty and incalculability. Evolution for all of them is made possible by the emergence of the new, which must be treated as a fundamental departure from the old, and must in no sense be regarded as deduction from, or a continuation of, the old. Perennial philosophy in the West has held fast as its sheet-anchor to the principle of continuity. Its last great champion was Hegel. The phenomenal rise in recent years of the philosophy of values has very much hastened its fall, for the philosophy of values is essentially a philosophy of emergence. Sri Aurobindo champions a form of Emergent Evolution which constitutes a far greater challenge than any attack it has had so far to face in the West.

According to the *Purusa Sukta* of the *Rig Veda*, the whole *Purusa* is not melted into the world.⁴ This is the foundation of the emergent view of evolution in India. The evolution of the world can only be through successive emergences of higher and higher consciousness from Him. These

³ S. K. Maitra, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

⁴ 'The Purusa had a thousand hands, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet; he covered the earth on all sides, and stretched ten figures length beyond it.'

emergences are really descents of the Divine Consciousness. We thus come to the doctrine of *Avatar*. The *Gita* speaks of a double current in evolution. The first, which is the normal current, does not require any Divine intervention, and can flow on smoothly of itself. But it cannot do so for very long. A time comes when it meets with obstacles which are beyond its power to remove. It is then that Divine intervention steps in, removes the obstacles which blocked the progress of the world, and sets free the current of evolution. Such a crisis in the evolution of the world the *Gita* calls *Dharmasya glani*, deterioration of Dharma, because it describes every process in terms of its spiritual significance. This direct intervention by God and the resulting emergence of a new consciousness are for the *Gita* an absolute essential of world-evolution. This does not reject in toto the doctrine of continuity, but sets up, along with it, the principle of emergence, without which we cannot obtain a complete picture of evolution. Likewise, it does not mean the elimination of thought from all effective share in the direction of the evolutionary process, but the setting of definite limits to its effectiveness, and the supplementation of it by other types of consciousness which are more at home in a discontinuous world.

For Sri Aurobindo, therefore, the world does not evolve of itself in a continuous process, but it requires at every critical stage of its evolution Divine intervention in the shape of a direct descent of the Divine Consciousness. No radical change in the stage of evolution is for him possible without such a Divine Descent. This view of evolution assures man, in addition to his own resources, the Infinite Power of God in his aspiration to rise higher and higher in the scale of evolution.

Unlike Bradley's, Sri Aurobindo's conception is based not upon the suicide of the lower principles, but upon their transformation. This transformation we may call a rebirth to indicate the radical nature of the change that will come upon them. The new principle brings about a total change in the character of the world as it existed before its emergence.

In Alexander's scheme of emergent evolution there is no change of the old principles on the emergence of a new one.

The old principles remain as they were before, only a new one joins them. For Sri Aurobindo, however, evolution does not mean merely addition of some new principles to those which are already existent, but it means that the old principles, by reason of the emergence of the new ones, change their character. Life, for instance, as it was before the emergence of Mind, is very different from Life as we know it today, dominated as it is by Mind. So again, Sri Aurobindo believes when the principle of Supermind will emerge, all the principles which are existent today, such as Matter, Life, Mind and Soul, will undergo a radical change. Even the physical universe will be very different from what it is at present, for it will cease to offer any resistance to the Spirit, but on the contrary will work in perfect co-operation with it.

Professor Whitehead, perhaps, is the most outstanding philosopher of the present day in the West, more evolutionary in his outlook than even Bergson or Alexander. A comparison of Whitehead's philosophy with that of Sri Aurobindo reveals striking resemblances as well as fundamental differences. For both Sri Aurobindo and Whitehead evolution is not merely one principle among many others which explain the world as it is and as it will be in the future, but it is the one principle round which have clustered all the other principles and without which they cannot be understood. They are both equally opposed to all forms of dualism; they are not devotees exclusively either of Being or of Becoming and are forward-looking buoyant optimists. As for their fundamental differences, Whitehead's theory of evolution is naturalistic, whereas Sri Aurobindo's is spiritualistic.⁵ The

⁵ Whitehead's philosophy of organism is based upon a purely naturalistic principle, namely what he calls *prehension*, a kind of feeling which is the inner spring or motive force of the entire world of process. It is the one great unifying factor which, starting from the lowest forms of it in electrons and molecules, reaches out to the highly developed aesthetic emotions and sentiments and moves on further to the uncharted entities so closely knit together so as to form one organic whole. It presents a magnificent scheme of a perfectly interrelated world of actual entities, but it cannot blind us to the fact that it is reared upon a purely naturalistic principle. It is clearly a case of evolution from the standpoint of the beginning. The higher processes are here all interpreted in terms of the lower, exactly as is done in the nineteenth century evolutionistic theories of Darwin, Spencer and others. It is a purely naturalistic theory of evolution. In striking contrast to this is Sri Aurobindo's theory of evolution.

principle of evolution itself is derived from the nature of the highest principle, the ultimate Reality. The key to the understanding of the nature of evolution is not to be found in the processes of nature but is to be sought in the Ultimate Reality.

Evolution, therefore, is the ascent of physical nature, life, mind, etc., to the Ultimate Reality, made possible by the circumstance that these lower principles are themselves expressions in varying degrees of perfection of the same ultimate Reality. As inadequate expressions of Ultimate Reality, there is an urge in them to complete and perfect themselves. Like Hegel, Sri Aurobindo, therefore, looks at evolution from the standpoint of the end. But the end as conceived by Hegel is a purely rational end, an end conceived by Thought. For Sri Aurobindo, Thought is not the Ultimate Reality, but there are various grades of reality above Thought which have to be climbed before the Ultimate Reality can be reached. No end, in fact, short of the Absolute, is competent to give an adequate account of the nature of evolution.

Whitehead identifies the principle of Creativity with novelty. This creativity or novelty is the inner spring of the process of evolution, both at the lower and the higher stages. It is haunted by a dread, the vanishing of the past. Mere novelty, therefore, has only a negative and hardly any positive value. It is axiologically of neutral quality. It cannot serve, therefore, as a directive principle of evolution; it cannot supply the missing element in Whitehead's philosophy, namely, a goal of evolution. In Sri Aurobindo, the dynamic element is not supplied by a mere urge for novelty but by the far more effective teleological idea of a definite goal of the entire process of evolution, a goal which takes it far beyond the limits of the finite—the Infinite.

This goal is again linked up by him with the question of the origin of the world. As the world has originated from *Sachchidananda*, so its goal is to return^{*} to Him.

Thus we find that both Hegel and Whitehead are committed to the principle of continuity. A true theory of evolution is an emergent one and treats matter, life and mind as successive and distinct stages in the onward march of the

world to its original spiritual Source. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy gives us an assurance that the future will not be a mere repetition of the past but that it will reveal undisclosed possibilities which we cannot dream of.

Evolution, however, is the soul of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. His theory of evolution is the pivot round which the whole philosophy of Sri Aurobindo moves. Evolution is the movement which is the reverse of the movement of involution or creation. It is because of the descent of the Spirit into matter, life and mind, that these can ascend to the higher regions of the Spirit. Because the Spirit in creation has involved itself in matter, life and mind, therefore matter, life and mind feel an impulse to rise to their Source. Evolution thus, 'is a sort of home-sickness of the Spirit'. The Spirit has descended into the lowest particle of matter; therefore, matter seeks to evolve into something higher than itself—mind. Similarly, there is a descent of the Spirit into mind, and consequently mind must ascend to something higher than itself, namely, Supermind. The highest principle so far evolved is mind. But evolution cannot stop with mind for mind is not its last word. It must move further up and come to the next stage, namely Supermind. But when it does so, there will be a radical change in the nature of the world for with the emergence of the Supermind the process of evolution becomes a process through knowledge, the previous process being through ignorance. Such, in brief, is Sri Aurobindo's most optimistic scheme of evolution.

Sri Aurobindo has accepted the cosmic view of evolution of the West but has rejected its mechanical character and replaced it by a spiritual evolution. Likewise he has rejected the cyclical view of the universe of Indian philosophy and the individualistic outlook of its theory of evolution, and substituted for the cosmic and over-personal outlook of the West. The result is an altogether new theory of evolution. It bases itself upon the idea that the source of evolution being *Sachchidananda* himself, it cannot stop until the whole world is completely divinised. No limited objective, such as the naturalistic ideal of a perfect adjustment between the organism and the environment or the realisation of a kingdom of ends, which is Kant's social ideal, can be looked upon as the goal of

evolution. What the thinkers in India ignored is the great truth that a divinised man can only emerge in a divinised world. The problem of salvation is intimately connected with that of evolution. In fact, evolution may be called a Cosmic Yoga.

The Nature of Reality

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of evolution is the direct outcome of his integral world-view. In *The Life Divine* he enunciates four main theories with their corresponding mental attitudes and ideals in accordance with four different conceptions of the truth of existence:

These we may call the supracosmic, the cosmic and terrestrial, the supra-terrestrial or other worldly, and the integral or synthetic or composite. In this last category would fall Sri Aurobindo's view of our existence here as a Becoming with the Divine Being for its origin and its object, a progressive manifestation, a spiritual evolution with the supracosmic for its source and support, the other worldly for a condition and connecting link, and the cosmic and terrestrial for its field, and with human mind and life for its nodus and turning-point of release towards a higher and a highest perfection. Our regard then must be on the first three to see where they depart from the integralising view of life and how far the truths they stand on fit into its structure.⁶

In the supra-cosmic view of things the supreme Reality is alone entirely real. A certain illusoriness, a sense of the vanity of cosmic existence and individual being is a characteristic turn of this seeing of things, but it is not essential, not an indispensable adjunct to its main thought-principle. In the extreme forms of its world-vision human existence has no real meaning; it is a mistake of the soul or a delirium of the will to live, an error or ignorance which somehow overcasts the Absolute Reality. But this idea of the total vanity of life is not altogether an inevitable consequence of the

⁶ S. K. Maitra, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

supra-cosmic theory of existence. In the Vedanta of the *Upanishads*, the Becoming of Brahman is accepted as a reality.

The cosmic-terrestrial view considers cosmic existence alone as real. Its view is confined, ordinarily, to life in the material universe. God, if God exists, is an eternal Becoming; or if God does not exist, then Nature is a perennial Becoming. Earth is the field or it is one of the temporary fields, man is the highest possible form or only one of the temporary forms of the Becoming.

The supra-terrestrial view admits the reality of the material cosmos and it accepts the temporary duration of earth and human life as the first fact we have to start from; but it adds to it a perception of other worlds or planes of existence which have an eternal or at least a more permanent duration; it perceives behind the mortality of the bodily life of man the immortality of the soul within him. There arises from this view of things the idea that the true home of man is beyond and that the earth life is in some way or other only an episode of his immortality or a deviation from a celestial and spiritual into a material existence.

But, finally, there must open in us, as our mental life deepens and subtler knowledge develops, the perception that the terrestrial and the supra-terrestrial are not the only terms of being; there is something which is supra-cosmic and the highest remote origin of our existence. In this integration the supra-cosmic Reality stands as the supreme Truth of being; to realise it is the highest reach of our consciousness. But it is the highest Reality which is also the cosmic being, the cosmic consciousness, the cosmic will and life; it has put these things forth, not outside itself but in its own being, not as an opposite principle but as its own self-unfolding and self-expression. 'A perfect self-expression of the spirit is the object of our terrestrial existence. The supra-terrestrial existence is also a truth of being; for the material is not the only plane of our existence; other planes of consciousness there are to which we can attain and which have already their hidden links with us. An integration of this kind would not be possible if a spiritual evolution were not the sense of our birth and terrestrial existence; the evolution of mind, life and spirit in Matter is the sign that this integration, this

completed manifestation of a secret self contained in it is its significance.' A complete involution of all that the Spirit is and its evolutionary self-unfolding are the double-terms of our material existence. 'An involution of spirit in the Inconscience is the beginning; an involution in the Ignorance with its play of the possibilities of a partial developing knowledge is the middle, and the cause of the anomalies of our present nature—our imperfection is the sign of a transitional state, a growth not yet completed, an effort that is finding its way; a consummation in a deployment of the spirit's self-knowledge and the self-power of its divine being and consciousness is the culmination: these are the three stages of this cycle of the spirit's progressive self-expression in life.'⁷ It is a perfected and divinised life for which the earth-nature is seeking, and this seeking is a sign of the Divine Will in Nature. There are also other seekings and these too find their means of self-fulfilment; a withdrawal into the supreme peace or ecstasy, a withdrawal into the bliss of the Divine Presence are open to the soul in earth-existence: for the Infinite in its manifestation has many possibilities and is not confined by its formulations. 'But neither of these withdrawals can be the fundamental intention in the Becoming itself here; for then an evolutionary progression would not have been undertaken—such a progression here can only have for its aim a self-fulfilment here: a progressive manifestation of this kind can only have for its soul of significance the revelation of Being in a perfect Becoming.'

Sri Aurobindo does not identify Reality either with Being or Becoming, but looks upon both of these as poises of Reality. The Absolute is beyond the two, it is eternal and infinite, and, therefore, is in its essence indeterminable and indefinable and inconceivable by the finite mind. It is not describable either by negations—*neti, neti*, or by affirmatives—*iti, iti*. Yet this Supreme Reality manifests itself to our consciousness in the universe by real and fundamental truths of its being which transcend the universe and are the foundation upon which the universe rests. These truths present themselves to our intellectual knowledge as the fundamental

⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, Part II (1940), pp. 590-1.

aspects in which we see and experience the Infinite Reality. This Supreme Reality or Brahman, as it manifests itself to our consciousness, is an eternal and absolute self-existence, self-awareness and self-power and self-delight of being. It is *Sachchidananda*. Its self-existence appears in three forms: self, conscious Being or Spirit, and God or the Divine Being, or, to use the more expressive terms of Indian philosophy, it manifests itself as *Atman*, *Purusha* and *Ishwara*. Similarly its self-awareness or force of consciousness, Consciousness-Force, appears in three forms: *Maya*, *Prakriti* and *Shakti*. *Maya* is the force of the Absolute Consciousness, conceptually creative of all things. *Prakriti* is Nature or Force as dynamically executive, working out all things under the supervision of the Supreme Spirit. *Shakti* is the conscious power of the Divine Being which is both conceptually creative and dynamically executive. And the fundamental determinates of Bliss are Love, Joy and Beauty. These three aspects and these three powers embrace the whole of Existence and all Nature and, if viewed as a whole, reconcile all apparent contradictions, all apparent disparateness and incompatibility between the supra-cosmic transcendence, the cosmic universality and the separateness of our individual existence. Brahman is omnipresent in all relativities; it is the Absolute governing, pervading, constituting all relativities.

'There is the difficulty of understanding how the Indeterminable determines itself as both Infinite and finite, how the One becomes an infinitely diversified multitude, how the Impersonal creates or supports an infinite of persons, and is itself also a Person. In despair, our logical reason gives up the chase and proclaims the universe to be an unmeaning jumble of phenomena.' But what is magic to our finite reason, observes Sri Aurobindo, is the logic of the Infinite. The reason behind the seemingly meaningless processes is a greater reason, a greater logic, because it is more vast, subtle, complex in its operations. The difficulties of both Bergsonism as well as Advaita Vedanta are due to the failure to understand the logic of the *Maya* of Brahman. 'Its logic is magic to them, because it refuses to come under their

narrow logical categories.'⁸ Its logic is the logic of the universal being of Brahman and the infinite intelligence of *Maya*. In order to understand it, we have to grasp certain fundamental powers or potentialities of the Infinite Reality; these being the powers of infinite self-variation, of self-limitation and of self-absorption. This logic of the Infinite Consciousness shows the weakness of the Sankhya position. The fundamental mistake of the Sankhya lies in its dualism. *Prakriti* must be the *Prakriti* of *Purusha*. Force must be the force of the Conscious-Being; otherwise force loses all its dynamism. An unconscious Force developing into life and consciousness is a contradiction in terms. It can only develop that which is already in it.

Bliss is the most important of all the components of the triune Reality. It gives the reason for the world-process; it is the 'why' of creation. So also declared our ancient sages: 'For from Bliss alone, it appears are these creatures born and being born they live by Bliss and to Bliss they go hence and return.'⁹ The *Parabrahman*, thus, is at once eternally self-realised and eternally self-realising. It is at once indeterminable and infinitely determinable. It is the indeterminable source of infinite determinations. Its indeterminability is the natural, the necessary condition both of its infinity of being and its infinity of power of being, it can be infinitely all things because it is nothing in particular and exceeds any definable totality. The Absolute is also indeterminable in the sense that it transcends all conceptual formulations of verbal characterisation, whether positive or negative. The formlessness of the Absolute is the condition for its power of assuming infinite forms.

Again, the Integralist conception of the Absolute provides a synthetic reconciliation of *Advaitavada*, *Visishtadvaitavada* and *Dvaitavada*. Integralism holds that Ultimate Reality has such inseparable aspects as plurality, totality and essentiality, or compromises such eternal poses of being of the Spirit as supra-cosmic transcendence, cosmic universality and unique individuality. The Absolute is both *saktijukta* and also *saktimukta*. That is why the Integral Non-Dualism

⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 70.

⁹ *Taittiriya Upanishad*, Bhrigu Valli, 6.

of Sri Aurobindo maintains that supra-cosmic transcendence, cosmic universality and unique individuality are three equally real non-temporal poses of being of the same supreme Spirit.

The Integral Yoga

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is neither an abstraction of the mere intellect nor a metaphysical justification of the ignorant human nature. There is in his teachings an integral spiritual vision, a synthetic comprehensive world view, the rare and sublime fusion of the ideals and approaches of the East and the West. There is above all 'the authentic divine dynamism, capable of transforming human nature and creating a new world order'. This transformation is made possible first through an ascent of consciousness towards the Infinite and next the descent of Infinite into the finite. Man is wrapped up in manifold ignorance of which he has first to become conscious. Ignorance according to Sri Aurobindo is seven fold in its nature:

We are ignorant of the Absolute which is the source of all being and becoming; we take partial facts of being, temporal relations of the becoming for the whole truth of existence—this is the first, the *original ignorance*. We are ignorant of the spaceless, timeless, immobile and immutable Self; we take the constant mobility and mutation of the cosmic becoming in Time and Space for the whole truth of existence—that is the second, the *cosmic ignorance*. We are ignorant of our universal self, the cosmic existence, the cosmic consciousness, our infinite unity with all being and becoming; we take our limited egoistic mentality, vitality, corporality for our true self and regard everything other than that as not-self—that is the third, the *egoistic ignorance*. We are ignorant of our eternal becoming in Time; we take this little life in a small span of Time, in a petty field of Space, for our beginning, our middle and our end—that is the fourth, the *temporal ignorance*. Even within this brief temporal becoming, we are ignorant of our large and complex being, of that in us which is superconscient, subconscient, intraconscient, circumconscient to our surface becoming; we take that

surface becoming with its small selection of overtly mentalised experiences for our whole existence—that is the fifth, the *psychological ignorance*. We are ignorant of the true constitution of our becoming; we take the mind or life or body or any two of these or all three for our true principle or the whole account of what we are, losing sight of that which constitutes them and determines by its occult presence and is meant to determine sovereignly by its emergence their operations—that is the sixth, the *constitutional ignorance*. As a result of all these ignorances, we miss the true knowledge, government and enjoyment of our life in the world; we are ignorant in our thought, will, sensations, actions, return wrong or imperfect responses at every point to the questionings of the world, wander in a maze of errors and desires, strivings and failures, pain and pleasure, sin and stumbling, follow a crooked road, grope blindly for a changing goal—that is the seventh, the *practical ignorance*.¹⁰

This colossal and multi-tiered ignorance is due to the alienation of the human from the divine consciousness. This is overcome only through yoga—the integral union with the divine. Yoga is essentially the union of the human consciousness with the Eternal and the Transcendent. The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo assimilates the triple path of the *Gita* and aims at physical transformation. It considers the body as ‘a potential tabernacle of the unveiled God-head’ and lays emphasis upon its radical transformation. A synthesis of all the Yogas implies an integration of all the parts of the human being including the physical. Sri Aurobindo stands for such a complete synthesis and the integral fulfilment of man. Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga is founded on three basic postulates. A perfect union with the supreme is a union in all His states, poses and modes of being. The Omnipresent Reality has four poses, *Soyamatma Chatuspat*. They are the waking state, *jagaritasthana* or the *vaisvanara* or *virat* state of Brahman, the dream state, *Svapnasthana* or the *Taijasa* state, the deep-sleep state *susuptisthana*, the status of the creative

¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, pp. 583-4 (Italics are author’s.)

Godhead, *sarvesvara, sarvajna antaryamin, prabhavapyayau* and that of supreme Peace, supreme Good and inalienable Oneness *santam, sivam advaitam*, the absolute state of Brahman. This synthesis of all poses and states of Reality is his unique contribution to Yoga. All is Brahman, says Sri Aurobindo, the Mutable as well as the Immutable, the finite as well as the Infinite, the many as well as the one:

The Purusha has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet; encompassing the earth on all sides, He stands ten fingers' width above. (*Svetasvatara Upanishad*: 3,14.)

Divine, formless is the Purusha, He is without and He is within, unborn, breathless, mindless and luminously pure, He is higher than the highest Immutable.

And of Him is born life and the mind and all the organs of sense, and of Him are Ether and Air and Light and Water and Earth that holdeth all. (*Mundaka Upanishad* 2, 1.)

That this union with the *chatuspat* Brahman has to be realised not only by the soul but by the whole being of the man is the second postulate. The Vedic Rishis knew the secret of making the divine light, force and bliss accessible to the entire human nature but there was no concrete way of making that realisation an imperative collective ideal. As each part of the being of man is a derivative of the divine and is permeated and sustained by Him, it has to be developed and led towards a conscious union with Him. Moreover, as each of the three primal principles, *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda* contains in itself the other two, a perfect development of any one implies a perfect development of the other two and the third postulate is that the perfection of mental, vital and physical parts of man organised round his soul or the psychic being has to ascend to the supreme Truth-consciousness, *Rita-chit*, in order to be re-made into its creative harmony and then descend with its force and light to instal itself in the sub-conscious and inconscient levels of Reality. 'Synthesis on the expressive planes of our being, synthesis on its creative summits and synthesis at its nether base'—this is the triple

formula of the synthesis envisaged by the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

Integral Yoga, in addition, aims at the plenary perfection of the embodied soul in its triple term of existence—individuality, universality and transcendence. Its union with the supreme is complete only 'when it is a union with him in his universal immanence as well as in His featureless transcendence'. Individual liberation is not the end of man's striving after perfection for liberation is not 'an ultimate retreat from all individual and universal play of God's delighting creation into His immutable transcendence,' but a perfect manifestation of His Love, Light, Power and Bliss in and through the mental, vital and physical. Also, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga effects a sublime synthesis between the visions and experiences of *Advaita*, *Visishtadvaita* and *Dvaita*. It is a spiritual, rather a supramental synthesis and certainly not a philosophical synthesis for it fuses them all and transcends them. According to Sri Aurobindo there are three poses of the creative supermind: 'The first founds the inalienable unity of things, the second modifies that unity so as to support the manifestation of the Many in the One and the One in the Many; the third further modifies it so as to support the evolution of a diversified individuality which, by the action of ignorance, becomes in us, at a lower level, the illusion of the separate ego.'¹¹

The truth and rationale of *Advaita* has its basis in the first poise of the supramental, for, in this poise there is no individualisation, and all is held and developed in the unitarian consciousness as one, and not as many. In the second poise of the Supermind 'the Divine Consciousness stands back in the idea from the movement which it contains, realising it by a sort of apprehending consciousness, following it, occupying and inhabiting its works, seeming to distribute itself in its forms'.¹² It is in this that there 'is a multiple concentration and a creation of countless soul-forms, but all within the fundamental unity and harmony of the One'. The original unity is here modified but there is yet no division or essential

¹¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*.

¹² *Ibid.*

difference. It is this poise that supplies the truth and justification for the experience of *Visishtadvaita*. It is only in the third poise of the Supermind that the stress of the consciousness falls on multiplicity, but well within the play of unity. This is 'a sort of fundamental blissful dualism in unity—no longer unity qualified by a subordinate dualism—between the individual Divine and its universal source'.¹³ This is the basis of *Dvaita*.

An integral supramental realisation would regard them all 'as indispensable strains of its developing harmonies' and therefore genuine and perfectly valid. It is only the human mind with its separative perception that cuts up the unity of existence.

A supramental Truth-consciousness is at once the self-awareness of the Infinite and Eternal and a power of self-determination inherent in that self-awareness; the first is its foundation and status, the second is its power of being, the dynamics of its self-existence. The Infinite of Being must also be an Infinite of Power; containing in itself an eternal repose and quiescence, it must also be capable of an eternal action and creation. Creation would then be a self-manifestation: it would be an ordered deploying of the infinite possibilities of the Infinite. But every possibility implies a truth of being behind it, a reality in the Existent; for without that supporting truth there could not be any possibles. But in our mind we do not see the complete process, we see only possibilities that determine themselves into actualities and though we infer or conjecture, we are not sure of a necessity, a predetermining truth, an imperative behind them which capacitates the possibilities, decides the actualities. 'Our mind is an observer of actuals, an inventor or discoverer of possibilities, but not a seer of the occult imperatives that necessitate the movements and forms of creation. But to the supramental Truth-consciousness these imperatives would be apparent, would be the very stuff of its seeing and experience'.

The Supermind, therefore, is a principle of active Will and Knowledge superior to Mind and creatrix of the worlds. It is the intermediary power and state of being between that

¹³ *Ibid.*

self-possession of the One and this flux of the Many. It is the vast self-extension of the Brahman that contains and develops. By the Idea it develops the triune principle of existence, consciousness and bliss out of their indivisible unity. It differentiates them but it does not divide. 'In a sense,' says Sri Aurobindo, 'the whole of creation may be said to be a movement between two involutions. Spirit in which all is involved and out of which all evolves downwards to the other pole of Matter; Matter, in which also all is involved and out of which all evolves upwards to the other pole of Spirit.'¹⁴ Supermind is Real-Idea. It is the Vast; it starts from unity, not division, it is primarily comprehensive; differentiation is only its secondary act.

Thus the indivisibility of the comprehensive Supermind which contains all multiplicity without derogating from its own unity, is a truth upon which we have always to insist, if we are to understand the cosmos and get rid of the initial error of our analytic mentality. In this comprehensive knowledge there is no independent centre of existence, no individual separated ego such as we see in ourselves; 'the whole of existence is to its self-awareness an equable extension, one in oneness, one in multiplicity, one in all conditions and everywhere.'¹⁵

Brahman is in all things, all things are in Brahman, all things are Brahman is the triple formula of the comprehensive Supermind, a single truth of self-manifestation in three aspects which it holds together and inseparably in its self-view as the fundamental knowledge from which it proceeds to the play of the cosmos. It is *Prajnana*, Supermind, the all-apprehending consciousness that makes the fundamental division which leads to all the rest. Existence plunging into an apparent Non-existence, Consciousness into an apparent Inconscience, Delight of existence into a vast cosmic insensibility are the first result of the fall and, in return from it by a struggling fragmentary experience, the rendering of Consciousness into the dual terms of truth and falsehood, knowledge and error, of Existence into the

¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Vol. I (1943), p. 154.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 167-8.

dual terms of life and death, of Delight of existence into the dual terms of pain and pleasure are the necessary process of the labour of self-discovery.

Still, because the Inconscience is a concealed Consciousness, a divine Life in the manifestation is then not only possible but is the inevitable outcome and consummation of Nature's evolutionary endeavour.

Beyond the supramental plane of consciousness which is an intermediate step from overmind and mind to the complete experience of *Sachchidananda*, are the greatest heights of the manifest Spirit. But the supramental Truth-consciousness would not be absent from these planes, for it is an inherent power of *Sachchidananda*: the difference would be that the determinations would not be demarcations; they would be plastic, interfused, each a boundless finite. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, 'for there all is in each and each is in all radically and integrally'.¹⁶ There would be to the utmost a fundamental awareness of identity, a mental inclusion and interpenetration of consciousness.

Returning to Reality and the integral knowledge, according to Sri Aurobindo, the integral knowledge is something that is already there in the integral Reality. It must rather be discovered or uncovered. An integral spiritual consciousness carries in it a knowledge of all the terms of being; it links the highest to the lowest through all the mediating terms and achieves an indivisible whole. An integral knowledge, therefore, presupposes integral Reality; for it is the power of a Truth-consciousness which is itself the consciousness of the Reality. In order to reach an absolute super-consciousness both the reality of the individual and the reality of the cosmos have to be transcended. Ego-consciousness and cosmic consciousness are extinguished in that supreme transcendence and there remains only the Absolute. The integral knowledge of Brahman is a consciousness in possession of both Being and Becoming together, and the exclusive pursuit of either closes the vision to one side of the truth of omnipresent Reality. As Sri Aurobindo puts it, 'An integral knowledge must be a knowledge of the truth of all sides of existence both

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 39.

separately and the relation of each to all and the relation of all to the truth of the Spirit.¹⁷

Integral knowledge will then mean the cancelling of the manifold Ignorance. It will mean the knowledge of the Absolute as the origin of all things. But this is not an intellectual knowledge; it must be an experience, a becoming, a change of consciousness, a change of being. This brings in the evolutionary character of the Becoming and the fact that our mental ignorance is only a stage in our evolution. The integral knowledge, then, can only come by an evolution of our being and our nature, and that would seem to signify a slow process in Time such as has accompanied the other evolutionary transformations. But as against that inference there is the fact that the evolution has now become conscious and its method and steps need not be altogether of the same character as when it was subconscious in its process. The integral knowledge, since it must result from a change of consciousness, can be gained by a process in which our will and endeavour have a part, in which they can discover and apply their own steps and methods: its growth in us can proceed by a conscious self-transformation.

The *Upanishads* were the first to have attempted the synthesis of all human experience and knowledge, but it was in an intuitive way. Then we have the illumined intellectual synthesis attempted by the *Gita* followed by the psycho-vital synthesis of the Tantra. It is Sri Aurobindo's supramental synthesis that indeed fulfils the supreme quest of the soul of man. The progressive manifestation of the divine in the individual as well as in the collective is the ideal of this Integral synthesis.

Union with the Divine, the Infinite and the Eternal is the ideal of the Integral *Yoga* as it is also the aim of all other yogas. But according to the former the divine includes and transcends the mutable and the Immutable, *Kshara* and *Akshara*. It is the Supramental Truth-consciousness, *Rita-chit*, that permits of a full realisation of the four poises of Brahman—*Chatushpada*. The ascent to the Supermind thus is the first aim of Sri Aurobindo's *Yoga*. It accepts and

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 272.

profits by the Sankhya experience of detached freedom, the silence of the Buddhistic *Nirvana*, the unfathomable peace of the Immutable and the power of the universal Divine. But it always insists on the ever increasing expansion of the waking human consciousness and its ascent to the Truth-light of the Supermind. For it seeks to raise the collective human consciousness into the Divine Consciousness of the Supermind, and bring the consciousness and the power of the Supermind for the transformation and divinisation of the whole nature of the individual. The descent of the Supermind is therefore the second aim of Integral Yoga.

The ascent to the Supermind is achieved by a progressive heightening and expansion of the being of man leading to the necessary evolution of all that is involved in the Inconscience. And the descent of the Supermind into the human transforms the mind, life and the body of man into sublime channels of Light, Love and Power and Luminous means of divine action. The ascent to the Supermind and its subsequent descent inevitably lead to the third aim of the Integral Yoga—the full and perfect manifestation of the Divine. A union with the Integral *chatuspada* Brahman is possible only on the supramental plane and this Integral union is the secret of the full and perfect manifestation of the divine in and through Matter. Such is the divine destiny offered to man upon earth.

The Triple Transformation

The *Nirvana* of Buddhism is the self-extinction of the individual in the Infinite Void, whereas *Brahma Nirvana* of the *Gita* is the *Nirvana* in the Brahman, and the *moksha* of Jainism results in the self-extinction in the *chitswarupa* of the soul. But Sri Aurobindo's Integral liberation is the liberation into the Divine, the Supreme Being, the Omnipresent Reality, the Eternal Master and Lover of our Being. It is the integral union with the *chatuspada* Brahman, and liberation means liberation both of the soul and the nature of man. The liberation of nature essentially means liberation from dualities, the working of the *gunas*. But the working of the *gunas* is not confined merely to the waking

nature; it has its roots deep in the sub-conscious and the inconscient layers of man's Being. A complete liberation is possible only by a process of radical transformation of the entire nature of man. Integral Union with the Divine, therefore, means at once *sayujya* and *sadharmya*—dynamic identity in being and in nature. Transformation for Sri Aurobindo is not moral or spiritual purification; it means a radical and integral transmutation of human nature. It implies 'another power of knowledge, another kind of will, another luminous nature of emotion and aesthesis, another constitution of the physical consciousness'. It is a change of consciousness and Being more radical and complete than what took place when 'a mentalised Being first appeared in a vital and material animal world'. This is a victorious descent and manifestation of the Supramental Light in the consciousness and nature of man marking a decisive advance in his evolution.¹⁸ Evolutionary Nature intends not merely a revelation of the spirit, but a radical and integral transformation of Nature. She strongly wills to effectuate a true manifestation of the embodied life of the Spirit, to complete what she has begun by a passage from Ignorance to Knowledge and to reveal herself as the luminous Consciousness-Force carrying in her the eternal Existence and its universal Delight of being.

There are three essential conditions of psychic transformation or of the soul's complete emergence as the all-controlling force.

¹⁸ 'It is true that a somewhat similar attempt was made by the Vedic Rishis, but it was confined to some parts of human nature, and undertaken on an individual, and not a collective scale. The Tantrics also laboured towards some such objective, but with nothing better than very partial and precarious, though often spectacular results. The Alchemists, at their very best, worked on these lines in Egypt and Chaldea, and later, with a lesser intensity of vision, in Greece and medieval Europe. They sought to turn the base metal of human nature into the Prima Materia from which it is derived; so that its original purity and power could be restored to it. But all these intrepid endeavours of man, which bear eloquent testimony to the fundamental demand of his being and nature, failed to achieve any enduring success for three important reasons: first, the spiritual vision behind the ideas was not deep and comprehensive enough to embrace the complex totality of human nature; second, the secret of transformation was sought for elsewhere than where it naturally belongs—the power that was employed for the work was not the supreme divine Power which alone can transmute.' Rishabchand, *The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry, 1953), p. 411.

First, there must be a sufficient preparation of the surface being. For a spiritual preparation of the surface nature, it is necessary that a contact should be secured in it with the spiritual Reality, whether through the avenue of the mind, or through the avenue of the heart, or through the avenue of the practical will, or through all these avenues. Secondly, the psychic entity cannot come forward and control the nature until the psychic individuality or the soul personality which it puts forward has been sufficiently developed. The psychic personality should be so developed that the soul can effectively impose itself through it and change the whole rhythm and pattern of living. Thirdly, in order that the psychic transformation may be complete, there must be a cracking of the crust of outer nature, a breaking down of the walls of inner separation, a joining of the depths of our being to the surface.

The psychic entity is the representative within the evolving nature of the unchanging Self above. It is, therefore, essential that the psychic movement inward to the inmost psychic entity should be supplemented by an opening upward to a supreme spiritual status or a higher existence. This is the beginning of what Sri Aurobindo has called spiritualisation. Thus the second transformation we require is the transformation by the spiritual consciousness.

The initial requirement of spiritual transformation is an upward movement of the mind to the higher ranges of super-consciousness. But this spiritual change will not lead to man's attaining the highest spiritual level of which he is capable, unless there supervenes the third and final transformation. This is the transformation by the Supermind which completes the passage of the soul through ignorance and for the first time places its consciousness, its life and power upon a completely effective basis of self-knowledge.

Psychic change was found to be a change circumscribed within the limits of the natural instrumentation and consequently it was found to effectuate only a reflected and modified manifestation of the supernal riches such as peace, light, bliss, etc., above us. Spiritual change gives an unfettered vision of the truth of things above, and succeeds in bringing

down into play in our terrestrial embodied existence the self-luminous instrumentation of the transcendent Self. But both this vision and this dynamisation which spiritualisation implies are after all inadequate. We know that the most integral, inclusive and harmonious vision, or rather, identity-knowledge of the Real in all its rich diversity of aspects can be obtained by the Supermind and the Supermind alone. So nothing short of supramental realisation can satisfy the spiritual aspiration of the Integral Yogi.

The transition to Supermind is really a passage from Nature to Supernature. This being so, it is not in the power of mind to effect this transition. All the previous stages of evolution that we have described are stages in ignorance, but the supramental change is a stage in knowledge. The emergence of the Supermind is not possible unless there is a direct descent of it.

The descent of the Supermind into our earthly nature is the only way in which the ascent of the evolutionary process to the Supermind can take place. The action of the Supermind, representing as it does the perfect identity of knowledge and will, is always and under all conditions intrinsic, automatic and irresistably self-achieving. It can descend to any depth of obscurity without losing its full power of action; and if it limits itself or its working, it is by choice and intention, not by compulsion; in the limits it chooses its action and the results of its action are harmonious and inevitable. This self-limitation of self-imposed restriction is for the fulfilment of a specific purpose.

Sri Aurobindo points out that 'for a real transformation there must be a direct and unveiled intervention from above; there would be necessary too a total submission and surrender of the lower consciousness, a cessation of its insistence, a will in it for its separate law of action to be completely annulled by transformation and lose all rights over our being'.¹⁹ This does not mean that we can by our efforts force the Supermind to descend. In fact, the whole of the process, the gradual psychicisation of our being and the slow spiritualisation of our nature

¹⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 959.

by the light of the higher reaches of the mind and the Overmind are preliminary conditions for the descent of the Supermind.

As a result of the descent of the Supermind there will be a real participation by the individual in the working of the universal Consciousness-Force; the individual *Purusha* would be the master of his own creative energy, and at the same time a conscious partner, agent, instrument of the Cosmic Spirit in the working of the universal Energy; the universal Energy would work through him, but he also would work through her, and the harmony of the intuitive truth would make the double working a single action. It is this crowning phase of supramentalisation that alone can usher into existence a new era of the unveiled manifestation of the Spirit in the material universe; Nature becomes transformed in to Supernature and human beings in to Gnostic Beings.

The blossoming forth of human evolution in to Supermanhood is the goal particularly stressed by the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. He refuses to believe that Man is the last word about the process of terrestrial evolution. He is firm in his conviction that the final fruition of all human progress would consist in a unique form of self-exceeding and self-transcending. 'Just as the animal has been the living laboratory in which Nature has worked out man, so also man himself is a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she is striving to work out the Divine Man or Superman'. Man is essentially a mental being, *manomaya Purusha*, with mind as the dominant power of his consciousness and as the guiding principle of his life. But mind is in essence only an inferior mode of operation of the true power of knowledge, self-luminous and self-realising, which we have called the Supermind. Supermanhood implies the bringing into play of the Supermind in man, its overt operation in all the parts of his existence, and its success in transforming him thoroughly into an image of the Divine. The Superman is thus man transfigured in all the members of his being by the sovereign dynamism of the Spirit. The vision of Supermanhood sums and brings to a focus the loftiest ideals which have been inspiring mankind

throughout the ages. It is the supreme vision of the rich outflowering of the Divine in Man.

The ideal of Supermanhood steers clear of two opposite extremes. It neither accepts the path of negation that leads to the silence of *Nirvana* or *Kaivalya*, nor encourages the path of egoistic self-affirmation which leads to spiritual death. Haridas Chaudhury writes: 'Having struck a middle course between asceticism and materialism, it directs man's attention to the goal of dynamic self-identification with the Divine Will in the World.'²⁰ To be a Superman is not simply to rise above the binding limitations of humanity and to get absorbed in the transcendent Divine. It is immensely more than that. The Superman is essentially the playmate of the Divine in His cosmic self-expressions and creative adventures. Supermanhood implies not only the realisation of God on the lofty summits of spiritual experience, but also the dynamic manifestation of God in the material circumstances of our human living.

Supermanhood as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo is quite in keeping with an integral view of ultimate reality and with a coherent account of the process of terrestrial evolution. When we speak of the superman we refer to a new race, almost a new species, that will appear on earth as the inevitable result of Nature's evolution. The new race will be developed out of the present humanity, but it does not mean, however, that the whole of humanity will be so changed of a sudden. Supermanhood means, of course, a very radical change; it means giving up altogether many and some very basic human qualities and attributes. Again, 'the Superman is not a purified moralised man, even as he is not a magnified glorified animal man; he is man of a different type, qualitatively different'.²¹

The Superman or the Divine Man, as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo, on the contrary, has for his distinguishing mark a thorough divine transformation of all the parts of his embodied existence including even the grossest physical. He

²⁰ Haridas Chaudhuri, *Sri Aurobindo, the Prophet of Life Divine* (Calcutta, 1951), p. 146.

²¹ Nolini Kanta Gupta, *The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*, Part V, (Pondicherry, 1969), p. 30.

will have the infinite power of God, but he would be loath to make any personal or egoistic use thereof. As a playmate of the Divine, he would unreservedly offer his body, life and mind as plastic instruments in the hands of God so that life on earth may be turned into a sacred poem of divine ecstasy. Again the Superman is not, as Nietzsche thinks him to be, the highest embodiment of the biological force of Nature, not even as modified and refined by the aesthetic and aristocratic virtues of which the higher reaches of humanity seem capable. For that is after all humanity only accentuated in certain other fundamentally human modes of existence. Instead of the ethical and intellectual man, we get the vital and aesthetic man. It may be a change but not a transfiguration.

Again a full grasp of the distinction between the extraordinary great man and the Superman, *mahamanava* and *atimanava*, is vital to a proper appreciation of the message of Sri Aurobindo and the ideal of Bernard Shaw. The Superman will differ from the greatest among men as profoundly as a normal human being differs from the mightiest or the most intelligent animal.

Again, the Superman would not be simply a great man or a human hero; he would rather be the embodiment of some unique emergent quality. Sri Aurobindo is firm in his conviction that the birth of the Divine in man is the supreme consummation towards which the march of human civilisation has been proceeding through the ages. 'The advent of Supermen and gnostic beings would, therefore, be the crowning consummation of the increasing process of self-manifestation of the spirit in material conditions.'

Finally, a word about *Jivanmukta* and the Superman: while the Superman of Sri Aurobindo must needs be a *Jivanmukta Purusha*, not all *Jivanmuktas* are Supermen. Supermanhood is a far richer concept and a greater achievement than *Jivanmukti*. There have indeed been numerous instances of *Jivanmukti* in the past, but Supermanhood is yet to blossom forth in the course of further evolution.

Thus we find that it is Sri Aurobindo who is par excellence the philosopher of the Superman, the thinker who has proclaimed more strongly than any other, the absolute necessity

of the emergence of a race of Divine Man. No philosopher in ancient or modern times has a higher conception of the destiny of man than he. No one has announced with greater conviction than he that man must exceed himself, that his destiny is not to be mere man but to be something infinitely higher. Such is Sri Aurobindo's account of the evolutionary process, of the spiritual evolution, such is his supreme enunciation, and his beatific and flaming vision of Supermanhood and the final result of the revelatory creation—the supreme manifestation of the Existence-Consciousness-Delight, *Sachchidananda*.

SISIRKUMAR GHOSE

Sri Aurobindo—Poet As Seer

SRI AUROBINDO once said that he had been first and foremost a poet and a politician and only later had he become a *yogi*. But outside a small if growing circle, he is but little known as a poet. This is unfortunate but a fact. As it is, the response has swayed between enthusiasm and denigration. In the process few have seen the object as it is. He remains a controversial, even an enigmatic figure.

The reasons for controversy and misunderstanding are not one but many. To begin with, Sri Aurobindo is a distinguished person, a culture hero. Romain Rolland described him as the greatest synthesis between the genius of the East and the genius of the West. A leader in more fields than one, his successive roles as a nationalist, a metaphysical thinker and latterly a *yogi*, has tended to throw his work as a poet into the background. Even devotees have been known to shy at it, many look upon it as ancillary, a by-product rather than what it, in fact is, essential to his mode of expression. Another difficulty is that there exists in certain quarters the fixed idea that no Indian can write worthwhile poetry in English. His own indifference to publicity is another factor. *The Collected Poems and Plays* (1942) has long been out of print. But the real difficulty would seem to lie in the fact that in his maturer verse, his more intimate utterances Sri Aurobindo deals almost exclusively with states of being, subtle ranges of experience that are never easy to grasp, much less to judge. In the contemporary crowd he appears to be of somewhat antique cast.

The poet seems so much like his own Shiva:

A face on the cold dire mountain peaks
Grand and still, its lines white and austere
Match with the unmeasured snowy streaks
Cutting heaven, implacable and sheer.

A moon-ray on his forehead blue and pale,
Stretched after its finger of still light
Illumining emptiness. Stern and male
Mask of peace, indifferent in might!

The modern consciousness, everyone is agreed, has lost its centre. In fact, the loss is its very *raison d'être*. Poetry today is mostly the poetry of crisis—now and then the crisis of poetry no less! It is at the same time an age of eager, unconventional experiments in form, and formlessness—all of which may be a cover for a tortured and confused seeking for integration. But integration is ever from within and depends upon a change of consciousness. This is where a good many of our poets and thinkers fail. Placed by their side Sri Aurobindo speaks almost a new tongue, an Orphic voice of such sanity and serenity, of incontestable inwardness and maturity as almost mocks at our agonies, real or pretended. To many he would seem to belong to a tradition which is hard to admit or to continue, *passé*. (This of course is a convenient error.) He seems to stand outside the mainstream of modern poetry or what has imposed itself as the mainstream. Perhaps we are in for a revolution of the word, and poetry such as Sri Aurobindo's might help in that emergence and revaluation. You have the word, Tagore had said to him. Only a poet can recognise another.

The degree of vision that dwells in a man is a correct measure of a person and the poetry in him. To presume that visionary writers have a weak hold on life is part of the order of ideas that has to be left aside if we are to enter the world of Aurobindean poetry. For it deals with as it depends upon experiences 'not very much frequented by common readers of poetry'. An openness to these experiences and some knowledge of the conditions of their fit expression would seem to be part of the reader's minimum equipment if he is

to make sense of and profit from this poetry, largely, of inner life. In this case 'the Wisdom of the East' did not make for any loss of poetic potency. In fact, it gave a new tone and range, an intensity characteristic of the author. Perhaps to appreciate this poetry we need a hierarchy of the imaginative life, a renewal of symbolic modes of correspondence which we have all but lost, a loss to which the proliferating interest in myths and symbols is an oblique reminder. Before we can hope to earn this poetry, 'too far from our surface nature's postal routes', the doors of perception have to be cleansed. For some that may not be easy. The way out, for such people, is to dismiss this poetry as philosophic, obscure or occult. But, as Stephen Spender had once said, art is a Hindu temple in which many gods can co-exist. Here is poetry such as the Rishis wrote, or might write. Not to recognise it is to declare oneself insensitive. The failure of the spirit is a failure from which poetry alone can deliver us.

I

With their obvious classical echoes, Sri Aurobindo's earliest verse, *Songs to Myrtilla*, is the work of one who has yet to find his voice; most of the poems were written in England during his student days. But even that early two groups stand out: the sonnets, a form for which he has a special attraction, and the political poems, an interest that survives *yoga* (see the later poems on Hitler and 'The Children of Wotan'). But soon, at the age of twenty-one, he left England for home. In 'Envoi', the young poet tells us and himself:

In Sicilian olive groves no more
Or seldom must my footprints now be seen,
Nor tread Athenian lanes, nor yet explore
Parnassus or thy voiceful shores, O Hippocrene.

Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the southern sea,
Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow.

The return to native grounds is followed by adaptations of two narrative poems, of romantic love, *Urvasie* and *Love and Death*. The similarity of theme does not escape notice. It was to be the theme of his final work or testament, *Savitri*:

The soul's debate with embodied Nothingness
Against the universe weigh its single self....
In the world's death-cave uphold life's helpless claim
And vindicate her right to be and love.

But at no period was Sri Aurobindo a puritan or averse to the joys of life, love or the senses. *Urvasie*, a young man's poem, is quite uninhibited. This is how the young poet describes the celestial nymph lying, abandoned, on the cold hillside:

Perfect she lay amid her tresses,
Like a lily mishandled luminous,
As she had fallen. From the lucid robe
One shadow gleamed and golden breasts left bare,
Divinely lifting, one gold arm was flung.
A warm rich splendour exquisitely outlined
Against the dazzling whiteness, and her face
Was as a moon fallen among the snows.

Or, later, the meeting of lovers, *Urvasie* and *Pururavus*:

She a leaf
Before a gust among the nearing trees,
Cowered. But, all a sea of mighty joy
Rushing and swallowing up the golden sand,
With a great cry and glad *Pururavus*
Seized her and caught her to his bosom thrilled,
Clinging and shuddering. All her wonderful hair loosened
and the wind seized and bore it streaming
Over the shoulder of *Pururavus*
And on his cheeks a softness. She o'erborne,
Panting, with inarticulate murmurs lay,
Like a slim tree half seen through driving hail,
Her naked arms clasping his neck, her cheek
And golden throat averted, and wide trouble
In her large eyes bewildered with their bliss.

With her sweet limbs all his, feeling her breasts
 Tumultuous up against his beating heart,
 He kissed the glorious mouth of heaven's desire.
 So clung they as two shipwrecked in a surge.
 Then strong Pururavus, with golden eye,
 Mastering hers, cried tremulous: "O beloved,
 O miser of the rich and happy voice,
 One word, one word to tell me that thou lovest."
 And Urvasie, all broken on his bosom,
 Her godhead in his passion lost, moaned out,
 From her imprisoned breasts, "My lord, my love!"

Surely not the poetry of a *sanyasi*. But the world of romance is soon left behind. The next two volumes, *Poems* and *Nine Poems*, mark a shift and we enter a grey world, an intellectually troubled universe of discourse. Now the poet is often engaged in fighting on the one hand the rival claims of science and materialism and of idealistic thought on the other. As James Cousins said, he is beating the dead horse of materialism. In one of these poems, the Angel of Science announces the familiar credo:

Nothing am I but earth....
 Tissue and nerve and from the seed a birth.
 A mould, a plasm, a gas, a little that is much
 In these grey cells that quiver, to each touch
 The secret lies of man, they are the thing called I.
 Matter insists and Matter makes reply.

Of course the poet does not accept that reply. But the anguish remains. Even in 'In the Moonlight' are heard the strains of the problem-tossed brain seeking, in vain, for the source and meaning of life:

Through chemistry she seeks the source of life,
 Nor knows the mighty laws that she has found
 Are Nature's bye-laws only, meant to ground
 A grandiose freedom building peace by strife.

In a poem like 'The Rishi' the dialogue continues and we have hints of the ancient wisdom, if not its very own

accent:

Shrink not from life, O Aryan,
 But with mirth and joy receive,
 His good and evil, sin and virtue,
 Till he bids thee leave.
 But while thou livest perfectly fulfil
 Thy part, conceive
 Earth as thy stage, thyself the actor strong,
 The drama His.

These and other ideational exercises have helped to fix the image of Sri Aurobindo as a philosophic poet. This is not wholly true, and though he has a penchant for generalisation, he is essentially a visionary or symbolic poet. Such at least is the evidence of the later poems. But even in the work of the middle period there are lyrics like 'Who', 'An Image', 'Revelation' or poems of power and prayer like the sea poems or 'The Vedantin's Prayer'. Nor is the poetry of heroic action absent. 'Baji Prabhou', with its severe locale, a parched soil and a bronze and brilliant sky provides the right background for resistance to foreign hordes:

A noon of Deccan with its tyrant glare
 Oppressed the earth, the hills stood deep in haze
 And sheltering athirst the fields glared up
 Longing for water in the courses long parched
 Imprisoned by a bronze and brilliant sky,
 Sought an escape from the wide trance of heat.

At the other end, in the same volume, we have 'Mother of Dreams' and 'Ahana'. The first takes us to the world of dreams and what lies beyond:

Thine is the shadow in which visions are made....
 In thy dream worlds we pass or look in thy magic glass,
 then beyond these we climb out of Space and Time
 to the peak of divine endeavour....

In 'Ahana', the Dawn of God, towards the end comes the prayer, which is perhaps poetry's ultimate rationale:

Flower of Beatitude! Living shape of the bliss of Brahman!

Art thou not she who will bring into life and time the
eternal?...

Vision delightful, alone on the peaks whom the silences
cover,

Vision of bliss, stoop down to mortality, lean to thy lover.

Yet had his poetry been confined to the work of the early and middle period, he would have been an assiduous, promising poet rather than a great poet. For that we have to wait. The heart of the matter is not in these poems but those that follow, a remarkable crop, unlike anything else. These are his later poems, from 1934 onward.

II

What follows—*Six Poems, Transformation and Other Poems, Poems Past and Present, Last Poems, More Poems* and *Savitri*—takes one by surprise. Whether *yoga* explains it all or not, the shift in sensibility as well as control of technique is striking. Idea, image and rhythm, everything has changed. It is a new world and a new idiom:

A deep spiritual calm no touch can sway
Upholds the mystery of the Passion-play.

The serenity of these inward states, of inner grace, their noetic nuances open out to experiences unfamiliar to the modern imagination. The maturity of insight is unfailing. In these poems, short or long, Sri Aurobindo has read the text of without from within as it has been rarely read before. It is not philosophy but vision, an 'apocalypse of a world of images' which he has to offer. Out of intellectual debates he has leapt into sight, for 'this Light comes out by struggle or by thought'. Part of his enlarging experience, his 'self-discovery's flaming witnesses, offering their marvel and their multitude', these records of extreme situations are yet marked by a rare normalcy. The difference between this poet and the characteristically contemporary writers, writing more and more about less and less, is qualitative. Today how many poets can say

He is in me, round me, facing everything....

I stand upon its boundaries and stare into
the frontiers of the Infinite?

Or:

Above my head a mighty head was seen
A face with the calm of immortality
And an omnipotent gaze that held the scene
In the vast circle of its sovereignty.
His hair was mingled with the sun and the breeze;
The world was in His heart and He was I:
I housed in me the Everlasting's peace,
The strength of one whose substance cannot die.

It is not a blank Infinite either, the Everlasting's peace is not unrelated to the here and now.¹ For what, above all, distinguishes Aurobindean vision is its unification of the fields, *bhumis*, or levels of being, a luminous totality. It takes, as he had predicted of the future poetry, all the places of existence as its empire. Seeing it steadily and seeing it whole, he has given that phrase an extended meaning or dimension. This is the source of that deep interpretative power, a new reconciling and fusing vision which many have mistaken for a prosaic element. Sometime what looks like statement is the essence of experience. In terms of self-understanding, there is no writer who does not appear a shade superficial by the side of the poet of *Savitri*.² Because of his earned and securely held vision, of 'many countries now hidden from our view', the poet can see through all countries. The poise and authenticity of these tidings from within are beyond doubt,

¹ See 'To find our self and the self of things is not to go through a rarefied ether of thought into Nirvana, but to discover the whole greatest integral power of our integral existence.' Shri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry* (Pondicherry, 1953), p. 321.

² As Krishnaprem put it so well: '*Savitri* is neither subjective fantasy nor yet mere philosophical thought, but vision and revelation of the actual structure of the inner Cosmos and the pilgrim of life within its sphere—*Bhu*, *Bhuvar*, *Svar*: the Stairway of the Worlds reveals itself to our gaze—worlds of Light above, worlds of Darkness beneath—and we see also ever-circling life ('kindled in measure and quenched in measure') ascending that Stair under the calm unwinking gaze of the Cosmic Gods who shine forth now as of old.... Poetry is indeed the full manifestation of the Logos, and when, as here, it is no mere iridescence dependent on some special standpoint, but the wondrous structure of the mighty Cosmos, the "Adored One" that is revealed, then in truth does it manifest in its full, its highest grandeur.'

and constitute a triumph song of the *sthitaprajna*. In these later mystical or spiritual poems Sri Aurobindo has achieved a new kind of rootedness, in the Vedic sense of the 'roots above'. No longer a romantic or an idealising, critical poet, he now speaks of 'those yet unimagined harmonies, the fate and privilege of unborn men'. This is another distinction of the later poems: they look towards the future rather than the past. Poetry is ontology. The relevance of this cosmic or solar poetry for the renewal of man should be obvious. The poet has helped us in getting rid of a false view of man which has dominated modern history for the last four hundred years or so. One can only guess at the discipline that must have gone to make the recovery possible:

Lifting the heavy curtain of the flesh
 He stood upon the threshold serpent-watched,
 And peered into endless gleaming corridors,
 Silent and listening to the silent heart
 For the coming of the new and the unknown.
 He gazed across the empty stillnesses
 And heard the footsteps of the undreamed Idea
 In the far avenues of the Beyond.
 He heard the secret voice, the Word that knows,
 And saw the secret face that is our own.

'The secret face that is our own' is part of the occult or teleological element in Aurobindean poetry, though not as a palpable design. At the same time there is nothing deliberately obscure or doctrinaire about this poetry which is its own best commentary, and which recovers one of the perennial functions of poetry as a mode or capacity for symbolic vision. Its intimation of the world of the adept or the *yogi* adds a new dimension to modern consciousness, provides that 'pure perception' in which science, religion and poetry come together. The poet is our representative man and the poetry a kind of therapy in the unfolding process of the Self, a return to the roots:

Sometimes when our sight is turned within,
 Earth's ignorant veil is lifted from our eyes;
 There is a short miraculous escape.

This narrow fringe of clamped experience
 We leave behind meted out to us as life,
 Our little walks, our insufficient reach.
 Our souls can visit in great lonely hours
 Still regions of imperishable Light,
 All-seeing eagle-peaks of Power
 And moon-flame oceans of swift and fathomless Bliss
 And calm immensities of spirit Space.
 In the unfolding process of the Self
 Sometimes the inexpressible Mystery
 Elects a human vessel of descent.

The poet is that vessel of descent and poetry a state of grace, a point which was conceded by so modern a critic as Herbert Read. The result, in the modern context, is a new kind of subjectivity of poetry. ('Subjectivity is truth,' said Kierkegaard). But though subjective, it is profoundly real: 'A self-discovery that could never cease.' In brief, here is poetry as a celebration of change of consciousness, the return of the Rishi. In *Cosmic Art of India*, Radhakamal Mukherjee had pointed out how the 'image of Man in the art of India reflects the moods, tensions and transcendences of his real Self or Being'. Only the puerile positivist, whatever new garb he may adopt, will deny the reality of these experiences. Here is a new hope for poetry and hope for man.³ In his later poems, especially the inner epic *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo's role as a pathfinder, 'a traveller between summit and abyss', stands revealed beyond cavil or question. To read him is once more to believe in human possibilities. What Claudel said about Rimbaud, '*C'est a Rimbaud que je dois humainement mon retour a la foi*' applies with equal, if not greater, force to Sri Aurobindo's massive insights, his 'revelation's everburning fire'. Are these insights to be condemned because they are sober—an 'open realisation'—while others are drunk or disordered?

³ 'The hope of the race in this crisis lies in the fidelity of its intellect to the larger perception it now has of the greater self of humanity, the turning of its will to the inception of delivering forms of thought, art and social endeavour which arises from these perceptions and the raising of the intellectual mind to the intuitive supra-intellectual spiritual consciousness which can alone give the basis for a spiritualised life of the race and the realisation of its diviner potentialities.' Sri Aurobindo, *op. cit.*, pp. 353-4.

It is the aim of such experiences to make of life a 'cosmic harmony', to 'weave a poem of His days'. All the same the poet is existentially⁴ aware of the powers that oppose, the many ordeals and subterfuges which await the adventurer soul. He knows

The Dragon of the dark foundations keeps
Unalterable the law of Chance and Death;
On his long way through Time and Circumstances
The grey-hued riddling nether Sphinx.
Her dreadful paws upon the swallowing sands,
Awaits him armed with the soul-slaying word;
Across his path sits the dim camp of Night.

Elsewhere we hear about the traveller of the worlds, how

In menacing tracts, in tortured solitudes
Companionless he roamed through desolate ways
Where the red wolf waits by the fordless stream
And Death's black eagles scream to the precipice.
And met the hounds of bale who hunt men's hearts
Baying across the veldts of Destiny.
In footless battlefields of the Abyss,
Fought shadowy combats in mute eyeless depths,
And bore the fierce inner wounds that are slow to heal.

The polarity of forces, the inner war without escape is not unknown to our poet. He knows well

The ordeal of the veiled Initiate,
The hero soul at play with Death's embrace,
Wrestler in the dread gymnasium of Fate
And sacrifice a lonely path to Grace.

In 'A God's Labour' he has told us, perhaps with a touch of confession:

He who would bring the heavens here
Must descend himself into clay

⁴ An existential exegesis of Sri Aurobindo's writings is both possible and necessary. See Frederic Spiegelberg's 'Sri Aurobindo and Existentialism' in *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo* (eds.), Haridas Chaudhuri and Frederic Spiegelberg.

And the burden of earthly nature bear
And tread the dolorous way.

Coercing my godhead I have come down
Here on the sordid earth,
Ignorant, labouring, human grown
Twixt the gates of death and birth

I have laboured and suffered in Matter's night
To bring the fire to Man;
But the hate of Hell and human spite
Are my meed since the world began...

My gaping wounds are a thousand and one
And the Titan kings assail,
But I cannot rest till my task is done
And wrought the eternal will.

The descent into hell, into 'Matter's night' is a recognised strategy known to ancient wayfarers.⁵ In the words of the poet: 'None can reach heaven who has not passed through hell.' In his poetry and *yoga* Sri Aurobindo has gone along the razor's edge. It is out of such encounter or exploration of the inconscient, the churning of the inner ocean, *hridya samudra*, to use the Vedic phrase, arises the pure passion of a new creation, tender and terrible:

O star of creation, pure and free,
Halo-moon of ecstasy unknown,
Storm-breath of the soul-change yet to be,
Ocean self enraptured and alone.

But 'alone' is company enough, since it is a cosmic consciousness where all is known by the light of identity. And so in 'The Cosmic Man' we hear:

I look across the world and no horizon walls my gaze;
I see Paris and Tokyo and New York,
I see the bombs bursting on Barcelona and on Canton
streets.

⁵ 'The heart and centre of the kingdom of the dead to which Orpheus goes in search of Eurydice is also the penetralia of the individual human life which pulsates (with the 'beating mind' which Wordsworth and Shakespeare speak of). Elizabeth Sewall, *The Orphic Voice*, p. 326.

Man's numberless misdeeds and rare good deeds take
place within my single self.
I am the beast he slays, the bird he feeds and saves.
The thoughts of unknown minds exalt me with their thrill.
I carry the sorrow of millions in my lonely breast.

It is a securely held vision of evolution, of cosmic and occult laws that distinguish most of his later writings. The truth of experience is expressed in a variety of ways, an encyclopaedia of enhanced awareness rather than any easy optimism. Here are a few passages chosen at random:

As rain-thrashed mire the marvel of the rose,
Earth awaits the distant marvel to disclose.

I saw my soul, a traveller through Time,
From life to life the cosmic way it trod,
Obscure in the depths and on the heights sublime,
Evolving from the worm into the god.

Still by slow steps the miracle goes on,
The Immortal's gradual birth mid mire and stone.
Fulfilling the occult magnificent plan,
The worldwide and immortal spirit in man.

My senses change into golden gates of bliss,
An ecstasy thrills through touch and sound and sight
Flooding the blind material sheath's dull ease
My darkness answers to his Call of Light.

Or take the serenity of the Silent or Witness Self, *sakshi*, the universal identity, or the Bliss of Brahman, epiphanies which he has put across with clarity and convincingness. Let one example do:

All is abolished but the mute Alone,
The mind from thought released, the heart from grief,
Grow inexistent beyond belief;
There is no I, no Nature, known-unknown....
Only the illimitable Permanent is here.
A peace stupendous, featureless.

The series of charismatic or liberating experiences culminate in the expected and breathtaking, unifying formula:

Tat tvamasi, Thou art That, the essence of Indian culture and imagination. Of this ultimate equation, replenishment, Sri Aurobindo's later poetry is an irrefutable proof:

In rare and lucent intervals of hush
 Into a signless universe he could soar
 Packed with the content of formlessness
 Where world was into a single being rapt
 And all was known by the light of identity
 And spirit was its own self-evidence.

Instead of the disorder and anarchy of our state (the settled anarchy of things) Sri Aurobindo proposes a new centre of creative, harmonious self, in other words, the New Being. That this is a real need is shown by the fact that lately even theologians have been speaking of it.

This is not meant to suggest that as a poet Sri Aurobindo is metaphysical, abstruse or wanting in a sense of the actual, a mistake tiresomely repeated in certain quarters.⁶ He knows, better than others, the conditions needed for acquiring and stabilising the new poise and level of awareness, to embody it in life no less than in art. After all, how can one transform what one does not understand? And Sri Aurobindo is essentially a poet of transformation,⁷ in a deeper sense than Rilke. His whole labour as a poet and *yogi* has been 'to build the rainbow-bridge marrying the soil to the sky', to resolve the duality without in any way denying the reality of the world and of human becoming. If this demands a capacity for experience and inwardness, that is as it should be. The ascent to poetry is the ascent to

⁶ A charge brought by Stephen Spender against Christian writers in general. With regard to Aurobindian poetry a certain difficulty about vision and language has perhaps to be admitted. If 'divided consciousness' be the mark of the modern, it would not be easy to fit Sri Aurobindo in the crowd. The ethos and teleology are different.

⁷ To use the poet's own words:

All here must learn to obey a higher law,
 Our body's cells must hold the immortal flame.
 Else would the spirit reach alone its source
 Leaving a half-saved world to its dubious fate.

As was said of *The Divine Comedy*, 'at least in the intention of its creator, it is an act, a means of action, a work, an *opera* in the primary meaning of the word; that is, an attempt to change and transform material. In this case the material is man.' 'This is even more true of *Savitri* and its author. Also see *The Life Divine*, Chap. XXXV, 'The Triple Transformation.'

Self, the permanent:

Only when we have climbed beyond ourselves
The Ineffable shall find a secret voice,
The Imperishable burn through Matter's screen
Making the mortal's body godhead's robe.

The poet is that secret voice, the prophet of a new Advent. Sri Aurobindo has projected a new symbol or myth—of evolutionary or inner change, till Matter becomes the Spirit's willing bride, to use his own phrase. He has done this, as might have been expected, by the alchemy of consciousness, by renewing the archetypal pattern of poetry as *prajna* or *mantra*,⁸ the intuitive and the inspired Word, *Vak* or Logos. It is a role entirely in keeping with the rest of his life and work. If Sri Aurobindo's major prose works—*The Life Divine*, *The Essays on the Gita*, *Synthesis of Yoga*, *On The Veda*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle*—form an intellectual statement of his insights into life and reality, his later poetry, especially *Savitri*, is the experimental validation of the same. Through its exploration of the World-Stair, the corresponding planes of our being, the inescapable encounter with Death and Nothingness, *Savitri* sums up cycles of culture and interior living, realises and re-establishes the recurrent dream: 'the crown of conscious Immortality', 'the end of Death, the death of Ignorance'.

At the moment this sober poetry of genuine insight and awareness, 'a harmonious and luminous totality of man's Being', may seem to be outside the mainstream.⁹ But

⁸ In Sri Aurobindo's own words: 'What the Vedic poets meant by the mantra was an inspired and revealed seeing and visioned thinking, attended by a realisation, to use the ponderous but necessary modern word, of some in most truth of God and self and man and Nature and cosmos and life and thing and thought and experience and deed. It was a thinking that came on the wings of a great soul rhythm.' Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*, p. 280.

⁹ But this is what Sri Aurobindo has to say: 'The poetry of the future can least afford to chain itself to the outward actualities which we too often mistake for the whole of life, because it will be the voice of a human mind which is pressing more and more towards the very self of the self of things, the very spirit of which the soul of man is a living power and to a vision of unity and totality which is bound to take note of all that lies behind our apparent material life. What man sees and experiences of God and himself and his race and Nature and the spiritual, mental, psychic and material worlds in which he moves, his backlook upon the past, his sweep of vision over the present, his eye of aspiration and prophecy cast towards the future, his

the illusion cannot last. When the antics of the absurd, the fellowship of the fallen, the tin gods of today, have become curiosities of decadence, poetry such as Aurobindo's might come into its own and the world thrill with mankind's first and last prayer, something truly symbolical and archetypal, as in 'The Rose of God':

Rose of God, vermilion stain on the sapphires of heaven,
Rose of Bliss, fire-sweet, seven-tinged, with the ecstasies
seven!

Leap up in our heart of humanhood, O miracle, O flame,
Passion-flower of the Nameless, bud of the mystical Name.

Rose of God, great wisdom-bloom on the summits of being,
Rose of Light, immaculate core of the ultimate seeing!
Live in the mind of our earthhood, O golden Mystery,
flower,
Sun on the head of the Timeless, guest of the marvellous
Hour.

Rose of God, damask force of Infinity, red icon of might,
Rose of Power, with thy diamond halo piercing the night!
Ablaze in the will of the mortal, design the wonder of thy
plan,
Image of Immortality, outbreak of the Godhead in man.

Rose of God, smitten purple with the incarnate divine
Desire,

Rose of Life, crowded with petalsm colours' lyre!
Transform the body of the mortal like a sweet and magical
rhyme;
Bridge our earthhood and heavenhood, make deathless
the children of Time.

Rose of God, like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,
Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!
Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's
abyss:

Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life Beatitude's
kiss.

passion of self-finding and self-exceeding, his reach beyond the three times to the eternal and immutable, this is his real life.' *Ibid.*, p. 325.

What power can bring that miracle—but love, knowledge and power? At heart Sri Aurobindo has always been a poet of love, surprising as the statement might seem. It is true that the content and treatment have changed, across the years, from *Urvasie* and *Love and Death* to *Savitri*:

That burning test of the godhead in our parts
A lightning from the heights to our abyss.

Savitri tells Yama,¹⁰ the dread Lord of Death:

Imperfect is the joy not shared by all,
Oh, to spread forth, oh to encircle and seize
More hearts till love in us has filled the world!
O life, the life beneath the wheeling stars,
For victory in the tournament with death,
For bending the fierce and difficult bow,
For flashing of the splendid sword of God!

More simply:

Love must not cease to live upon earth,
For love is the bright link twixt earth and heaven,
Love is the far Transcendant's angel here,
Love is man's lien on the Absolute.

Later, when she has gained her soul's wish and her husband, Satyavan, has been restored to life, the bewildered sages in the forest ask her to explain the miracle. To this, as a kind of summing up,

Low she replied
Awakened to the meaning of my heart
That to feel love and oneness is to live
And this the magic of our golden change
Is all the truth I know or seek, O sage.

In another poem, 'World Game', the god, no ascetic, tells the goddess, the rationale of creation. It is a re-affirmation of the Tantric tradition, a wisdom that the goddess,

¹⁰ Yama himself tells Savitri: 'For ever love, o slave of God.' As. P.C. Kotoky has said: '*Savitri* is also remarkable for its brilliant poetry of love.' *Indo-English Poetry: A Study of Sri Aurobindo and Four Others* (Gauhati University, 1969), p. 182.

black or white, guards for the initiate soul:

Then shall life be thy arms drawing thy own clasped
 by the breast's rapture of calm peace,
 With thy joy for the spirit's immortal flame and thy
 peace for its deathless base.

Our eyes meeting the long love shut in deep eyes and
 our being held fast and one,
 I shall know the game was well worth the toil whose end
 is thy divine embrace.

III

This short survey has tried to suggest two things: a new possibility of poetic utterance and Sri Aurobindo's role in making it real. What is true of the enduring arts of India is true of the mature poetry of Sri Aurobindo, the poetry of *Samyakdrishti* or *Totalitatdenken*. Once more we see the muses functioning as awakeners of consciousness, as agents of transformation. This answers the deepest, sometimes inarticulate need of the eroded psyche today. In his critical theory, in *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo had put forward the hypothesis that 'the mediation between the truth of the spirit and the truth of life' might be one of the chief functions of the poetry of tomorrow. It is not unreasonable to believe that in our present time of troubles, in 'the Discovery and Colonisation of Inwardness', the varied symbols and art works of this seer-poet, genuine *voyant*, may provide profound affirmations of reality and transformation, of being and becoming in their cosmic range and depth. In Valéry's terms, the poetic word induces us to become rather than exciting us to understand. Some poets may combine both functions: we become what we know, rather we become what we are. An *uttarsadhaka*, Sri Aurobindo has offered, in poem after poem, an integral vision of life which carries its own authority and will be recognised as such by all who are not lost in the local and the temporal. As of old, the poet leads the human march:

Aspiring to godhead from insensible clay,
 He travels slow-footed towards the eternal day.

A Vyasa of the inner life, Sri Aurobindo is likely to be one of the influences towards a change of consciousness and a new life which every crisis in world history brings a little nearer. He stands for a renewal of the cognitive and delight self, the *vijnana* and *ananda purusha*, the ecstasy of the 'brooding bliss of the Infinite'. In 'Musa Spiritus' we hear the poet's prayer:

O Word concealed in the upper fire,
Thou who hast lingered through centuries,
Descend from thy rapt white desire,
Plunge through gold eternities.

Break the seals of Matter's sleep,
Break the trance of unseen height...
O Muse of the Silence, the wideness make
In the unplumbed stillness that hears thy voice...

All make tranquil, all make free,
Let my heart-beats measure the footsteps of God...
Weave from my life His poem of days,
His calm pure dawns and His noons of force.

Reading this poetry one has the sense of an ascension:

Into the Silence, into the Silence
Arise, O spirit immortal,
Away from the turning Wheel, breaking the magical Circle,
Ascend, single and deathless:
Care no more for the whispers and the shoutings in the
darkness,
Pass from the sphere of the grey and the little,
Leaving the cry and the struggle,
Into the Silence for ever.

Not only an ascent but also a descent. One feels

The Word was near...
Of which the darkened universe was the robe.
No more existence seemed an aimless fall,
Extinction was no more the sole release.
The hidden Word was found, the long-sought clue,
Revealed the meaning of the spirit's birth

Condemned to an imperfect body and mind
 In the inconscience of material things
 And the indignity of moral life.

Recently Heidegger has tried to remind us that poetry is the establishment of being by means of the word and that what the poet names is holy (which is exactly what the oldest Indian tradition, the Vedic, has acted upon). Though our present literary fashions obscure such a possibility, paradoxically that is where the cure lies. 'How shall the wounded be well?' 'Only by understanding their illness.' Is it so small a thing to have established the New Being, with the help of poetry, the poetry of the peaks?

On peaks where Silence listens with still heart
 To the rhythmic metres of the rolling worlds,
 He served the sessions of the triple fire.
 On the rims of two continents of slumber and trance
 He heard the ever, unspoken Reality's voice
 Awaken revelation's mystic cry,
 The birthplace found of the sudden infallible Word
 And lived in the rays of the intuitive Sun.

The Sun is the symbol of self-understanding. And so, if and when the crisis of identity,¹¹ one word too often profaned, is resolved, that will be the time to read Sri Aurobindo again, in a new light. Then perhaps in the marriage of the most ancient with the most modern will be found the key to the future. And we shall learn that which can never be forgotten, the truth of our larger self, 'by ourselves unseen':

A deathbound littleness is not all we are:
 Immortal our forgotten vastnesses
 Await discovery in our summit selves;
 Unmeasured breadths and depths of being are ours.
 Even when we fail to look into our souls
 Or lie embedded in earthly consciousness,
 Still have we parts that grow towards the Light.

¹¹ In an essay, 'The Education of a Poet', Peter Viereck has pointed out: 'Today the whole world is *terrible*. Today, when reality is itself an obscure nightmare poem of uncontrolled association, then a poetry which is lucid and lofty and calm and ennobling—a clear-water communicative poetry—is more creative and a truer criticism of the age.'

In moments when the inner lamps are lit
 And the life's cherished guests are left outside,
 Our spirit sits alone and speaks to its gulfs:
 A wider consciousness opens then its doors;
 Invading from spiritual silences
 A ray of the timeless Glory stoops awhile
 To commune with the seized illumined clay
 And leave its huge white stamp upon our lives.
 These signs are native to a larger self
 That lives within us by ourselves unseen.

At its simplest we say: in such a time as ours when all the images are blurred and doubtful, when men go starved because they cannot wish in common—poetry alone imagines, and imagining creates the loyalty for lack of which we cannot live. As Archibald Macleish once said, poetry which owes no man anything, owes nevertheless one debt—an image of mankind in which men can again believe. This is what Aurobindean poetry abundantly provides: an oecumenical image of Man before which almost every other poet is pale. The depth and density is without compare. Rilke spoke of the artist as one who works towards an extension of the regions of the individual senses. Sri Aurobindo has extended our doors of perception, to include the visible as well as the invisible, as perhaps no other poet in history. Not cerebration but celebration of the inherent structure and order of the universe, the mature poetry of Sri Aurobindo, especially his *Savitri*, is a triumphant breakthrough of the various levels of experience. In other words, in him we have, after ages, a recovery of gnosis or language of the Self, recovered, imperishably, under the aspect of an encounter with Fate ('Earth and Love and Doom'). Revealer of the potencies of the spirit, of man's creative evolution, Sri Aurobindo is the poet of tomorrow, the poet's poet. That is why we say, he is not only, as he claimed, first and foremost a poet, but also—as he did not claim—first and foremost among poets. Not *Kavi* but *Kaviraj*.

VINAYAK KRISHNA GOKAK

Sri Aurobindo on Applied Science in Savitri

MANY readers of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* are baffled by the metaphysical subtlety, the mystical depth and the spiritual radiance of this epic. But we forget that there are other facets to this epic which appeal as much to the common man as to the initiated reader. Some day the metaphysics, the mysticism and the spirituality will have to be the concern of the common man too. Culture may be said to have come of age when the individual is interested in all facets of life.

Nature, Love and Contemporary Thought kindle a general interest even in the uninitiated reader of poetry. They present a subject-matter which is of common human interest. They arouse what Mathew Arnold called the primary human emotions. It is true that Nature and Love can also be treated in a manner which brings in metaphysical subtlety, mystical depth and spiritual radiance. But this is linked up with common human experience and the reader feels that he is at home with the Poetry.

This human interest in *Savitri* is evident in the descriptions of Nature in Book IV (Cantos 1 and 4) and Book V (Canto I). I do not mention Book I Canto I as the description of dawn is highly symbolic; in the treatment of love in Book V (Cantos 2 and 3); and in the poetic commentary on Science in Book VII (Canto 4); 'The Triple Soul-Forces' (the books concerned with the debate between Savitri and Death) have also to be reckoned with in this context. These passages bring the epic much nearer to the common reader and throw a bridge by which the passage into the other realms of the epic is

somewhat facilitated.

II

In Book VII Canto 4, Savitri, who is out to find her soul comes across three soul-forces each one of which claims to be her soul. One of them is the Goddess of Pity or the Mother of the Seven Sorrows. The voice of wrath that, like an echo from below, takes up the refrain is the unchastened vital or desire-self in man that expresses itself in cynical or pessimistic terms. Another goddess who meets Savitri is the Mother of Might, Durga. She also claims to be the secret soul of Savitri. The burden of her speech is taken up by a warped echo, the voice of a dwarf-Titan, the ego of this great world of desire, the human will. The Mother of Might maintains that she is the secret soul of Savitri. The Ego maintains that he is a claimant to the throne of heaven. The third goddess that claims to be the secret soul of Savitri is the Madonna of Light, who is also the Mother of Joy and Peace, for light makes for joy and peace. The burden of her speech is taken up by the warped echo of her voice—the sense-shackled mind or intellect of man.

Savitri tells each one of these three goddesses that she is only a *portion* of her soul put forth to help mankind and help the travail of time. One day, when she has found her soul, Savitri will return, a bringer not merely of strength but light which gives the mirror of God, and love which will make man see the face of the Absolute, for all these are but faculties of the Soul.

Modern philosophies are glanced at passinglly in all these situations. Scientific socialism is a noble doctrine because it is pity that man feels towards his fellow men that is its basic inspiration. But this pity is not aided by virtuous powers or by luminous knowledge. It is backed by a warped indignation that proceeds from cynicism, which is not a constructive attitude to life. That is how pity gets mixed up with hatred. This is what we understand from the discussion that Savitri has with the Goddess of Pity and her echo.

Then there is the situation that brings in the Madonna of Light and the sense-shackled mind. It is true that the human intellect has unravelled many of the secrets of the universe:

I have detected plasm and cell and gene,
The protozoa traced, man's ancestors,
The humble originals from whom he rose.

As Savitri says:

But not by showering heaven's golden rain
Upon the intellect's hard and rocky soil
Can the tree of Paradise flower on earthly ground...

These two 'interviews' make it clear how Sri Aurobindo has been able to bring in contemporary knowledge into an epic which sums up the legendary past and looks forward to the future prefigured in symbols. We may deal here with the colloquy between Savitri and the Mother of Might in some detail. The situation brings out the value as well as the futility of applied science and technology.

The Goddess of Might sat on a boulder carved like a huge throne. Dressed in gold and purple sheen, she was armed with the trident and the thunderbolt. Her feet rested on a couchant lion's back:

A formidable smile curved round her lips,
Heaven-fire laughed in the corners of her eyes.

A halo of lightning flamed around her head, and majesty and victory, which sat with her, guarded Truth, Ideal Wisdom, Love and Bliss against the flat equality of Death and the all-levelling Night in the cosmic battle-field. Her speech was a charm restoring hope in failing hearts.

In the battle that goes on between the bright and sombre powers on earth, Durga has her own part to play.

To the strong I bring the guerdon of their strength,
To the weak I bring the armour of my force.

She gives fortune to the great and wise and then tramples them down with the armed heel of Fate.

My ear is leaned to the cry of the oppressed,
I topple down the thrones of tyrant kings;

I smite the Titan who bestrides the world
And slay the tiger in his blood-stained den.

I am Durga, Goddess of the proud and strong,
And Lakshmi, Queen of the fair and fortunate;
I wear the face of Kali when I kill,
I trample the corpses of the demon-hordes.
I am charged by God to do his mighty work.

I reason not of virtue and of sin
But do the deed he has put into my heart.
I fear not for the angry frown of Heaven,
I flinch not from the red assault of Hell;
I crush the opposition of the gods,
Thread down a million goblin obstacles.
I guide man to the path of the Divine
And guard him from the red wolf and the Snake.
I set in his mortal hand my heavenly sword
And put on him the breastplate of the Gods.

The goddess also breaks the ignorant pride of human mind
and tears to pieces man's narrow and successful life so that
he may die to earth and live in the soul.

But the great sorrow of the Mother of Might lies in the fact
that the mass falls back unsaved:

I know the goal, I know the secret route;
I have studied the map of the invisible worlds.
I am the battle's head, the journey's star.
But the great obstinate world resists my word,
And the crookedness and evil in man's heart
Is stronger than Reason, profounder than the Pit,
And the malignancy of hostile Powers
Puts craftily back the clock of destiny
And mightier seems than the eternal Will.

Her only consolation is that she guides a few who pass
towards the Light. She has also the conviction that the
world is going to be saved in the end:

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

The burden of her speech is then taken up by the unrege-
nerate vital or the desire-self from the lower human world.

This dwarf-Titan always strives to make the universe his instrument. He claims to be himself vessel of the Godhead that must be. Struggling to be a lord of Nature, this thinking animal has made of Nature his nurse and tool and slave. But actually he himself is a tool and slave of Nature who is supposed to be his slave and tool. The heart's grief and body's pain are Nature's means to make man grow, see and feel; and his death assists the immortality of Nature by perpetuating the type. Man thinks that he is endowed with free will and a master mind. But it is Nature that pushes him on her own chosen paths. He claims to be the possessor and ruler. But he is in truth ruled and possessed by Nature. He is her conscious automation and dupe of her desire. His soul is her guest—a mute and inert sovereign. His body is her robot and his life is her way to live. It is only his conscious mind that revolts now and then against Nature. But even the mind is nothing more than her 'strong revolted serf'.

Man's claim is that though he is the last born of the earth, he stands the first. He has progressed so fast that now the earth is his floor and the sky his living's roof. The conquest of Nature by man through his intellect is a thrilling saga of great daring and achievement. Man says about nature:

I have made real what she never dreamed,
I have seized her powers and harnessed for my work,
I have shaped her metals and new metals made;
I will make glass and raiment out of milk,
Make iron velvet, water unbreakable stone,

Like God in his astuce of artist skill,
Mould from one primal plasm protean forms,
In single nature multitudinous lives...

But man's triumphs are not merely those of chemical engineering. He has achieved a great deal in the field of Physics and Electronics:

I have found the atoms from which he built the worlds:
The first tremendous cosmic energy
Missioned shall leap to slay my enemy kin,
Expunge a nation or abolish a race,

Death's silence leave where there was laughter and joy.
Or the fissured invisible shall spend God's force
To extend my comforts and expand my wealth,
To speed my car which now the lightnings drive
And turn the engines of my miracles.

He has also used the mystery of the cosmic waves 'to see far distance and to hear far words'.

But man also claims to have become a master of the arts of life. He has examined the world and also studied his own being. He has tamed the wild beast and trained him to guard his house and be his friend. He has conquered space and knitted close all earth.

These are, no doubt, great achievements. But instead of being accompanied by humility, these have promoted pride in man and given him an exaggerated sense of power. He makes the arrogant claim:

For me and my use the universe was made.

The sun and moon are lights upon my path;
Air was invented for my lungs to breathe,

The sea was made for me to swim and sail
And bear my golden commerce on its back.

He has grown 'greater than Nature, wiser than God'. And he has the insolence to say:

What God imperfect left, I will complete,
Out of a tangled mind and half-made soul
His sin and error I will eliminate;
What he invented not, I shall invent:
He was the first creator, I am the last.

Man looks forward to seizing occult powers and all the secrets of the Mind:

I shall slay my enemies with a look or thought,
I shall sense the unspoken feelings of all hearts
And see and hear the hidden thoughts of men.
When earth is mastered, I shall conquer heaven;
The gods shall be my aids or menial folk,

No wish I harbour unfulfilled shall die;
Omnipotence and omniscience shall be mine.

But Savitri knows that man's voice is only a distortion. The power of the Mother of Might is corrupted out of all recognition when it is mixed with man's egoism. Savitri tells the goddess that even uncorrupted power, without wisdom, is no better than a wind. It can breathe upon the heights and kiss the sky. But it cannot build 'the extreme eternal' things. Wisdom should be as vast as Power itself if we wish to see the Self and World as they are seen by God. The ego, whose lion roar claims the world as food, will be eliminated when Love, Wisdom, and Power work together.

A. K. MAJUMDAR

Sri Aurobindo's Interpretation of the Gita

TO EXPLAIN Aurobindo's approach to and interpretation of the *Gita*, to bring out the differences between him and other commentators, and to fit in Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* with the main pattern of his philosophy is a forbidding task. It is not possible to do full justice to the subject in this paper. What is attempted here is a summary of its main aspects as discussed by Shri Aurobindo in his *Essays on the Gita*.

Before the main subject is discussed, it is necessary to say a few words about the position of the *Gita* as a religious-philosophical text. Hindus believe that the *Gita* is the record of the dialogue that took place between Krishna and Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. All the manuscripts of the *Mahabharata* discovered so far have been placed at about 8th century A.D. However, we learn from the *Kuvalayamala*, completed by Uddyotanasuri in A.D. 779, that people in those days used to recite the *Gita*. But more important than the antiquity of the *Gita* is the problem of its influence on Hindu religious thought. More reliable evidence is available on this point. The earliest available commentary on the *Gita* is by Sankaracharya who was probably born in A.D. 788 and died in 820. Sankara in his introduction to the *Gita* states that he was induced to write his commentary because the existing ones were full of errors. Sankara's criticism is at least partially sustained by the *Yoga-Vasistha-Ramayana* written within a century of Sankara's birth, which contains a bowdlerized version of the *Gita*.

Apparently, by Sankara's time, the text of the *Gita* needed

revision, and Sankara fixed the number of the verses at 700 which was accepted by all. Some years ago, the Kashmir recension of the *Gita* was discovered which contains about 45 extra verses. But all the Acharyas who followed Sankara, including those who opposed him, have commented on the text approved by Sankara. Sometimes, one verse is added at the beginning of Chapter 13, and Aurobindo has accepted this verse.¹

The methodology of writing a commentary demands that each verse should be explained separately, if indeed any explanation is needed. All the commentators from Sankara's time have followed this method, including Lokamanya Tilak, whose commentary on the *Gita* is one of the most important written in the modern age. Here Aurobindo differs from others; he has written *Essays on the Gita*, which work is divided into two parts and contains forty-eight essays. However, in the second part, the last five chapters of the *Gita* have been treated in as many chapters, while the last essay, called the 'Message of the *Gita*', gives a summary of the text. In their totality the essays bring out the central theme of the *Gita*, but each essay is complete in itself.

This method is not without its advantages and disadvantages. One cannot obtain the meaning of each verse of the *Gita* from the essays, but as an introduction to the study of the *Gita*, there can hardly be a better method. Moreover, Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* is not only for beginners; even those who have read the text thoroughly will find his observations revealing in a flash, some meaning of the text which no other commentator has noticed or said. For example, Aurobindo's statement that the most vital part of the *Gita* is not its philosophical system, but that its suggestive ideas are not only 'eternally valuable and valid' but are 'enduring truths of spiritual experience, verifiable facts of our highest psychological possibilities'.²

This indeed is the main difference between the approach of Sri Aurobindo and the former Acharyas. But in order to

¹ Shri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (New York, 1950), p. 26. It is remarkable that though Sankara says that the *Gita* has 700 verses, his version actually has 699 verses and only the addition of this verse makes the total 700.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

understand the standpoint of the Acharyas, it is necessary to take into account that the *Gita*, since Sankara wrote his commentary, has been accepted as one of the three principal sources of the Vedanta doctrine, the other two being the ten or eleven principal *Upanishads*, and the *Brahma-sutra*. Sankara accepted as *mahavakya* or fundamental principle the Upanishadic statements, namely, *tat-tvam-asi* (that thou art) and *aham Brahm-asmī* (I am Brahman) and his commentaries were written with a view to prove that all these texts yield this meaning, or at least that they are capable of bearing this interpretation, though even he is not very sure of his position in his commentary on the *Gita*, which is probably his most mature work. However, the Acharyas who came after Sankara took up his challenge, and interpreted the *Gita* in a manner which favoured their schools of philosophy, and as a result, the *Gita* has always been studied as a work of systematic philosophy. Even Tilak interpreted it to prove the superiority of *Karmayoga* as he understood it, and wrote an introduction which incidentally is probably the best introduction to traditional Indian philosophy. But Aurobindo differs from all of them when he says:

The *Gita* starts from this Vedantic synthesis and upon the basis of its essential ideas builds another harmony of the three great means and powers, Love, Knowledge and Works, through which the soul of man can directly approach and cast himself into the Eternal.³

He then declares:

We of the coming day stand at the head of a new age of development which must lead to such a new and larger synthesis. We are not called upon to be orthodox Vedantins... or to entrench ourselves within the four corners of the teaching of the *Gita*. That would be to limit ourselves and to attempt to create our spiritual life out of the being, knowledge and nature of others, of the men of the past, instead of building it out of our own being and potentialities. We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future.⁴

³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Hence, he says that our study of the *Gita* must not be scholastic or academic, but we should seek 'for help and light in the *Gita* and our aim must be to distinguish its essential and living message, that in it on which humanity has to seize for its perfection and its highest spiritual welfare'.⁵

This practical approach is different from the traditional view, but Aurobindo does not accept the assumption of modern critics that the *Gita* is a later composition inserted into the *Mahabharata* to invest it with the epic's authority. On the other hand he emphasises that the battle of Kurukshetra and its effect on Arjuna have to be understood in order to realise the central drift of the idea of the *Gita*. Indeed he says that three things in the *Gita* are spiritually significant; 'they are the divine personality of the Teacher, his characteristic relations with his disciple and the occasion of his teaching'.⁶ 'The teacher,' Aurobindo says, 'is god himself descended into humanity.'⁷

Aurobindo believes in Avatarhood, that is, incarnation of God as mortal, and in support of his view he quotes the *Gita* (IV. 7-8) which includes the famous utterance of Krishna: 'For whensoever there is the fading of the Dharma and the uprising of unrighteousness, then I loose myself forth into birth. For the deliverance of the good, for the destruction of the evil-doers, for the enthroning of the Right I am born from age to age.'⁸ But Aurobindo points out, 'the upholding of Dharma in the world is not the only object of the descent of Avatar, as it is not an all-sufficient object in itself,' and adds, that 'there are two aspects of the divine birth; one is a descent, the birth of God in humanity, the Godhead manifesting itself in the human form and nature, the eternal Avatar; the other is an ascent, the birth of man into the Godhead, man rising into the divine nature and consciousness'.

Here Aurobindo relies on the *Gita* (IV. 10) where Krishna says: 'Delivered from liking and fear and wrath, full of me,

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

taking refuge in me, many purified by austerity of knowledge have arrived at my nature of being', and he explains *madbhavam* of this verse, as 'the divine nature of Purushottama'.⁹ Aurobindo's view seems to be supported by the last verse of Chapter XI, in which Krishna declares: 'Whoever works for me alone, makes me his only goal and is devoted to me, free from attachment, and without hatred toward any creature—that man O Pandava, shall enter into me.' Here it may be noted that even Sankara has said that this verse represents the central idea of the *Gita*. Hence, it can be said that the final destiny of man is to enter into Godhead or as Aurobindo says:

If there were not this rising of man into the Godhead to be helped by the descent of God into humanity, Avatarhood for the sake of the Dharma would be an otiose phenomenon, since mere Right, mere justice or standards of virtue can always be upheld by the divine omnipotence through its ordinary means, by great men or great movements, by the life and work of sages and kings and religious teachers, without any actual incarnation. The Avatar comes as the manifestation of the divine nature in the human nature... in order that the human nature may by moulding its principle, thought, feeling, action... transfigure itself into the divine... the *Gita* contains as its kernel this second and real object of the Avatarhood.¹⁰

Aurobindo, however, does not minimise the aspect of re-establishment of *dharma* by the *Avatar*, but for him *dharma* has a very wide connotation and embraces 'the relations of man with other beings, with Nature, with God, considered from the point of view of'¹¹ an active divine principle. Fundamentally *dharma* is eternal and unchanging but in its formal manifestation it is continually changing and evolving because man does not already live in it by struggle towards perfection in knowledge and practice, overcoming *adharma*, which strives to overcome *dharma*. This struggle has been typified in the Vedas as between the

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

Divine and Titanic powers, in Zoroastrianism by Ahuramazda and Ahriman, and in Christianity and Islam as the contest between God and his angels and Satan or Iblis.

'It is these things,' says Aurobindo, 'that condition and determine the work of the Avatar.'¹² Hence, in Buddhism, the aspirant takes refuge in *dharma*, *sangha* and the Buddha, and in Christianity there is the law of Christian living, the Church and the Christ. Similarly in Vaishnavism we have the *bhāgavat*, *bhakta* and *bhagavān*, the *bhāgavat* being the law of the Vaishnava dispensation of adoration and love, the *bhakta* representing the fellowship of those in whom the law is manifest, while *bhagavān* is the divine Lover and Beloved in whose being and nature the divine law of love is founded and fulfils itself. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa also used to emphasise their triune aspect by saying that '*bhāgavat*, *bhakta* and *bhagavān* are three in one and one in three', but Aurobindo develops the significance of this cryptic sentence, and states that 'these three are always the necessary elements of the work of the Avatar'.¹³

On the basis of this principle, the *Gita* may be said to have three elements, Krishna the *Avatar*, Arjuna the *bhakta*, and the text itself, the *bhāgavat*. The importance of Krishna in the *Gita* is of course too obvious and the only question to be determined is whether he is an *Avatar* or not. As we have seen, Aurobindo accepts him as an *Avatar* and here he may be said to have been following the traditional view, but for his re-interpretation of the purpose of Avatarhood, Aurobindo has also brought out the significance of Arjuna in the *Gita*.

The *Gita*, Aurobindo says, 'can only be understood... as a developing argument'.¹⁴ This argument takes place between an *Avatar* and a typical Aryan prince who has been trained in warfare from early boyhood. For the moment he is assailed by doubts, which indeed have overcome him, hence he has turned to his friend for advice and guidance as to the proper conduct of a *kshatriya* prince under such circumstances. He does not ask for the secret of life or of

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

the world, or their meaning and purpose, but for a clear rule of action. But the divine Teacher, as Aurobindo calls Krishna, wants to impart precisely these teachings to his favourite disciple. In the process Arjuna is flustered. Hence after Krishna has explained *Yoga* and *samadhi* as fixed anchoring of the intelligence in a state of desireless equity, Arjuna asks impatiently: 'O Janardana, if thou holdest the intelligence to be greater than action, why then dost thou appoint me to an action terrible in nature? Thou bewilderest my understanding with mingled word: speak one thing decisively by which I can attain to what is the best.' Krishna tries to remove these doubts, and in due course tells him at the beginning of Chapter IV that it was he (Krishna) who in ancient times revealed this *Yoga* to Vivasvat. Since Vivasvat was a very ancient sage, Arjuna frankly expresses his doubt about the veracity of this statement by pointing out that Krishna was born long after Vivasvat, and it is then that Krishna declares that he is an *Avatar* in the most well-known verse of the *Gita*.

However, Arjuna still is not reconciled to the teaching and at the beginning of Chapter V says quite bluntly, 'You speak so highly of the renunciation of action; yet you ask me to follow the *Yoga* of action. Now tell me definitely which of these is better.' Gradually Arjuna's doubts are removed and perplexities resolved and he admits the divinity of Krishna, but still he is not satisfied and requests Krishna to tell him what are the great manifestations of the Divine self-energy in the world so that Arjuna can recognise and realise it by meditation. When Krishna imparts this knowledge to him, Arjuna respectfully asks if the Lord is capable of revealing to him the divine cosmic Form of that which is actually speaking to him through the veil of the human mind and body.

Thus the great dialogue goes on till at the end of Chapter XVIII when Krishna asks Arjuna: 'Have you listened carefully, Arjuna, to everything I have told you? Have I dispelled the delusions of your ignorance?' And Arjuna replies: 'O Achyuta, my delusions have been dispelled. My mind stands firm. Its doubts are ended. I will do thy bidding.' Thus the *bhakta* accepts the *bhāgavat* or the teachings of

the *Gita*; and one may now proceed to discuss the central idea of the *Gita*. According to Aurobindo:

The *Gita* is not a book of practical ethics, but of the spiritual life. The modern mind is just now the European mind, such as it has become after having abandoned not only the philosophic idealism of the highest Graeco-Roman culture from which it started, but the Christian devotionism of the Middle Ages... the modern mind has exiled from its practical motive-power the two essential things, God or the Eternal and spirituality or the God-state, which are the master conceptions of the *Gita*. . . . Therefore, it is a mistake to interpret the *Gita* from the standpoint of the mentality of today, and force it to teach us the disinterested performance of duty as the highest and all-sufficient law.¹⁵

Aurobindo criticises Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the great Bengali novelist, for having presented the teachings of the *Gita* as a Gospel of Duty, relying on its earlier part, particularly on the famous passage which says: 'Thou hast a right to action, but none to the fruits of the action.' Aurobindo points out that the core of the teaching lies in almost the last verses where Krishna declares:

With the Lord in thy heart take refuge with all thy being; by His grace thou shalt attain to the supreme peace and the eternal status. So have I expounded to thee a knowledge more secret than that which is hidden. Further hear the most secret, the supreme word that I shall speak to thee. Become my minded, devoted to me, to Me do sacrifice and adoration; infallibly thou shalt come to me, for dear to Me art thou. Abandoning all laws of conduct seek refuge in Me alone. I will release thee from all sin; do not grieve.

Aurobindo says that this is the *mahavakya* of the *Gita*,¹⁶ which means that not only is this its fundamental doctrine, but that all other statements of the *Gita* have to be reconciled

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 32 and 34.

with this and all apparently contrary views have to be reoriented to fit in with this view. Here Aurobindo is only logical, because it comes at the end of the dialogue and is expressly stated to be 'most-secret'. The Acharyas also have taken it to express the culmination of the *Gita's* teachings, and Sankara has declared it to be the 'quintessence of Vedanta'. Other commentators are practically of the same opinion, though they differ on the interpretation of *dharma* in the last verse, which Aurobindo has translated as 'laws of conduct'.

The verses which Aurobindo considers as *mahavakya* call for intense devotion or *bhakti*, and he says that the last step in spiritual progress is *Bhaktiyoga*. According to him:

The first step is Karmayoga, the selfless sacrifice of works, and here the *Gita's* insistence is on action. The second is Jnanayoga, the self-realisation and knowledge of the true nature of self and the world, and here the insistence is on knowledge; but the sacrifice of works continues and the path of Works becomes one with but does not disappear into the path of Knowledge. The last step is Bhaktiyoga, adoration and seeking of the supreme Self as the Divine Being, and here the insistence is on devotion; but the knowledge is not subordinated, only raised, vitalised and fulfilled, and still the sacrifice of works continues; the double path becomes the triune way of knowledge, works and devotion.¹⁷

The superiority of *bhakti* over *karma* and *jnana* is declared in several other passages of the *Gita*. For example at the end of Chapter VI, after having explained *Karmayoga* and *Jnanayoga*, Krishna says: 'O Arjuna, become a *yogin*; [for] a *yogin* is greater than a *tapasvin*, greater than a *jnanin*, and even greater than a *karmin*. [But] among all the *yogins* he who gives me all his heart, he who worships me in faith and love [*bhajate*], I call my very own.' Hence, as Aurobindo says, 'The first six chapters only carry the synthesis so far as it can be carried without the clear expression and decisive entrance of these all important truths which, when they come

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

in, must necessarily enlarge and modify, though without abolishing, these first reconciliations.¹⁸

But Aurobindo has also insisted on the supreme importance of the *Karmayoga*, and devotes a chapter to it. Again in the *Synthesis of Yoga*, he writes:

The greatest gospel of spiritual works ever yet given to the race, the most perfect system of Karmayoga known to man in the past, is to be found in the Bhagavad Gita. In that famous episode of the Mahabharata the great basic lines of Karmayoga are laid down for all time with an incomparable mastery and the infallible eye of an assured experience. It is true that the path alone, as the ancients saw it, is worked out fully; the perfect fulfilment, the highest secret is hinted rather than developed; it is kept back as an unexpressed part of a supreme mystery. There are obvious reasons for this reticence; for the fulfilment is in any case a matter of experience and no teaching can express it.... What then are the lines of Karmayoga laid down by the Gita? Its key principle, its spiritual method, can be summed up as the union of two largest and highest states of powers of consciousness, equality and oneness. The kernel of its method is an unreserved acceptance of the Divine in our life as in our inner self and spirit. An inner renunciation of personal desire leads to equality, accomplishes our total surrender to the Divine, supports a delivery from dividing ego which brings us oneness. But this must be a oneness in dynamic force and not only in static peace or inactive beatitude. The Gita promises us freedom for the spirit even in the midst of works and the full energies of Nature, if we accept subjection of our whole being to that which is higher than the separating and limiting ego. It proposes an integral dynamic activity founded on a still passivity: a largest possible action irrevocably based on an immobile calm is its secret, free expression out of a supreme inward silence.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (New York, 1950), pp. 51-2.

Sri Aurobindo further says:

To act in God and not in the ego. And here, first, not to choose action by reference to personal needs and standards, but in obedience to the dictates of the living highest Truth above us. Next as soon as we are sufficiently founded in the spiritual consciousness, not to act any longer by our separate will or movement, but more and more to allow action to happen and develop under the impulsion and guidance of a divine will that surpasses us. And last, the supreme result, to be exalted into an identity in knowledge, force, consciousness, act, joy of existence with the Divine Shakti; to feel a dynamic movement not dominated by mortal desire and vital instinct and impulse and illusive mental free will, but luminously conceived and evolved in an immortal self-delight and an infinite self-knowledge. For this is the action that comes by a conscious subjection and merging of the natural into the divine self and eternal spirit; it is the spirit that for ever transcends and guides this world-Nature.²⁰

Here Aurobindo has brought out the true significance of the *Gita* (IV. 18) where Krishna declares: 'He who sees the inaction that is in action, and the action that is in inaction is indeed wise. He is united (with the spirit) and has completed all work.' That is, even when such a man is engaged in action he still remains poised in the tranquillity of the *atman*.

Commenting on this verse, Sankara meets the objection of his opponent, that every act performed is *karma*, by a very homely example. 'To a man travelling on a boat,' says Sankara, 'it is the nearby fixed objects like trees which seem to be moving in the opposite direction, but he fails to notice the movement of a distant object (like a star).' Here the apparent movement of the tree is *akarma* which appears as *karma*, while the apparent fixity of stars are *karma* which appears as *akarma*. Hence Aurobindo says:

Be free from obscuration and bewilderment by the three *gunas* and action can continue, as it must continue, and

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

even the largest, richest or most enormous and violent action; it does not matter, for nothing then touches the *Purusha*, the soul has *naiskarmya*.²¹

He adds:

Devotion is all important, but works with devotion are also important; by the union of knowledge, devotion and works the soul is taken up into the highest status of the Ishwara to dwell there in the Purushottama who is master at once of the eternal spiritual calm and the eternal cosmic activity. This is the synthesis of the Gita.²²

It has been stated that in a state of perfection or liberation, action appears to be inaction, and inaction appears as action. Who then performs the acts? The *Gita* says that it is the three *gunas* who are the *karta* or the performer of action; these *gunas* are located in the *Prakriti* or Nature and being her modes and qualitative in essence are called *gunas* or qualities, and the *Gita* describes their psychological action in man. The three *gunas* are: *sattva*, the mode of poise, knowledge, and satisfaction; *rajas*, the mode of passion, action and struggling emotion, and *tamas*, the mode of ignorance and inertia. *Sattva* is the principle of understanding, knowledge, and of according assimilation, measure and equilibrium, which by itself would lead only to some lasting concord of fixed and luminous harmonies. *Rajas* is kinetic power, the principle of creative endeavour and motion, and impulsion in *Prakriti*; it appears more evidently as a conscious or half-conscious passion of seeking and desire and action in the dominant character of life, for that passion is the nature of all vital existence. *Tamas* the principle of inertia, is a passive and inert nescience which suffers all shocks and contacts without any effort of mastering response and by itself would lead to a disintegration of the whole action of energy and a radical dispersion of substance, but it is driven by the kinetic power of *rajas*. Aurobindo says that material energy appears to be *tamasic* in its basic action, *jada*, nescient, mechanic and in movement disintegrated.

²¹ *Essays on the Gita*, p. 98.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

tive. But it is dominated by a huge force and impulsion of mute *rajasik* kinesis which drives it to build and create; and a *sattvik* ideative element imposes a harmony and preservative order on the *tamasik* tendencies of dispersion and disintegration.²³

The *Gita* says that the liberated man is free from the operation of the three *gunas* (II, 45: XIV, 19-20). But the *Gita* also says, and indeed it is the principle of *Karmayoga*, that a man should work after having obtained release from the thralldom of *Prakriti* and her *gunas*. But it has just been said that it is under the impulse of the three *gunas* that an act is performed. Is there then a contradiction in the *Gita*?

'No,' says Aurobindo. We lead ourselves to an impasse 'only when we knot ourselves up in the rigid logical oppositions of the analytic mind, not when we look freely and subtly at the nature of the spirit and at the spirit in Nature. What moves the world is not really the modes of *Prakriti*—these are only the lower aspect, the mechanism of our normal nature. The real motive power is a divine spiritual Will which uses at present these inferior conditions, but is itself not limited, not dominated, not mechanised, as is the human will, by the *gunas*.'²⁴ The liberated soul that lives in God acts by this spiritual will and not by the normal will of the unliberated mind. 'The calm of the liberated man is not an indolence, incapacity, insensibility, inertia; it is full of immortal power, capable of all action, attuned to deepest delight, open to profoundest love and compassion and to every manner of intensest Ananda.'²⁵

Sattva is the quality of goodness or purity regarded as the highest of the three *gunas*, and is said to be the dominant quality of gods and heavenly beings. The *Gita* does not say what lies beyond the *Sattvik* state; it does not unravel the great mystery. Here, from his own spiritual experience Aurobindo, says:

There is a luminous spiritual and in its native action a direct supramental force of knowledge, *jyotih*, not our

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 416.

modified and derivative mental light, *prakasa*. That is the light and bliss of widest self-existence, spontaneous self-knowledge.... That light is full of a luminous spiritual will and there is no gulf or disparateness between its knowledge and its action. That delight is not our paler mental happiness, *sukham*, but a profound concentrated intense self-existent bliss extended to all that our being does, envisages, creates, a fixed divine rapture, Ananda. The liberated soul participates more and more profoundly in this light and bliss and grows the more perfectly into it, the more integrally it unites itself with the Divine. And while among the *gunas* of the lower Nature there is a necessary disequilibrium, a shifting inconstancy of measures and a perpetual struggle for domination, the greater light and bliss, calm, will of kinesis of the Spirit do not exclude each other, are not at war, are not even merely in equilibrium, but each an aspect of the two others and in their fullness all are inseparable and one. Our mind when it approaches the Divine may seem to enter into one to the exclusion of another, may appear for instance to achieve calm to the exclusion of kinesis of action, but that is because we approach him first through the selecting spirit in the mind. Afterwards when we are able to rise above even the spiritual mind, we can see that each divine power contains all the rest and can get rid of this initial error.²⁶

In a footnote Aurobindo adds:

This is from the point of the view of our nature ascending upwards by self-conquest, effort and discipline. There must also intervene more and more a descent of the divine Light, Presence and Power into the being to transform it; otherwise the change at the point of culmination and beyond it cannot take place. That is why there comes in as the last movement the necessity of an absolute self-surrender.²⁷

Here Aurobindo has correlated the doctrines of *purushakara*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 416-17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 417 fn.

and *saranagati* which he calls 'self-conquest' and 'absolute self-surrender'; the *Gita* actually speaks of both. As Krishna says: 'The abstinent run away from what they desire; but this does not lead to the cessation of desires; only when a man has a vision of the Divinity, he is rid of his desire. The senses are so unruly that they can drag even a wise man away from the path.' (*Gita* 11, 59-60). Again Krishna says: 'Even a wise man acts according to the tendencies of his own nature; all living creatures follow their nature; what use is any external restraint?' (*Gita* III, 33).

Now if that is so, then, as Sankara says, the question arises that if all the creatures follow Nature (*Prakriti*) and all are under her control then *purushakara* or self-conquest becomes inadmissible leading to the denial of scriptural teachings. Hence in the next verse, Krishna says: 'The attraction and aversion which the senses feel for different objects are natural. But you must not give way to such feelings; they are obstacles.' Here Sankara says that when a person can control his desires and revulsions by generating opposite (*pratipaksha*) thoughts he can be said to be free from *Prakriti's* control. All the other commentators from Ramanuja to Baladeva Vidyabhusana are also agreed that a person should conquer Nature or *Prakriti* by his own endeavour.

But at the end Krishna speaks of surrender when he says:

The Lord (*Isvara*) lives in the heart of every creature. He turns them round and round upon the wheel of *Maya*. Take refuge utterly in him. By his grace you will find supreme peace, and the state which is beyond all change. Now I have taught you that wisdom (*jnana*) which is the secret of secrets. Ponder over it carefully (and act as you think best). (XVIII.61-3.)

Here, as the Acharyas have pointed out, it is only by total self-surrender to *Isvara* that one can cross the domain of *Maya*. Thus we see that Aurobindo's realisation that having completed the path of self-conquest one must totally surrender as the last movement, is borne out by the *Gita*.

Here it may be pointed out that Aurobindo has revealed some secrets of his spiritual realisation, and here he differs from the great Acharyas who have explained the *Gita* and other scriptures within the four corners of the text without in any way divulging their experience. Hence, they had to take recourse to formal logic to prove many of their points so that their writings appear somewhat polemical, though the Acharyas were embodiments of spiritual fervour. Long before them, however, the Vedic Rishis freely uttered their spiritual experiences which are preserved in the *Upanishads*. In Aurobindo we find a Vedic Rishi performing the duties of an Acharya (teacher), one who has recorded his spiritual experience and has also explained a text.

Aurobindo is known as *mahayogi*, yet he advocates ultimate self-surrender and dependence on Divine Grace, which are not contemplated in Yoga texts. The *Gita* (VI. 27-28), however, says that 'a *yogin* utterly quiet and free from all passions reaches Brahman (the true self), the highest bliss; and the sinless *yogin* having yoked himself (with the true self) attains the boundless bliss of contact with Brahman'. The method advocated by Patanjali is supposed to be different though he admits the existence of *Isvara*. However, the Paramāra Emperor Bhoja in his commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga-sūtra* (I. 24) categorically asserts that the release of *Purusha* from *Prakriti* is not possible without Divine intervention.

This dependence on Divine Grace and self-surrender has some affinity with the Vaishnava doctrines, but the two are not quite identical. The attitude of the Vaishnavas has been presented in modern times by Aurobindo's great contemporary, Rabindranath, who wrote:

āmār milan lāgi tumi āschha kabe theke

(Since when have you been coming to be united with me),
and

tāi tomār ānanda āmār par tumi tāi esechha nīche

āmāya naile tribhūvaneśvar tomar prem ye hato michhe
(Your bliss is in me, [and] You have come down, for without me O Lord of the universe your *prem* would have been wasted).

This extreme position is typical more of the Bauls of Bengal than the Vaishnavas, though Bengal Vaishnavism also emphasises the *lila* aspect of Godhead and can be supported by the *Brahma-sutra* (II. i. 33). However, this is not Aurobindo's attitude; the Vaishnavas concentrate only on devotion or *Bhaktiyoga*, but Aurobindo integrates *karma*, *jnana* and *bhakti*, which is supported by certain passages in the *Gita* (III. 4; XVIII 49-55). But since he speaks of the necessity of ultimate self-surrender, it appears that though the ultimate goal or *sādhya* is the same (*yoga* and *milan* have practically the same meaning), the means or *sadhana* is different. In *Savitri* (II.2), Aurobindo says:

This huge world unitelligibly turns
In the shadow of a mused Inconscience;
It hides a key to inner meanings missed,
It locks in our hearts a voice we cannot hear.

This minute elaborate orchestrated life
For ever plays its motiveless symphonies.
The mind learns and knows not, turning its back to truth;

Our will tunes not with the eternal Will
Our heart's sight is too blind and passionate
Impotent to share in Nature's mystic tact,
Inapt to feel the pulse and core of things.
Our reason cannot sound life's mighty sea
And only counts its waves and scans its foam;

Our acts emerge from a crypt our minds ignore.

Here Aurobindo is describing the state of the lower self or the *Gita's Kshara-purusha*, when the soul throws itself out into active Nature; the same soul gathered back into pure silent self and essential spirit is the *Gita's Akshara-purusha*. The fundamental problem of spiritual quest is first to establish a communion between the lower life and higher life which ushers in a complete inner quietism, which the *Gita* calls *naiskarmya*. Then the soul is ready to take off for its union with *Purushottama*. This is probably Aurobindo's most outstanding contribution to our understanding of the *Gita*. Here he has differed from all other

commentators; and it appears that Aurobindo's view is the most persuasive explanation.

Then begins the *Gita's* final message: 'When one has become the Brahman, when one neither grieves nor desires; when one is equal to all beings, then one gets the supreme love and devotion to Me' (XVIII. 54). Sri Aurobindo points out:

But in the narrow path of knowledge, bhakti, devotion to the personal Godhead, can be only an inferior and preliminary movement; the end, the climax is the disappearance of personality in a featureless oneness with the impersonal Brahman in which there can be no place for bhakti: for there is none to be adored and none to adore: all else is lost in the silent immobile identity of the Jiva with the Atman. Here there is given to us something yet higher than the Impersonal—here there is the supreme Self who is the supreme Ishwara, here there is the supreme Soul and its supreme nature, here there is the Purushottama who is beyond the personal and impersonal and reconciles them on his eternal heights. The ego personality still disappears in the silence of the Impersonal, but at the same time there remains even with this silence at the back the action of a supreme Self, one greater than the Impersonal. There is no longer the lower blind and limping action of the ego and the three gunas, but instead the vast self-determining movements of an infinite spiritual Force, a free immeasurable Shakti. All Nature becomes the power of the one Divine and all action his action through the individual as channel and instrument. In place of the ego there comes forward conscious and manifest the true spiritual individual in the freedom of his real nature ... an imperishable portion of the supreme Godhead, an indestructible power of the supreme Prakriti.... The Soul of man then feels itself to be one in a supreme spiritual impersonality with the Purushottama and in its universalised personality a manifest power of the Godhead. Its knowledge is a light of his knowledge; its will is a force of his will; its unity with all in the universe is a play of his eternal oneness. It is in this double

realisation, it is in this union of two sides of an ineffable Truth of existence by either and both of which man can approach and enter into his own infinite being, that the liberated man has to live and act and feel and determine or rather have determined for him by a greatest power of his supreme self his relations with all and the inner and outer workings of his spirit. And in that unifying realisation, adoration, love and devotion are not only still possible, but are a large, an inevitable and a crowning portion of the highest experience.²⁸

Sri Aurobindo drew upon his spiritual experience to explain and reconcile the final message of the *Gita*, which from ancient days have raised the controversy whether Godhead is attainable or indeed approachable through knowledge, devotion, or action. However, Aurobindo here has spoken of 'double realisation' and the 'union of two sides of an ineffable Truth' after having spoken of 'knowledge and force of will'. Hence it appears that by 'double realisation' Aurobindo implies the 'realisation of both Siva and Sakti',: who are the 'two sides of an ineffable truth', for Sakti cannot exist or indeed cannot be conceived without 'Saktimat' who is Siva. This union of Siva and Sakti is the supreme reality, but Aurobindo says that 'a man can approach through either or both'.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 477-8.

SANAT KUMAR BANERJI

Sri Aurobindo's Political Thought

SRI AUROBINDO's political thought is but one aspect of his vision of Reality and his view of the meaning and destiny of man's life on earth. He wrote:

This erring race of human beings dreams always of perfecting their environment by the machinery of government and society; but it is only by the perfection of the soul within that the outer environment can be perfected.¹

This is the keynote of his thought. It takes within its scope man's entire past and his present endeavour to better his inner and outer life, and looks far into the future to indicate the goal to which he is being led in a momentous voyage of discovery. The concepts of freedom, equality, and harmony so significant in Sri Aurobindo's thought emanate from the human soul. They need to be founded first and foremost in the hearts and minds of men and from there these would be progressively manifested in the political institutions. The institutions are moulded according to the levels of consciousness through which the soul passes. The individual, therefore, is significant in the process of change. No machinery can perfect man unless he himself undergoes a complete transformation.

There is little of any significance in the whole history of political thought that has not received an illumining touch

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Aphorisms* (Pondicherry, 1959), p. 55.

at the hands of Sri Aurobindo. He takes his stand on the past and the present, and casting his vision far into the future offers a solution to the problem of politics which man can neglect only at his peril. To give an adequate account of his political thought and study it in any depth would need more than one treatise. Attention has been paid here to three major aspects of his thought, namely, the philosophy of history, the view of the state, and the future of international relations.

For source material we have to rely mainly on the three series of essays published in his monthly review, the *Arya*, between 1915 and 1920, which were later issued under the titles, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, and *War and Self-Determination*.

I

Meaning and Process in History

By concentrating on external data, economic factors, changing institutions, events and personalities, history seems to miss the sense of the aim towards which humanity is moving and the power that moves it. Sri Aurobindo says:

Nothing is more obscure to humanity or less seized by its understanding, whether in the power that moves it or the sense of the aim towards which it moves than its own communal and collective life History teaches us nothing; it is a confused torrent of events and personalities or a kaleidoscope of changing institutions. We do not seize the real sense of all this change.²

The Power that moves it is the Supreme Divinity within and above the vague entity we describe as Nature. This Divinity is supremely conscious of its aim, which in humanity is to progressively manifest in and through the individual and the collectivity, its Power and Unity, Freedom, Beauty, Good and Delight, its Harmony and Truth and all the myriad riches of which it is the Absolute.

² Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination* (Pondicherry, 1962), p. 247.

This manifestation is a slow and logical process which takes full account of the complexity of man's nature and the forces that oppose his upward endeavour. Rooted deeply in his vegetable and animal past, man, a developing soul incarnated for this progressive manifestation in a mind, life and body, has had to struggle towards an illumination and harmonisation of the demands of the body, the instincts and impulses of his life, the ideas and ideals of his mind into an ordered whole. Starting with no sure basis of knowledge—for the truth-conscious soul within him remains hidden for the most part allowing the outer instruments with the ego as their nodus to develop on their own lines—he has had to proceed by a constant swing backwards and forwards between their various possibilities of self-effectuation.³

In this uneven march, Sri Aurobindo has identified culture patterns of different sorts which have developed in the course of history. In his opinion, each well-defined culture has grown along its own lines even when exerting a mutual influence on other cultures. Thus the ancient cultures of Asia and Europe regarded this life primarily as an occasion for the fulfilment of the rational, the ethical, the aesthetic, the spiritual being, relegating the economic *motif* to a second place. In this too there were variations. Ancient Athens laid most stress on beauty and reason, Sparta and Rome on will and character, Israel on the ethical preoccupation, ancient India on the spiritual. In medieval times, an ardent other-worldly religiosity took hold of the cultured mind of the race to the exclusion of much else. The modern age has seen the emphasis shifting to reason and science, to material and economic preoccupation, to a social and political readjustment through machinery rather than an inner change of the spirit.

All the great cultures, ancient and modern, seem to pass through a cycle of growth and decay of which the general lines are clearly marked. Our 'progression,' Sri Aurobindo said, 'has been cyclic or spiral rather than in a straight line, or has at least journeyed in a very zigzag swinging curve of advance.'⁴ The human evolution and its growth would

³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (New York, 1949), pp. 253-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 927.

have been rapid and 'soul-flowering' if only the soul, the hidden psychic entity, had been in close partnership with the human body, life and mind.⁵ In the cycle of change, there is first a seed-time when the main ideals and aspirations find their clear formulation in the minds and actions of a few exceptional individuals, like the Rishis of ancient India, the sages of ancient China and Greece. This is followed by a long period of crystallisation, when the ideals and aspirations are sought to be enshrined in forms of thought and life; this we see in the classical ages of all the great cultures. This maturity is followed inevitably by decay and death, for forms cannot endure unless they acquire the capacity to recreate themselves at every moment anew; this can be done only when man or nation learns to live consciously in the soul, and few have done that. 'The secret light within us' has not always been able to illumine human civilisation.⁶

The Steps of Inner Change

Taking an overall view, the evolution of society seems to start everywhere with an infra-rational state, in which men in the mass act principally from their customary responses to desire, need, and circumstance; it is these that are canalised or crystallised in their social institutions. Society proceeds from these beginnings towards a rational state, through three broad phases, which need not coexist at the same time all over the world; some societies advance faster while others lag behind. Besides, each of these phases contains, within the same society, elements of the other phases, though not in a dominant form. In the ultimate analysis, however, human evolution must 'move through a subjective towards a supra-rational or spiritual age, in which he (man) will develop progressively a greater spiritual, supra-intellectual and intuitive, perhaps in the end a more than intuitive, a gnostic consciousness'.⁷

The first phase of the infra-rational order may be called the symbolic, because society derives its guiding principle, its

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 927-8.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*, p. 247.

basis of order, primarily from the symbols or forms of an occult Reality which it instinctively feels as governing and determining its every movement. The gods are felt to be near and embodiments of this Reality; their will however ascertained passes for law.⁸

The symbolic passes into the typical phase when in course of time with the greater predominance of the intellect, the spiritual and religious *motif* is subordinated to the psychological idea and to the ethical idea which expresses it.⁹ The social order comes to be determined primarily by temperament and psychic type with a corresponding ethical discipline, so well illustrated in the ancient Indian system of the four *Varnas*. *Dharma*, that is, the inherent law proper to each being and thing, becomes now the watchword.

The ruling idea of the typical stage is *Dharma*. The *Dharma* codified into *Shashtra*, inherent law fossilising into code and convention for the safe guidance of thought and life, paves the way to the next phase of the infra-rational order of society, the conventional. The tendency of the conventional phase is to fix, to arrange firmly, to formalise, to erect a system of rigid grades and hierarchies, to stereotype religion, to subject thought to infallible authorities, to cast a stamp of finality on what seems to it the finished life of man.¹⁰

This brings in its train an inevitable revolt of the spirit in man, when he finds that the social order is based on sanctified tyrannies for which there is no rational justification. It is the individual who asserts the right to freely use his own reason and pass everything through the crucible of his personal judgment. Religion, thought, society, politics are all subjected to close scrutiny; anything that does not seem to be rational is discarded. Reason proceeds to reconstruct everything anew.

This rational age of human development, which began in the West with the Renaissance, is now influencing the mind of the East in increasing measure. Its record of achievement has been as impressive as the record of its failures. Its method has been to erect a system, work it out with enthusiasm,

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

discard it on account of the defects it has shown, and then to proceed to another scheme hoping that it might prove to be enduring. The hope is always belied by experience, and this is bound to be so because reason can never take the whole of life in its grasp. It has to proceed by partial constructions which do not square with all the facts. In its progression it has followed a typical pattern, 'first a luminous seed-time and a period of enthusiastic effort and battle, next a partial victory and achievement and a brief era of possession; then disillusionment and the birth of a new idea and endeavour.' The goal recedes always, Sri Aurobindo asserted.¹¹

This has already led some advanced minds to question the ultimate validity of reason. This cycle of 'progress' from failure to failure may now perhaps give way to a more intuitive approach to the problem of life. A more subjective approach to literature and art and religion, the intuitivist trends in philosophy, a growing interest in psychical phenomena, a certain incertitude in the findings of physical science, a more mystical view of the state with its vague concepts of the nation-soul and its 'divine' mission—these are pointers to the coming of a new and subjective age. If the search goes deeper and does not miss its true aim, this may well be the harbinger of the reign of the Spirit, the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth of which the old religions dreamed.

'Subjectivism', in Sri Aurobindo's view, 'is a road of return to the lost knowledge. First deepening man's inner experience, restoring perhaps on an unprecedented scale insight and self-knowledge to the race, it must end by revolutionising his social and collective self-expression'.¹² The modern mind, still obsessed by the mechanistic view of the universe and the domination of physical science, attaches little importance to these psychological factors. Many modern historians and some political thinkers have concluded that objective necessities are by law of Nature the only really determining forces, all else is the incidental result of these forces. But this is a superficial view.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Sri Aurobindo writes: 'For behind all the external circumstances and necessities of which we are more easily aware in Nature, there is always an internal necessity in the being, a will and a design in Nature itself which precedes the outward signals of its development and in spite of all obstacles and failures must in the long end inevitably get itself realised.'¹³ This is the will of the Oversoul or Super-nature—Sri Aurobindo gives it the name of Divine Supermind—that secretly guides the destinies of the race. 'It is subconscious or even inconscient if you like (for so it appears to our superficial cognition), but it is still a blind will, a mute idea which contains beforehand the forms it is going to create, is aware of a necessity other than the environmental.'¹⁴ As we deepen our self-knowledge and advance towards the spiritual consummation, this becomes a self-evident truth.

II

Evolution of Forms of Group-life

Simultaneously with this inner adventure of the spirit in man, there has been, according to Sri Aurobindo, a slow evolution of the outer forms of socio-political life in response to an inner need. The family and the clan, the earliest forms of group life of which we have record, needed to organise themselves in a city-state or tribal kingdom for the purposes of defence and internal progress. These in their turn had to be replaced later by the regional kingdom or the much bigger empire, if they were not to be baulked of their primary aims through constant warfare and internal discord. The bigger units assured peaceful progress, but by crushing out all local feeling and centralising the best energies in the metropolitan centre—this applies with particular force to the big empires—themselves fell an easy prey to more vigorous barbarians when the centre itself had exhausted its vitality. This story has been repeated often enough and in Asia until quite recent times.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 745.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

In Europe, after the fall of the Roman empire, a new beginning was made with the debris of the empire to build up the nation-state on the basis of the regional units. The nation-state, which came into being after a protracted struggle between the forces of feudal anarchy and monarchical absolutism, succeeded finally in creating a lasting bond of unity where the empires both ancient and modern had failed. The nation is immortal because it is based on a real psychological unity and meets a genuine demand of the race. It now seems to have become the only viable form of the state, until a new unit, the world-state, replaces it. That possibility will be considered later.

Origin and Nature of the State

The state as an organised group owes its origin and persistence to the individual's need for survival, growth, efficiency, and self-assertion. The state was a necessity born of circumstance and environment; it was man's first defence against a hostile world of men and beasts and adverse nature, the sole condition under which the undeveloped individual could hope to progress. As a result the individual also had to submit to the powers of coercion of the organised group-life or the state.¹⁵ For it is only a social compulsion on the infra-rational man that he could be helped towards a better status. But as the group and the individual have both an innate tendency to assert their egoism against the other, there is a constant tendency towards a conflict between the state and the individual, a conflict that seems to be nature's method of arriving at an ultimate harmony between these two poles of our existence.

It makes little difference to the essential nature of the conflict whether it is an absolute monarch claiming to be the state, or a democratic majority in parliament or a dictator ruling through a partisan force. In asserting its right to govern, the state is merely obeying its *dharma*. But this *dharma* is falsified when the state claims to be greater than the individuals constituting it.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

There is never a guarantee that the ruling men who call themselves the state represent the best minds of the nation. What they do usually represent is the average pettiness, selfishness, self-deception that is all around, together with a great deal of mental incompetence and moral conventionality, timidity and pretence. It is in no way the largest good of all that is thus secured, but a great deal of organised blundering and evil with a certain amount of good which makes for real progress, because Nature always makes the best use of her instruments.

The individual has usually something at least like a soul. The state has none, according to Sri Aurobindo. It is no Divinity, but simply a collective egoism, political, military, economic, armed with enormous power which it normally uses with little regard to internal scruples or external checks. In ancient times, at least in some countries, the state had certain ideals. And in modern times, it has been feeling the necessity of justifying itself by organising the general economic and animal well-being of the community and in generally trying to intellectualise and moralise itself. But it has yet to earn the right to the individual's worship.

The state is not an organism, it is a machinery and it works like a machine, without tact, taste, delicacy or intuition. It tries to manufacture, but what humanity is here to do is to grow and create. The state tends always to uniformity, because uniformity is easy to it; but uniformity is death, not life. It is the energy of the individual which is the really effective agent of collective progress. The claim of the state to the sole right of directing the nation's energies is an unnatural violence to the spirit in man and to the truth of life.

Nevertheless, the state has a certain utility so long as it keeps within its true function. What that function is or should be will be considered later, after the stages of its evolution are examined.

Evolution of the State

In its first forms, the State almost everywhere coincided with the clan or tribal system, perhaps migratory in the early stages but later settling down within fixed geographical limits,

very often with the village community as the basic unit.¹⁶ As a variant there arose the city-state or regional states which helped to cut across the clan or tribal groupings in some of the more advanced areas of the world. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Thus Greece, Italy, Gaul, Egypt, China, Medo-Persia, India, Arabia, Israel, all began with a loose cultural and geographical aggregation which made them separate and distinct culture-units before they could become nation-units. Within that loose unity... the tribe, clan or city or regional states formed in the vague mass so many points of distinct, vigorous and compact unity. ...¹⁷

The people did matter in the scheme of things but they were often instruments of the ruler's will at this stage of development. Aurobindo further says:

The meeting of the people, *visah*, assembling for communal deliberation, for sacrifice and worship or as the host for war, remained for a long time the power-sign of the mass body and the agent of the active common life with the king as the head and representative, but long depending even after his position became hereditary on the assent of the people for his formal election or confirmation.¹⁸

The King was hereditary or elective, and sometimes, as in the small city-states of Greece and Italy, he was replaced by an *Archon* or a titular head, for monarchy could not flourish where it lacked the advantage of distance from the mass. But in the main, 'the King, his council, military and civil, the priesthood and the assembly of freemen converting itself for the purposes of war into the host, were perhaps everywhere, but certainly in the Aryan races, the elements with which the self-conscious evolution of society began'.¹⁹

The history of the State, in its broad underlying principle,

¹⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (Pondicherry, 1968), p. 342.

¹⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*, p. 480.

¹⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, p. 342.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

is simply a record of this 'self-conscious' process, a process which was aided more and more by a centralised and centralising agency mainly in the form of monarchy.

The nature and functions of the State varied from time to time. Sri Aurobindo said:

In the old infrarational societies, at least in their inception, what governed was not the State, but the group-soul itself evolving its life organised into customary institutions and self-regulations to which all had to conform; for the rulers were only its executors and instruments.²⁰

What made the State a necessity was primarily the danger, almost constantly present, of disruption from within and attack from without. Of these, the second was the more important. Under the circumstances the social life itself was politicised.

Since the society is one competitive unit among many of its kind, and since its first relations with the others are always potentially hostile...a political character is necessarily added to the social life.²¹

War and the threat of war compel a concentration of energies; and this creates a tendency towards a strong political and military centralisation. Peoples and societies which have neglected this elementary law of history and have 'failed to evolve or to preserve this concentration of powers, have always tended to fare ill in the battle of life, even if they have not shared the fate long endured by Italy and Poland in Europe or by India in Asia'.²² Unity of control gradually leads to the growth of uniformity in all spheres of life, in administration, legislation, social and economic life and culture, and chief means of culture, education and language. In all, the central authority becomes more and more the determining and regulating power.²³

²⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*, p. 283.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

²² *Ibid.*, 586.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 591-9.

Monarchy

Sri Aurobindo explains the changes in the form of the state—from monarchy to socialism—which occurred in history. At first and for a long time, the determining power was the king. His power was not absolute, for it was hedged in by the other estates in the realm.

At first, this authority was the king, elective or hereditary, in his original character a war leader, and at home only the chief, the head of the elders or the strong men and the convener of the nation and the army, a nodus of its action but not the principal determinant: in war only was he entirely supreme....It was naturally easier for him to become thus supreme in foreign than in internal politics.²⁴

In internal politics, the king had to gradually get rid of his other rivals before he could be entirely supreme and call himself the State with any truth. For 'the king may get rid of the power of the priesthood, he may reduce his council to an instrument of his will or the nobility which they represent to a political and military support for his actions; but until he has got rid of the assembly or is no longer obliged to convoke it—like the French monarchy with its States-General summoned only once or twice in the course of centuries...he cannot be the chief, much less the sole legislative authority',²⁵ contended Sri Aurobindo.

The process by which the king attained to this position is well illustrated in the history of the modern European nations in their first formative stages. After a prolonged struggle between the forces of feudal anarchy and monarchical absolutism in which sometimes the one and sometimes the other seemed to gain the upper hand, the king finally emerged victorious.

The monarchical State in this evolution crushed or subordinated the religious liberties of men and made a subservient or conciliated ecclesiastical order the priest of its divine

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 595.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 606.

right....It destroyed the liberties of the aristocracy....After using the bourgeoisie against the nobles, it destroyed, where it could, its real and living civil liberties....As for the people, they had no liberties to be destroyed. Thus the monarchical State concentrated in its own activities the whole national life.²⁶

In thus engrossing the whole national life, the king was exceeding his function.

Legislation, social development, culture, religion, even the determination of the economic life of the people are outside his proper sphere they constitute the expression of the life, the thought, the soul of the society, which, if he is a strong personality in touch with the spirit of the age, he may help to influence but which he cannot determine.... Only the society itself can determine the development of its own dharma or can formulate its expression.²⁷

Hence, monarchy had to be replaced by the democratic form of the State. But this need not blind us to the salutary task it performed, in helping the social evolution. Monarchy was the

great instrument of the transition from the organic to the rational society.... This transitional instrument represented the first idea of the human reason and will, seizing on the group-life to fashion, mould and arrange it according to its own pleasure and power and intelligent choice, to govern nature in the human mass.... And since the mass is unenlightened and incapable of such an intelligent effort, who can do this for it, if not the capable individual?... That is the whole rationale of absolutism. Its idea is false or only a half-truth or temporary truth.... But the idea had to take its course and the will in the idea...had necessarily to attempt its own extreme.... It worked by an oppression on the life and soul of the community, a more or less complete inhibition of its freedom of thought, speech, association, individual and associated action, often attended

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 503.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 607.

by the most abominable methods of inquisition and interference and pressure on the most sacred relations and liberties of man.²⁸

Democracy and Liberty

Monarchy was replaced by democracy. Democracy is the first attempt of man, the collective being, to vindicate his liberty against this oppressive tyranny. In the ancient world it found its greatest opportunity in the small city-states of Greece and Rome.

Modern democracy, taking its cue from the ancient Greek idea, bases its claim on the liberty of the individual. Its main postulates are the right of each individual to govern his life according to the dictates of his own reason and will so far as that could be done without impinging on the same right in others, and that the reason of each and all seeking for a basis of agreement should be effectively organised only for the indispensable common ends of the society. The democratic idea implies the right of all individuals and not merely of some privileged ones to the full life and the full development of what they are individually capable.

The justice of the idea has a universal appeal. But there is here a gulf between idea and fact that renders the results almost negatory. For man in the mass is still only a half-rational being, declared Sri Aurobindo. He uses his reason mainly to justify his impulses, interests and prejudices under specious labels. He is more prone to enforce his opinions on others than to come to an agreement. And his right to live his own life is easily misused into an exaggerated claim for his ego. This has led to a free running of many in the same field glorified under the name of competitive individualism; it must mean a free chaos or collisions.²⁹

The result is that after a century and a half of hope and ardent effort, one finds in place of the rational order intended, a series of confusions and gross injustices. Democracy has evolved a political system where there is a perpetual strife of

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 610-12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 835-6.

parties, a constantly recurring tyranny of the majority claiming to speak for the whole,³⁰ a government effectively dominated by a single class, the bourgeoisie.³¹ The economic order it has supported rests on the exploitation of the mass of the proletariat by a handful of plutocrats.

Socialism

Dissatisfaction with these results of individualistic democracy has led to the opposite idea of state socialism. Socialism seeks to replace the competitive order of society by a co-operative order; it hopes to make the individual do what he has never yet done, live for the community more than for himself.³² The individual gives up his freedom of action and possession to the state, which in return doles out to him a regulated liberty, sufficient elbow-room so parcelled out that he shall not at all butt into the ribs of his neighbour. To equalise opportunity for all and to provide an equal share in the advantages of the aggregate life as the right of all, both to be secured through the agency of the state, this is the fundamental idea. Equality not liberty is the watchword of socialism.³³

Aurobindo argued that this idea, like the one that preceded it, is bound before long to come up against the logic of facts, as this equality can be secured under present conditions only by strict regulation which means an infringement on liberty. In the end, the discovery cannot fail to be made that an artificial and imposed equality has its irrationalities, and contradictions of the collective good. Most important of all, man needs freedom in order that he may grow.³⁴ Disallowed the full and free use of his mind and mental will, man the mental being will be like the insect, a stationary species. This is the central defect of a socialistic state, and the socialistic ideal is bound to be condemned before long with the growth of a new and greater ideal.

The innermost difficulty would not disappear even if the socialistic state became really democratic, the expression of

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 836-7.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 842.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 843-7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 282-4.

the free, reasoned will of the majority in agreement. Collectivism pretends to regulate life in its details. It aims at a thorough-going scientific regulation, and an agreement of the free reasoned will of millions not merely on broad issues but in every aspect of life and this is a contradiction in terms.³⁵ Democratic socialism still clings to 19th century liberalism; it imagines that it will combine some kind of individual freedom with the rigours of the collectivist idea. But it is evidently a most complicated phenomenon unlikely to stand the test of time. If it proves itself wanting in logic or courage, it will be destroyed by the foreign element it tolerates.

Communism and Fascism

It is this uneasy mental poise between two opposing principles, socialistic regimentation and democratic liberty, that may be the root cause of its replacement in so many countries by the more vigorous and ruthlessly logical forces of communism and fascism.

Russian communism has discarded democratic liberty with contempt, but it has preserved the ideal of a proletarian equality for all in a classless society. Still, its spirit is a rigorous totalitarianism on the basis of the dictatorship of the Communist party in the name or on behalf of the proletariat. Non-proletarian totalitarianism goes farther and discards democratic equality no less than democratic liberty; it preserves classes but only as a means of social functioning, not as a hierarchic order.

In other respects, however, the deadly quarrel between the two systems seems to be a blood feud of kinsmen. There is in both the same dominance by an individual leader, head of a small active minority, the Party, and supported by a militarised partisan force. There is a rapid crystallisation of the social, economic, political life of the people into a new rigid organisation effectively controlled at every point. There is a total, unprecedented compression of the whole communal existence so as to compel a maximum efficiency and a complete unanimity of mind, speech, feeling, and life.³⁶

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 285-6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

A strange paradox is the result. Sri Aurobindo says:

Rationalisation is no longer the turn; its place is taken by a revolutionary mysticism.... In Russia the Marxist system of Socialism has been turned into a gospel.... In Fascist countries the swing away from Rationalism is marked and open; a surface vital subjectivism has taken its place and it is in the name of the national soul and its self-expression and manifestation that the leaders and prophets teach and violently enforce their totalitarian *mystique*.³⁷

Already the pressure of the state organisation on the life of the individual has reached a point which makes it intolerable. If it continues to be what it is now, a government of the life of the individual by the comparatively few, and not as it pretends, by a common will and reason, then it will be this falsity through which it will be attacked and meet its doom.

Future of the State

In the theory of communism, a free classless, stateless communal life is indeed the eventual ideal. But it is not likely that the living state machine would let go its prey or allow itself to be abolished without a struggle.³⁸ On the other hand there are other possibilities that might cut short the duration of the collectivist phase of human society. Socialism might well develop away from the Marxist groove. The irrational and mystical elements in the totalitarian regimes may be a pointer to a new, more subjective and supra-rational phase of human development. If as a result of its awakening, the East follows its own bent in the direction of subjectivism and practical spirituality—the present trends towards Western individualism and Communist orthodoxy may well prove to be a temporary reaction against a dominant conservatism—then it might bring into being a quite novel social tendency which will have its world-wide repercussions. Perhaps most important of all, the deepest truth that

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 275-6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 276-8.

individualism has discovered, namely, that the individual is not merely a member of a human pack, hive, or ant-hill, that he is something in himself, a soul, a being who has to fulfil his own individual truth, a truth which agrees in its root with the profoundest spiritual conceptions of Asia, has a large part to play in the moulding of the future.

The exact shape of the future cannot be predicted. But one thing seems certain, that whatever the ultimate end, some form of governmental control remains a necessity so long as man in the mass does not come within any measurable distance of a fully self-conscious spiritual being. So long as the vital ego remains dominant in him and governs his thoughts and actions, a stateless society, whether Communist or Anarchist, remains a chimera. Any attempt towards that end would lead to anarchy and disruption. All we can do is to make the state as helpful as possible to the growth of man in the spirit.

The Ideal State

As a first step to this end, Sri Aurobindo made a strong plea to correct the mistakes of the modern mind which seeks to develop, in place of a living people, a mechanical state, an instrument of the communal life taking the place of life itself. This error had been avoided in the ancient Indian polity, and its experience might be of use in tracing the pattern of an ideal state of the future. Sri Aurobindo drew inspiration from ancient Indian polity in which the main function of the political sovereign was to maintain the sound law of life, the *Dharma* of the society. All the members and groups of the socio-political body, the family, caste, class, economic guild, religious community, village, township, region or province, had their *Dharma* determined for them by their nature, their position, their relation to the whole body. They were to be assured and maintained in the free and right exercise of their *Dharma*, but at the same time restrained from any transgression or deviation from their right working and true limits. That was the office of the supreme political authority. All that it was called upon to do was to coordinate, to exercise a general and supreme control, to defend the

life of the community against external attack or internal disruption, to assist, promote and regulate in its larger lines the economic and industrial welfare, to see to the provision of facilities and to use for the purpose the powers that passed beyond the scope of the others.³⁹

In this view, the business of the state, so long as it continues to be a necessary element in human life and growth, is to provide all possible facilities for cooperative action, to remove obstacles, to prevent all really harmful waste and friction, and to remove avoidable injustice, to secure for every individual an equal chance of self-development and satisfaction to the extent of his powers and in the line of his nature, *swadharma, swabhava*. But even cooperative action is injurious, if instead of seeking the good of all compatible with the necessities of individual growth, it immolates the individual to communal egoism and prevents the necessary initiative for the flowering of a more perfectly developed humanity.⁴⁰

The perfect state will, therefore, be that which entirely favours the perfection of the individual, the flowering of the divine in him to its utmost capacity of wisdom, power, love and universality. The social aggregates which stand in the way of this perfection of the individual and seek to coerce him within their limited mould will soon be destroyed by the irresistible impulsion of progressing Nature. It must not try to make man perfect by machinery or keep him straight by tying up all his limbs. Its aim should be to diminish as soon and as far as possible the element of external compulsion of the spirit within, and all the preliminary means it has to use must have that for its aim.⁴¹

III

The Problem of International Relations

The fundamental problem in international relations is basically the same as confronts us within the state; it is the

³⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, pp. 352-7.

⁴⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*, pp. 266-73.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 618-31.

problem of harmonising conflicting egoisms. The question which evolving Nature now places before man is whether collective egoism already existing in the claims to national sovereignty can be sufficiently modified so as to replace the present state of near-anarchy by something like a planned order.

Two devastating world wars have forced the attention of men to a need for a better world order. Such dubious and make-shift arrangements as a shifting balance of power system, a concert of powers with their blundering discords, arbitration tribunals and international courts with little or no enforcing jurisdiction, paper guarantees of neutrality and no-war pacts, a limping League or a United Nations Organisation rendered impotent by the veto and the Great Powers engaging in an arms race to prevent an armed collision: these will no longer serve.⁴² Without a world state of some sort with effective power to disarm or render innocuous the bellicose propensities of nations and to make effective judgment of law and commonsense, global war cannot be stopped; the means of strife remaining, its causes, opportunities, excuses will never be wanting.

The Possibilities of a World State

Sri Aurobindo argued that however remote the possibilities of such a world state coming into being within the foreseeable future may be, one cannot discount them altogether. At first there may come about, as between the communist bloc and the so-called free world led by the United States, some sort of a rapprochement and initial union for the most pressing common needs; arrangements of commerce, peace and war, common arbitration of disputes, arrangements for the policing of the world. What will induce the smaller nations to join such a union may well be the obvious advantages; it would guarantee protection against external attacks and internal disruption. But these initial arrangements, once accepted, will naturally develop by the pressure of an inherent need into a closer unity, and perhaps, in the long run, into a common supreme government.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 507-21.

The question is whether a world-union of this nature will provide the ultimate solution to the problem of international relations, asked Aurobindo. A world state, assuming that it succeeds in its endeavour to blot out partly by force but mainly through the power of public opinion as within the nation-state, the more blatant forms of national egoism, will have the great advantage of assuring to the peoples general security, economic well-being, and combinations for intellectual and social activity and progress. It will have habituated nations of different races, traditions, civilisations to live together harmoniously. But common cultural activity and progress may not by themselves be sufficient to bring into being the fully powerful psychological factor that would be required to keep the world-unity intact. The keen sense of difference from others that keeps the national spirit alive will be wanting in this case. Economic well-being by itself cannot permanently satisfy, and the world may even tire of an unchanging peace. There can be one of two possible results. The world state must end either in stagnation, or else there will be a shattering of its fabric by the resurgence of a revolutionary principle or of the suppressed idea of free nationality reasserting itself, leaving it to man to start tackling the problem all over again.

Conditions for a True World-Union

If instead of waiting till this attempt at a mechanical unity ends in inevitable failure, man could devise a better way of ensuring unity, based on the largest amount of freedom to the nations, that would be an ideal solution. But a free world union dreamed of by the world's intellectuals is hardly feasible until there is a measure of equality among the nations, and any form of coercion, military, political or economic, is actually renounced by all in their international relations. We are far from this ideal.

But certain possible lines of change may hasten the realisation of the ideal. That ideal of internationalism which regards mankind as one single nation and effaces the separative national spirit altogether needs to be discouraged. Encouragement ought to be given to the revival of that idealistic

nationalism which at one time was on the point of being crushed out of existence under the victorious march of the imperial idea. At the same time, a radical cure has to be found for that separatist sentiment which is at the moment the very basis of the nation-idea. We find that events have considerably helped the change. However, Sri Aurobindo says that much remains to be done to make a free world-union a reality.

The disappearance of a number of empires as a result of the First World War and a certain change in the attitude of those that remained saved the nation-idea from imminent death. The Second World War practically replaced the idea of empire by that of the Commonwealth, and brought about the creation of a number of new nation-states. The League Covenant gave formal recognition to the right of the weaker states to exist and the UN Charter reaffirms this right. Most significant of all, a new principle of national self-determination emerged out of the exigencies of war and however ignored as yet in practice, is bound to be a determining force of the future.

The principle of self-determination means that within every distinct human collectivity, growing or grown, there is a self, a being which has the right to grow in its own way, to find itself, to make its life a full and a satisfied instrument and image of its being.

Religion of Humanity

But national self-determination must harmonise with a common self-determination for the world at large, freedom must move in the frame of unity. To make the nations conscious of their souls in which alone they can find their true unity with all the other nations in a common aspiration towards the truth of the Spirit: this is the complete formula and this is the task set before man.⁴³ This alone can circumvent the national egoism that stands in the way.

In a word, there must evolve a new religion of humanity more powerful in its appeal than the religion of country that keeps alive the sentiment of separativeness. This

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 312-13.

religion of humanity, one must hasten to add, is not to be a matter of creed, dogma and ritual. Its mainspring will be in the inmost soul of man, in his deepest heart where he automatically feels a sense of freedom and equality as well as a sense of true unity with the world. No mere intellectualisation or moralisation of the superficial ego will serve. A deep spiritual change becomes imperative, for egoism cannot go unless man learns to live in his soul and spirit.⁴⁴

This change demanded of man has never been attempted except on a small scale within the limits of a religious group or peculiar community; it has not been accepted even as an ideal by the general mind of the race. If the change is to come, there must be a general acceptance by the mass of the ideas and aspirations born of this ideal and at the same time there must come to the fore a growing number of individuals who can embody these ideas and aspirations in their consciousness and life and by their influence lead progressively the rest of mankind towards a realisation of the ideal.

If this is done, any form of outward unification may not be indispensable, or if indispensable, it will come about naturally, by the demand of the human mind and will be held secure by an essential need of our perfected and developed human nature.

IV

Conclusion

The true solution to the problem of politics as of every other problem can, therefore, come only when man avows boldly to himself that all he has done so far is only provisional and a half-measure, and that in order to find the true way he must turn inwards and seek a deeper source of guidance than the fallible intellect; he must learn to live in his soul and make it the leader of the march. As Sri Aurobindo said:

The solution lies not in the reason but in the soul of man, in its spiritual tendencies. It is a spiritual, an inner freedom that can alone create a perfect human order. It is a

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 313-15.

spiritual, a greater than the rational enlightenment that can alone illumine the vital nature of man and impose harmony on its self-seekings, antagonisms and discords. A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfound law of love is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution.... It is in the soul that it must find its roots.⁴⁵

He concludes that if this is not the solution, then there is no other solution; if this is not the way then there is no other way for man and he has to give place to a higher species who will be better fitted to take up the evolutionary endeavour. But Sri Aurobindo gives ample reasons to hope that there is a power at work who would enable man ultimately to attain fulfilment.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 295-6.

V. MADHUSUDAN REDDY

Sri Aurobindo's Vision of Human Unity

A PHILOSOPHY of history generally either comprehends an analysis of the causal motivation¹ of historical movements or connotes the formation of the various cultural patterns and civilisational cycles² or deals with the problem of historical knowledge.³ Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of history evidently belongs to the first category as it deals with the many factors contributing to the rise and fall of cultures with particular reference to those of India and Europe. For Sri Aurobindo history means the social, cultural, political and spiritual history of a people. But his philosophy of history is certainly not the product of what Toynbee calls 'times of troubles', but is based on certain fundamental metaphysical findings about the ethos of nations in general and the nature of the Absolute Reality in particular.

The problem of history is not so much of historical objectivity, as it is tried to be made out by some,⁴ as it is of *historical subjectivity*. By historical subjectivity we mean the consciousness-content of history, which, in a given period of history, is trying to manifest itself in the collectivity through her chosen human instruments. The approach of history is therefore ontological rather than rational or scientific and

¹ St. Augustine, Hegel and Marx are philosophers of history in this sense.

² Oswald, Spengler and Toynbee.

³ Windelband and Heinrich Rickert.

⁴ W. H. Walsh, *Philosophy of History : An Introduction* (London, 1967), p. 94. According to Walsh, 'the problem of historical objectivity is at once the most important and the most baffling in critical philosophy.'

critical. Though the historian cannot eliminate entirely the personal equation,⁵ for, he is a creature of time, place, circumstances and culture,⁶ history itself is a value-fulfilment process. The historian thus is not only causally and logically involved in history but also ontologically is a part of it. The historian is therefore more a philosopher than a scientist. History is not a formalised discipline with a specially devised technical vocabulary of its own, nor a causal and logical account of the procession of events, nor an attempt to understand the past in its own terms (of the conditions existing in those times), or in terms of the remote past, but a vast oceanic movement, wave on wave upon wave, each moment manifesting the future, directed by and pulled towards the future. It is not a physical process, not even a rational and moral movement; it is a spiritual matter every inch of the endless way. It is the eternal movement of the total human past into the bosom of the divine future—a future that is endlessly manifesting itself as the human present. It is thus by its very nature value-constituted. It would be a poor, inadequate or even false description, if history is conceived of as a mere 'record of facts which one age finds remarkable in another'.⁷ That would only be a utilitarian or surface evaluation of history. Such accounts of history as are concerned with so called 'assessment' and mere 'truth-telling' leave out or do not do justice to the deeper inductive and spiritual considerations.

The first flowering of speculative philosophy of history is found in Hegel. The great German idealist Hegel, the English meta-historian Arnold Toynbee and the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr are the better known authors of philosophical accounts of history in the West; their systems are respectively metaphysical, empirical and religious. The meaning Hegel finds in history can be fully expounded only by means of his metaphysical concept of 'World Spirit', which again depends upon the acceptability of his philosophic

⁵ 'What are Historical Facts?' reprinted in *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, ed. Hans Meyerhoff (New York, 1959), p. 131.

⁶ 'That noble dream', reprinted in *The Varieties of History*, ed. Fritz Stern (New York, 1956), pp. 323-5.

⁷ Quoted in Karl Lowitt, *Meaning in History* (University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 20.

position as a whole. Whereas Toynbee's view of history is represented as a conclusion which is forced upon him by his empirical survey of the whole of history, for Niebuhr, metaphysical reflection and empirical investigation do not make any sense of history at all. He only shows how Christian faith, which transcends rational argument, can meaningfully account for the otherwise meaningless occurrences in history.

Philosophers of history are usually classified by the type of pattern they claim to find in past events. There seem to be open only three possibilities: either history is *linear*, or *cyclical* repeating itself endlessly in succeeding peoples and periods, or will appear *chaotic* exhibiting only 'the play of the contingent and the unforeseen'.⁸ Also, there could be various combinations of these basic possibilities. But the speculative theories of Hegel, Toynbee and Niebuhr cannot be classified under any of the above three descriptions. For, though Hegel emphasises the linear development of human freedom in history, he finds a recurring three-stage pattern in sub-histories of the various peoples, cultures and nations who contribute to the sum total of human history. And Toynbee, who seems to view history as 'the rise and fall of civilizations' finally comes 'to represent this as contributing cumulatively to the spiritual insight of the human race'.⁹ As for Niebuhr, he finds no significant over-all pattern in history, and still admits that one can draw lines of progress through it, but none of these developments is of any significance from the standpoint of Christian faith.

Though Niebuhr suffers from the concept of an all-pervasive sin, he is the only one who seems to be looking to religion to explain history. In a broad sense Hegel's philosophy of history is a 'justification of the ways of God' and seeks reconciliation with the fact of the existence of evil. And with Toynbee the problem is 'how any spiritually significant purpose can be served by the "vain repetitions" of the cyclic life of civilizations'.¹⁰

Hegel's philosophy of history can only be appreciated in

⁸ H. A. L. Fisher, *History of Europe* (London, 1936), p. V.

⁹ William H. Dray, *Philosophy of History* (Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 62.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

relation to his world view, for it is embedded in his political philosophy. For him 'reason is sovereign of the world; that the world, therefore, presents us with a rational process'.¹¹ That is to say philosophy brings to the study of history the concept of 'reason'. This rationality is then discovered, not in the mere external orderliness of nature, but in the realisation in it of a purpose or plan. He rules out any reference to 'providence', for such reference, apart from concealing a part of the plan of history, does not fully explain what goes on in history. It is only reason, according to Hegel, that makes clear both what is being achieved and how it is brought about. The essential characteristic of 'spirit' being self-movement or freedom, history gives an account of the emergence of 'spirit' out of 'material nature.' The 'aim' of history and 'the final cause of the World at large' is the complete realisation of this 'potential' freedom of 'spirit'.¹² And it is by means of 'will' that such a goal can be achieved. It is the 'cunning of reason' as Hegel calls it that has made history the 'slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized'¹³ and hastened the fulfilment of its goal, namely, the realisation of greater freedom. For the self-regarding destructive passions of men have always worked, he observes, as the unconscious efficient instruments of reason. Freedom is not individual caprice; it can be developed only through discipline and can be attained only in an organised state. The greatness of a state depends upon the form and level of spirituality it attains. This is expressible in terms of some central principle or idea which expresses itself 'in all its particular affairs—its wars, institutions, etc.',¹⁴ indeed in all aspects of its culture. The Hegelian World Spirit is immanent in history; it is Spirit which assumes the form of the state; it is Spirit which is at war with itself in the course of dialectic and has the development of freedom as its chief aim.

According to Toynbee civilisations have their origins in responses to a variety of challenges offered by the physical and

¹¹ *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel, ed. by C. J. Friedrich (New York, 1956), p. 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

human environment. They arise out of specially favourable conditions of nature. And they grow too by responding to a series of such challenges—through a change in the character of challenges, through ‘etherialization’ of the physical and psychological environment. The chief cause for the fall of civilisations being the failure of creativity, ‘the nemesis of creativity’, as he calls it, and the consequent loss of social unity. It is through the rise and fall of civilisations that mankind moves forward, for the goal of history is to enable society to pass beyond the merely civilised state into a moral order. The medieval Christian Church for Toynbee almost achieved such ‘a terrestrial City of God’. Its failure lay in its Papacy taking up the sword. In his post-Christian phase, Toynbee regards all the major religions as of more or less equal values, but seems unable to envisage the possibility of achieving any further religious insight by mankind out of the dissolutions of the present day civilisations. However, his hope for the future appears to be that the great universal churches will ‘in some unexplained way either work together or coalesce’—producing ‘heavenly music on earth’.¹⁵ He does not consider the career of Western civilisation as totally meaningless, for, he thinks, that moving towards its eventual disintegration, it can still unite the world ‘in some soon to be established universal political community’. This, in turn, may provide the nursery for the synthesis of all the higher religions ‘in some new all-embracing church’.

Niebuhr attempts to interpret history from the standpoint of religion. It is the divine revelation, as elaborated in Christian theology, that alone can adequately explain all historical events. ‘All historical destinies’, observes Niebuhr, ‘are under the dominion of a single divine sovereignty,’¹⁶ which provides a general frame of meaning¹⁷ for all historical events. It is because of the sovereignty of God over the whole of history, he concludes, that ‘history is potentially and ultimately one story’.¹⁸ The Hebrews believed in a supreme power which was at work in their national history,

¹⁵ Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (New York, 1961), Vol. VII, p. 428.

¹⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History* (New York, 1949), p. 107.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

and yet was neither 'the projection of the nation's ideals, nor... coextensive with, or supplementary to, the nation's power'.¹⁹ The divine sovereignty is not at the disposal of a particular nation or people; that it is a covenant between God and all believers is at the basis of the idea of universal history. It shows itself in the face of human resistance and defiance as divine *judgement* and divine *grace*. It is this two fold activity that makes history the great story of 'God's contest with all men'.²⁰

Niebuhr's providence, like Hegel's 'reason', is immanent in the historical process itself, but unlike the Hegelian dialectic, there is no progress from synthesis to synthesis. The providential dialectic of history, in addition, is *ironical*. According to Niebuhr, Christianity, 'tends to make the ironic view of human evil in history the normative one. Its conception of redemption from evil carries it beyond the limits of irony, but its interpretation of the nature of evil in human history is consistently ironic'.²¹ However, human history, he observes, is 'not progressively emancipated from evil',²² and therefore not completely meaningful. The reason, given by Niebuhr, for this residual moral obscurity lies in the fact 'that providence does not operate through miraculous interventions; it uses historical instruments, and these are always morally defective.... Both judgment and grace, as they operate in history, are necessarily related to the 'morally irrelevant factor of power'.²³ Usually unscrupulous nations go unpunished, and social virtue is not necessarily rewarded. And Christian love, he observes, 'is normative for, but not tenable in, history'. Christ himself 'suffered historical defeat' for all destruction of evil inevitably involves suffering by the good and the innocent. The operation of divine grace too is likewise defective. Enmeshed in a historical fate man can never be fully redeemed although the divine grace assures him that he is never completely beyond redemption. The figure of the Antichrist symbolises the Christian

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York, 1954), p. 133.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 129; William H. Dray, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-4.

belief that history as a whole remains 'morally ambiguous' to the end.²⁴ There is, therefore, no hope of mankind being totally emancipated from evil 'either progressively or miraculously'. Moreover, the 'most explicit forms of evil' are envisaged as coming late in history, and there is also the suggestion, Niebuhr points out that the faith itself might vanish from the earth.²⁵ But even this however would not mean the 'defeat of God', for the Last Judgment, though not made *within* history, holds out the promise of absolute justice beyond the inexact ones of ordinary history and the symbol of Resurrection implies God's illimitable resources of love and mercy 'for the *final* overcoming of evil, although once again this is beyond the possibilities of history itself'.²⁶ A close study of Christian eschatology reveals that there is a *trans-historical* reality which can be apprehended by faith alone. However, for the Christian, 'the grace of God completes the structure of meaning beyond the limits of rational intelligibility in the realm of history'.²⁷

According to Niebuhr no historically significant moral progress is possible in the future for 'even in historically significant action, man remains a part of the physical and biological world'.²⁸ Man cannot transcend his inclination to self-centredness and to self-interested activity for it is not by nature but in freedom that he sins. And history, Niebuhr declares, is the fruit and proof of man's freedom. Original sin is a corruption which dominates all men, and therefore, man's misuse of freedom is a permanent factor in history. The Fall symbolises this inevitable corruption of freedom. There are some events in history, he says, which reveal the transcendent source and end of the whole panorama of history, such as the life, death and resurrection of Christ. But these can be apprehended only by faith, in humility and repentance.

The Christian view, in Niebuhr's opinion, neither abandons hope of the fulfilment of 'history's potential moral meaning', nor concedes to any single institution the possibility of

²⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*, p. 135.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁶ William H. Dray, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

achieving such fulfilment. The moral obscurity in history, he feels, will somehow be made good. But he denies that his position is 'trans-historical'. In Niebuhr's view, again, history itself is not fully meaningful, and yet concludes that history may be fully meaningful after all, although it is not possible to discern what exactly its meaning is. Similarly, although we find no exact execution of a divine justice in history, it would be appropriate to say that divine justice is beyond all human comprehension and as such does not necessarily conform to any human notion of it. The full meaning of history is not 'non-historical' but 'trans-historical'. It is this mystery of divine Providence that gives meaning to history.

'History teaches us nothing', says Sri Aurobindo; 'it is a confused torrent of events and personalities or a kaleidoscope of changing institutions. We do not seize the real sense of all this change and this continual streaming forward of human life in the channels of Time. What we do seize are current or recurrent phenomena, facile generalisations, partial ideas.'²⁹ But all this does not reveal its real inner meaning and significance. For truly history is the progressive revelation and manifestation of the absolute spirit in and through Time. It is the endless unveiling of the Godhead in the soul and life of humanity. Its task is therefore not only to discover the immanent soul in history but also to follow its unfoldment through history in the many events and phenomena of social, political and cultural existence of humanity. Within the framework of Space and Time history is synonymous with evolutionary progression. It is the dynamic concretisation of the infinite potentialities of the One in terms of the Many. The Supreme Being, according to Sri Aurobindo, fulfils itself in the world and the individual and the collectivity for all are its equal powers of self-manifestation. 'Man and the cosmos are both of them symbols and expressions of the same hidden Reality.'³⁰ Human society is therefore an expression in life of the cosmic *Purusha* who also expresses himself in the physical and the supraphysical universe.

The historical and political thought-structure of Sri Aurobindo is based upon the three basic concepts of his

²⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity* (Pondicherry, 1950), p. 2.

³⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle* (Pondicherry, 1949), p. 7.

philosophy—*Sachchidananda* or the Supreme Reality, Supermind or the Truth-consciousness and Evolution.

The concept of a self-existent spiritual Absolute is central to his philosophy. Also, such a Reality, the *Sachchidananda* according to him, is the basic need of the human spirit. *Sachchidananda* has three eternally real poises, namely, the supra-cosmic transcendence, the cosmic universality and the unique separate individuality.³¹ Moreover, the Absolute has two aspects—those of active consciousness and of passive or silent consciousness.

The silent and the dynamic Brahman are not different, opposite and irreconcilable realities. They are one Reality in two aspects, positive and negative. It is out of the Silence that the worlds-creating Word comes expressing that which is self-hidden in the Silence. 'It is an eternal passivity which makes possible the perfect freedom and omnipotence of an eternal divine activity in innumerable cosmic systems. For the becomings of that activity derive their energies and their illimitable potency of variation and harmony from the impartial support of the immutable Being, its consent to this infinite fecundity of its own dynamic Nature.'³²

The *Nirguna* and *Saguna* are the two truths of the Eternal, the two supreme aspects of one Reality. An impersonal Brahman without qualities, a fundamental divine Reality free from all relations, and a Brahman with infinite qualities, a fundamental divine Reality who is the source, container and master of all relations, are the two inseparable correlatives and supreme aspects of 'a still greater Transcendence which originates them or upholds them both in its supreme Eternity'. The world is therefore not a figment of conception, nor an illusion, but a conscious birth of the supreme Reality into forms of itself. As Sri Aurobindo says, 'It is conscious Reality throwing itself into mutable forms of its own imperishable and immutable substance.'³³ There is a Truth of the Conscious Being that supports the world of multiplicity and expresses itself in them. The supreme knowledge and power that corresponds to this Truth is the supramental Truth-

³¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Riddle of This World* (Pondicherry, 1951), p. 71-5.

³² Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Vol. I (Calcutta, 1943), p. 33.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

consciousness, *rta-cit* as the Rig Veda calls it. *Rta-cit* is the consciousness of essential truth of being, *satyam*, or ordered truth of active being, *rtam*, and the vast self-awareness, *brhat* in which precisely this infinite consciousness is possible. Mind, Life and Body are an inferior consciousness and a partial and limited expression of this superior consciousness. This partial expression and manifestation ceaselessly strives to arrive in the mould of a multiple evolution at that superior expression of itself which is already existent to the Beyond-Mind. It endlessly labours to realise in its own conditions that which is in the Beyond-Mind.

From our ascending point of view we may say that the Real is behind all that exists; it expresses itself intermediately in an Ideal which is a harmonised truth of itself; the Ideal throws out a phenomenal reality of variable consciousness which, inevitably drawn towards its own essential Reality, tries at last to recover it entirely whether by a violent leap or normally through the Ideal which put it forth. It is this that explains the imperfect reality of human existence as seen by the Mind, the instinctive aspiration in the mental being towards a perfectibility ever beyond itself, towards the concealed harmony of the Ideal, and the supreme surge of the spirit beyond the ideal to the transcendental. The very facts of our consciousness, its constitution and its necessity presuppose such a triple order; they negate the dual and irreconcilable antithesis of a mere Absolute to a mere relativity.

Mind is not sufficient to explain existence in the universe. Infinite Consciousness must first translate itself into infinite faculty of Knowledge or, as we call it from our point of view, omniscience. But Mind is not a faculty of knowledge nor an instrument of omniscience; it is a faculty for the seeking of knowledge, for expressing as much as it can gain of it in certain forms of a relative thought and for using it towards certain capacities of action. Even when it finds, it does not possess; it only keeps a certain fund of current coin of Truth—not Truth itself—in the bank of Memory to draw upon according to its needs. For Mind is that which does not know, which tries to know and which never

knows except as in a glass darkly. It is the power which interprets truth of universal existence for the practical uses of a certain order of things; it is not the power which knows and guides that existence and therefore it cannot be the power which created or manifested it.³⁴

Mind must make room for another and higher consciousness which can fulfil it by transcending it. For Mind is only a passage not a culmination. It is Supermind, the Truth-consciousness, the Real-Idea which is the vast self-extension of Brahman and that which contains and upholds multiplicity and maintains unity in utmost diversity and stability in utmost mutability. By the Idea the Supermind develops the triune principle of existence, consciousness and bliss out of their indivisible unity. It differentiates them but does not divide them. Like the Mind it does not arrive to the One from the three; it manifests the three out of the One and yet maintains them in the unity. It establishes the inseparable Trinity and out of this all-constituent Trinity evolves the entire universe. It possesses the power of development of evolution and of making explicit what is already there implicit in Reality. It also carries with it the other power of involution, of envelopment and of making implicit. In the words of Sri Aurobindo 'the whole of creation may be said to be a movement between two involutions, Spirit in which all is involved and out of which all evolves downward to the other pole of Matter, Matter, in which also all is involved and out of which all evolves upwards to the other pole of Spirit'.³⁵ All nature is therefore only the Knowledge-Force of the Supreme Being at work to evolve in force and form all the inevitable truth of the Idea into which it originally has thrown itself. This is the truth of the evolutionary progression in Nature.

The Absolute Reality is transcendental, universal and individual. It is the manifestation of the universal aspect of Reality that is at the basis of the evolution of the collectivity. It is the perfection of the collectivity through the perfection of the individual that leads to the realisation of human unity. Evolution therefore proceeds on two lines, namely,

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

the perfection of the individual and the perfection of the collectivity. The first stage in the perfection of the latter is the family. The others are the class, the tribe, the group and the nation. The conflict between the individual and the group has been there because neither has fully realised the basis of their underlying unity—the Spirit. Division and disharmony are due to the separative action of the Mind; each individual instead of functioning as *one* of the many centres of the Universal Soul acts and behaves as if it was *the* centre of the cosmos. The many are the self-multiplications of the One, the self-extensions of the Supreme Spirit. Multiplicity is indeed an inexhaustible diverse play of Unity. It is the nature of Mind to divide the One for its own convenience, and then instead of seeing the divisions as complementaries takes them for mutually exclusive realities. The evolutionary nîsus in Nature points to the fact that man is not the final product of evolution and that he is only a transitional being. He contains within him a power and a light greater than the Mind—the Truth-consciousness which the Vedic Rishis called *Rta-chit*. It is the manifestation of this Truth-consciousness that, Sri Aurobindo believes, would bring about the necessary individual and collective perfection as well as human unity.

Sri Aurobindo deals with the problem of man's destiny on earth and the nature of perfection he can attain. If Spirit is the truth of life then life must be full of harmony, love and joy. It is possible for man to attain to the supreme status of the Spirit—to rise above the mental consciousness to a Truth-consciousness, the Supermind. In the Supermind Unity is the law of life. Man's destiny is to rise to this plane, bring its light and power into his earth life and solve his problems in its light.

Ignorance is as much a collective problem as it is that of the individual. It is the ignorance of the mass that hampers human unity. The problem of human unity brings us to the interpretation of history. History is not the record of man's social, economic and political achievements through the ages. It is the gradual unfoldment of the Soul of the collectivity. There is a spiritual principle—the collective soul, which seeks fulfilment through history. Man's destiny is to attain a

divine life on the earth—to manifest the supramental Truth-consciousness and to recreate life, individual and collective in its light.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of divine fulfilment implies the concept of the 'Godsent leader',³⁶ the *Vibhuti* and the *Avatara*, for it is they that become most powerful and in many cases the willing and conscious instruments of the divine force *Kali*. *Kali*, the dynamic aspect of the Absolute, uses them as its agents for executing and fulfilling the divine will. Christ, Mohammad, Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon and Vivekananda have been such leaders of history. Whereas the *Avatara* or the divine incarnation descends into the world for the specific purpose of establishing in the earth-nature some principle relevant to the evolutionary progression, in all great movements of history, 'in every great mass of human action', says Sri Aurobindo, 'it is the Spirit of the Time, that which Europe calls the *Zeitgeist* and India *Kala*, who expresses himself'.³⁷

It is *Mahakala*, the secret Spirit in Nature that shapes the destiny and history of peoples and nation through its dynamic formulation and active instrumentation *Kali*. It is the supreme will of *Mahakala*, therefore, that expresses and fulfils itself through history and times. The events of history are a magnificent panorama of its external manifestation. The hidden Spirit and supreme Master of the universe endlessly manifests itself through the many movements of history, nay, history is only the record of its manifestations in Time. This is the purpose that runs through the process of the centuries, the change of the suns, this is that which makes evolution possible and provides it with a way, means and goal. 'This is He who from years sempiternal hath ordered perfectly all things.'³⁸ The universe is conceived by Sri Aurobindo as the body and habitation of Brahman, and everything happens as part of its supreme will for self-unfoldment. It is this eternal Self that throwing itself as the adventurer in Time becomes our surface being and existence. Time

³⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches* (Pondicherry, 1952), p. 171.

³⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* (Pondicherry, 1966), p. 60.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

and Space are the conceptive self-extension of this absolute Reality. In the eternity of the supreme Spirit there are three statuses—that of timeless eternity, in which the Spirit is self-absorbed and immobile and without any development of consciousness in movement, that of stable status or simultaneous integrality of Time in which past, present and future are at once envisioned in its whole-consciousness and that of Time movement in which the processive movement of Consciousness-Force unfolds itself. The eternity of status and the eternity of movement are the two different positions taken by Consciousness with regard to the one and the same Eternity. For in the one it either sees the whole Time development from above or sees the before and the after from a stable position within the movement, and in the other case either take a mobile position in the movement and see all that has happened in the past or can know all that is to happen in the future. 'It can see Time from above and inside Time, exceeding it and not within it; it can see the Timeless develop the Time-movement without ceasing to be timeless, it can embrace the whole movement in a static and a dynamic vision and put out at the same time something of itself into the moment-vision.'³⁹ This integral simultaneity of vision may seem to the finite mind impossible or a magic of the Infinite but to the infinite consciousness it is perfectly logical and consistent. To comprehend fully the world-process of the Infinite and the Time-process of the Eternal, the finite reason has to transcend itself and become responsive to the logic of the Infinite which is the very logic of the supreme Being itself. The Absolute, indeed, cannot be limited:

'it can be limited neither by formlessness nor by form, neither by unity nor by multiplicity, neither by immobile status nor by dynamic mobility. If it manifests form, form cannot limit it; if it manifests multiplicity, multiplicity cannot divide it; if it manifests motion and becoming, motion cannot perturb nor becoming change it: it cannot be limited any more than it can be exhausted by self-creation. Even material things have this superiority to their manifestation; earth is not limited by the vessels made from it,

³⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part I (Calcutta 1940), p. 105.

nor air by the winds that move in it, nor the sea by the waves that rise on its surface. This impression of limitation belongs only to the mind and sense which see the finite as if it were an independent entity separating itself from the Infinite or something cut out of it by limitation: it is this impression that is illusory, but neither the infinite nor the finite is an illusion; for neither exists by the impressions of the sense or the mind, they depend for their existence on the Absolute.⁴⁰

The timeless Eternity and time eternity are the two aspects of the Eternal and the Absolute. Both are real in different orders of reality; 'what is unmanifest in the Timeless manifests itself in Time', says Sri Aurobindo; 'each thing that exists is real in its own degree of the manifestation and is so seen by the consciousness of the Infinite.'⁴¹ All world-existence is therefore the manifestation of the Absolute. Human ignorance is both an expression and a disguise of the original being, consciousness and delight of existence; it is a half-knowledge evolving towards complete knowledge as well as a condition and circumstance of a greater manifestation here. Terrestrial or material existence is only a partial manifestation of the Being; it is a world of actualised possibilities, and does not exclude all other possibilities not yet actualised here.

In a manifestation in Time new realities can emerge, truths of being not yet realised can put forth their possibilities and become actual in the physical and terrestrial existence; other truths of being there may be that are supraphysical and belong to another domain of manifestation, not realised here but still real. Even what is nowhere actual in any universe, may be a truth of being, a potential of being, and cannot, because it is not yet expressed in form of existence, be taxed as unreal.⁴²

But the mind because of the force of its pragmatic habit admits only the factual and actual as true and all else as unreal.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 275-6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 282-3.

All things which are not yet realised or perhaps cannot be realised in the present conditions are therefore considered as unreal. The mental view and experience of existence suffers from a limitation of consciousness which is at the basis of material creation itself. It is this limited, separative awareness which is at the basis of our misconception of the Real. It is only the supreme Consciousness which sees reality as a whole. The world is therefore the spiritual self-power of Being for multiple self-becoming; it is only the outward executive aspect of the dynamic consciousness-force of the Absolute.

There is in Nature a secret will and a design which imperceptibly but effectively concretises itself. Behind the external workings of Nature there is an internal necessity which fulfils itself through the many intellectual and spiritual movements in history. There is a prefigured rhythm in Nature which is revealed through the many steps of her inevitable advance. Acting according to this plan she prepares mankind spiritually, morally and socially for a specific course of action. Human unity and world peace are gospels which perhaps Nature is now preparing to realise. The creative urge and innate necessity in her for human fellowship must prepare the necessary instruments of universal and historical action. Maybe humanity is on the verge of one of those epochs when Nature throws a surprise and overtakes it with a vast cosmic imponderable force for which it had not been prepared at least on the surface, for the manifestation of human unity—a free union of sovereign nations must not be considered a mere *utopia*. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of history is futuristic and believes in the inevitable dawn of a spiritualised society and of human fellowship. History is not an aimless procession of mechanical and meaningless forces; there is an inner and cosmic purpose fulfilling itself through it. Mankind's ageless quest for peace and unity, Sri Aurobindo assures us, would be realised through the historical structure and progression.

According to Sri Aurobindo there is a cyclical movement in human and cosmic history. Not only the evolution of social and political history is cyclical but also human evolution as well as cosmic manifestation and withdrawal. It is the

supreme Spirit that manifests itself in history and thereby imparts meaning and purpose to the historical process. The Vedic Age in India represents the symbolic period of Indian history—an age of intuition, esoteric science and mystic vision. It was succeeded by a spiritualised typical society overwhelmingly psychological and ethical which gave the *Varnashrama dharma*. This was followed by the conventional age which pinned its faith in systematisation, social organisation, formalisation and tradition. The caste system was the characteristic product of this period. Finally comes the age of individualism representing reason, revolt, freedom and progress. But even here because of her native subjectivism India may introduce a new social dynamics based on spirituality that might change present day world politics and bring about the necessary inward transfiguration.

There is the need for a spiritual foundation of our civilisation. Mere pursuit of physical and vital enjoyments may ultimately lead to frustration and fall of a civilisation. Transcendence of vitalism, hedonism and exclusive materialism as well as avoidance of excessive reliance on reason by a spiritual culture based on a radical change of human consciousness can alone lead to lasting human unity. This means the spiritual transfiguration of the very historical process itself—the psychic and spiritual transformation of humanity in general.

The individual according to Sri Aurobindo is a spiritual soul, a being and self-expression of the Absolute. The purpose of evolutionary Nature is the total spiritual transformation of the individual through his liberation from the domination of ignorance and inconscience. The destiny of the individual is the realisation of his unity with the totality of Brahman in its dual nature of Being and Becoming and the spiritualisation of the terrestrial life. His goal is the realisation of a gnostic consciousness and transform his life by its unified self-awareness and all-awareness. The individual is a conscious power of the Eternal, 'always existing by unity, always capable of mutuality', and enjoys liberation and immortality by this self-knowledge. He is neither an epiphenomenon of matter nor a mere social animal. He is a spiritual and evolutionary being, and a necessary

instrument not only of subconscient Nature but also of the consciousness-force of the Spirit for its progressive manifestation in terrestrial existence. As the individual, so also the group or the collectivity is a form and field for the manifestation of the Spirit. The individual is both the means of working out the collective Will of mankind and an instrument for the expression of the omnipotence of the Absolute. In the language of Sri Aurobindo, '...the infinite Identity, the multitudinous Unity, the Omniscient, who having made man in his own image, with the ego as a centre of working, with the race, the collective Narayana, the *visvamanava* as the mould and circumscription, seeks to express in them some image of the unity, omniscience, omnipotence which are the self-conception of the Divine'.⁴³

As regards the family, it is an essentially practical and vitalistic creation. It provides a larger vital ego for the individual by drawing him into a competitive and cooperative life unit. The family too in its turn uses society as a means for its well-being. But the society too being a still larger vital, competitive and cooperative ego can take up both the individual and the family into a more complex organism and use them for the satisfaction of its vital needs, often with the consent of its constituting units. The society though essentially economic in its aims and in its functioning is in its inner self a great corporate soul, a subjective power and a formation of the divine Spirit. Like the individual the society too has a body, an organic life and an aesthetic temperament, and seeks its own self-fulfilment. It is

a living power of the eternal Truth, a self-manifestation of the cosmic Spirit, and it is there to express and fulfil in its own way and to the degree of its capacities the special truth and power and meaning of the cosmic Truth that is within it... it essentially is a soul rather than has one; it is a group-soul that, having attained to a separate distinctness must become more and more self-conscious and find itself more and more fully as it develops its corporate action and mentality and its organic self-expressive life.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 18.

⁴⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, pp. 39-40.

The only difference between the individual soul and the group-soul is that the latter is much more complex for it has as the constituents of its body not only physical and vital subconscious cells but also self-conscious mental beings. It is therefore both objective and subjective. A society may be viewed as essentially organic or rational and basically political and economic in its aims, but according to Sri Aurobindo it is wholly spiritual—'a soul-form of the Infinite, a collective soul myriadly embodied upon earth for a divine fulfilment'.⁴⁵ Its chief aim is the spiritual evolution of its constituent members by providing the necessary conditions of life and growth, and to express in the general life of mankind as a whole the light, the power, the beauty, the harmony and joy which are native to the Spirit. Freedom and harmony are the two essential principles of variation and oneness which mankind has been ceaselessly trying to realise throughout its history. Mankind is the only self-conscious self-expression of the Absolute in His cosmic unfolding. 'All mankind', says Sri Aurobindo, 'is one in its nature, physical vital, emotional, mental and ever has been in spite of all differences of intellectual development ranging from the poverty of the Bushman and Negroid to the rich cultures of Asia and Europe, and the whole race has, as the human totality, one destiny which it seeks and increasingly approaches in the cycles of progression and retrogression it describes through the countless millenniums of its history'.⁴⁶ It is within this general nature and general destiny of mankind that each individual has to pursue the common ideal according to his own basic nature, *swabhava*, and to arrive at the necessary perfection by inner development. The individual, therefore, is not to be treated as a mere cell of the body of society, nor its dead and passive instrument. He is the divine reality itself in human birth and epitomises all human potentiality in his being which he is required to discover, develop and manifest. He can truly help the world only through the growth of his own real self. The individual is not only a variation of human nature in general, but also a member of a race-type, a class-type and a physical, vital, mental or

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 281-2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9.

spiritual-type. Nevertheless he cannot be limited by any of these categories or types. Even as he belongs to them he exceeds them all, for essentially he belongs to God, 'to the world of all beings and to the godheads of the future'. He has the double capacity for self-limitation and self-expansion and transcendence. Unlike the individual animal, the individual man outgrows the group and experiences something of the infinity, complexity and free variation of the manifest Spirit.

The individual and humanity are the two conscious terms of manifestation; each has to live in the other, but mankind is too large an aggregate for the intimate experience of this mutuality. Nature therefore evolves a series of intermediate groups or aggregates between the two, giving pragmatic credence to the claims of the community, the society or the nation. The community or the nation expresses the self according to the general law of human nature and also helps the fulfilment of the destiny of mankind by its own development in accordance with the nature of its corporate individuality. But this right to be oneself should not make the community or nation isolated from other communities or nations.

As the individual lives by the life of other individuals, so does the nation by the life of other nations, by accepting from them material for its own mental, economic and physical life; but it has to assimilate this material, subject it to the law of its own nature, change it into stuff of itself; work upon it by its own free will and consciousness, if it would live securely and grow soundly. To have the principle or rule of another nature imposed upon it by force or a de-individualising pressure is a menace to its existence, a wound to its being, a fetter upon its march. As the free development of individuals from within is the best condition for the growth and perfection of the community, so the free development of the community or nation from within is the best condition for the growth and perfection of mankind.... Thus the law for the individual is to perfect his individuality by free development from within, but to respect and to aid and be aided by the same free development in others. His law is to harmonise his life with the life

of the social aggregate and to pour himself out as a force for growth and perfection on humanity. The law for the community or nation is equally to perfect its corporate existence by a free development from within, aiding and taking full advantage of that of the individual, but to respect and to aid and be aided by the same free development of other communities and nations. Its law is to harmonise its life with that of the human aggregate and to pour itself out as a force for growth and perfection on humanity. The law for humanity is to pursue its upward evolution towards the finding and expression of the Divine in the type of mankind, taking full advantage of the free development and gains of all individuals and nations and groupings of men, to work towards the day when mankind may be really and not only ideally one divine family, but even then, when it has succeeded in unifying itself, to respect, aid and be aided by the free growth and activity of its individuals and constituent aggregates.⁴⁷

This is the ideal law for the simultaneous and symbiotic development of the individual, the community or the nation and the human race. To know oneself fully, to find the law of one's being and to follow it ideally is the only hope of the individual, community or the nation and humanity for fulfilling their common destiny. Perfect individuality and perfect mutuality and reciprocity is then the only way for the realisation of a perfect union and even oneness in a free diversity by the individual, the community and the human race. The perfection of the individual is therefore a precondition for the perfect development of society. Man is the index and the foundation of human perfection. Man essentially is a soul—an embodied spirit. His physical, vital and mental self are the many subordinate means of his self-realisation, empirical helpers on the way, pragmatic values of self-expression and not the truth of man's inner existence.

The community is a formation of the infinite and eternal Reality—the body of Brahman. Ancient Indian sages regarded life as a manifestation of Spirit: 'the community was

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-5.

the body of the creator Brahma, the people was a life body of Brahma in the *Samasti*, the collectivity, it was the collective Narayana, the individual was Brahma in the *vyasti*, the separate *Jiva*, the individual Narayana.⁴⁸ The eternal Spirit expresses itself in Time, says Sri Aurobindo, and seeks its own fullness in humanity through the vicissitudes of human cycles. The cause of the cultural decline of a people, nation or civilisation is mainly due to the lack of faith both in the central inward spirit and the outward mental, vital and material forms and the lack of their constant assimilation. Eventually, it is the force of the Spirit that alone can help a civilisation to recover from its fall and enable it to move forward once again.

The individual is not only a manifestation of the eternal Spirit but also the key to the evolutionary progression. He is therefore not confined within the community or nation although his mind and life are a part of the communal mind and life. In fact the community exists by the individual for its body, life and mind are constituted by the body, life and mind of its members. But the individual is not a mere cell of the community for it can exist outside the community too. He has his own life and soul which can assert themselves in a manner congenial to the growth of the individual. If in a community he cannot achieve a full material, social or mental life, still he can spiritually exist and realise the inner truth of his existence and the indwelling self of being. It is therefore through his perfection that the communal perfection is achieved. He is neither confined within his humanity. 'He has been less than human, he can become more than human. The universe finds itself through him even as he finds himself in the universe, but he is capable of becoming more than the universe, since he can surpass it and enter into something in himself and in it and beyond it that is absolute.'⁴⁹ The Upanishadic dictum *Thou art That*, brings out the spiritual character of the individual.

Just as the individual has an ego so also the community or the nation has an ego. But ego is only a false substitute for the inner self of an individual or the central ethos of a people.

⁴⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity* (1947), p. 29.

⁴⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II (Calcutta, 1944), p. 920.

It is this that is responsible for the evils and conflicts within and between the individuals as well as among communities or nations. The nation-ego is not the soul or self of the nation; it is a dark and misguided life-force that has its origin in the sub-conscience. It is a non-spiritual, unregenerate, crude force that obstructs the spiritual progression of the race. For it leads to strifes, wars and a reversion to barbarity. It is only the descent of the supramental Truth-consciousness that can replace the communal ego by the communal soul which alone can truly spearhead human evolution.

The evolution of the state is closely related to the role of reason in the socio-economic and political evolution of man. Mankind has passed from the infra-rational, vitalistic stage to the rational through many intermediary stages of rational development and application. In the infra-rational stage men are not able to be guided in their life-activities by the clarified intelligence. They act mostly out of their instincts, impulses, desires and circumstances. In the intermediary stages reason slowly gains ascendancy and begins to preside over their ideas and actions. In the next stage that belongs to the future the spiritual or the supra-rational will play a decisive role in the transformation of society and its perfection. In this stage mankind is bound to develop a supra-intellectual, an intuitive and even a gnostic consciousness. And man 'will be able to perceive a higher divine end, a divine sanction, a divine light of guidance for all he seeks to be, think, feel and do, and able, too, more and more to obey and live in this larger light and power'.⁵⁰ This will be achieved not by means of an infra-rational religious impulse but by a higher spiritual living and thought. These stages are neither mutually exclusive, nor rigidly marked off from each other in their functioning. They arise out of each other and are even partially developed in each other. These three co-exist in man in varying degrees, and man cannot be any of these exclusively or absolute as long as he has not spiritualised and divinised his whole being and nature.

The state represents the transition of society from the infra-rational organic stage to the rational. It attempts to bring

⁵⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 229.

about an organic unity of the aggregate's political, social and economic life through centralised administration. The need for compactness, single-mindedness and uniformity to promote security and strengthen national defence is sought to be fulfilled by the state-idea. But national unity is not fully achieved through a single central authority and the uniformity of its political, military and administrative functions. The legislative and judicial functions contribute not less to the organic growth and unity of the nation. Self-legislation by the state, or the making of laws for the fulfilment of its own needs, helps the conscious development of the state. And the process becomes complete when society in the role of a freely and consciously self-regulating organism becomes synonymous with a democratic and socialist state. Modern democracy and modern socialism are only the first crude steps in the direction of such a consummation. Thus it is the state which eventually brings about the desired transformation of society from the organic to the rational stage. It is always the rational society which gives precedence to the code and constitution over custom and tradition. The code itself being an intellectual systematisation of the needs of society, capable of variation and development. This certainly is the triumph of the self-conscious rational over the vague life-instinct in the society. But this flexible, developing and self-conscious law, the all-comprehensive national *Dharma*, must be reflective of the deeper aspirations of the people; it must reveal the ethos of the nation. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

Only the society itself can determine the development of its own *dharma* or can formulate its expression; and if this is to be done not in the old way by a naturally organic and intuitive development, but by a self-conscious regulation through the organised national reason and will, then a governing body must be created which will more or less adequately represent, if it cannot quite embody, the reason and will of the whole society. Even a perfect democracy is not likely to be the last stage of social evolution, but it is still the necessary broad standing-ground upon which the self-consciousness of the social being can come to

its own. Democracy and Socialism are, as we have already said, the sign that that self-consciousness is beginning to ripen into fullness.⁵¹

Unity and uniformity are the rationale of contemporary society, the principal need of modern life. For it is they which alone can comprehend the incalculable complexities of life and make them manageable. Democratic socialism is the complete expression of this principal trend which through uniformity of social and economic principles and processes, and through uniformity of culture and perfectly organised administration secures the social well-being of the collective human life. But the giant machinery of the state replaces the vigour, the fertility of life and the spontaneous development of its powers. It becomes 'the masterful but arbitrary and intolerant science' that takes the place of the natural evolutionary experiments of Nature.

But the state is only an outward form, a convenient machinery to enforce unity and uniformity. It is the nation which is the living unity of the aspirations and powers of its peoples. It is the soul-power, the thought-power and the life-power of the millions of individuals constituting it welded into evolving unity. A common race-origin, a common language and a common culture though very helpful to the growth of a nationality are not its essential elements. Geographical unity, a common past, a common aspiration and ideal and a common enthusiasm and interest impelling towards unity are some of the more powerful fosterers of nationality. Even as an individual has a personality and a unique life history, so too nations have their personality and unique life-history. 'The stronger the inner life a nation builds up and organises, the longer it lives and the greater the power it acquires to revive when it falls for a time into decline.'⁵² The nature and quality of this inner life itself may differ from nation to nation. Nations with greater inner contact with the fundamental principles of existence naturally enjoy a longer immortality and have greater capacity for renewal. 'A nation like India that

⁵¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 224-5.

⁵² Nolani, 'The Immortal Nation,' in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual*, Jayanti Number, 14, p. 33.

hitched her wagon of life to a star—the supreme spiritual reality—is bound to regain her life always through whatever calamities and catastrophies might befall her.’⁵³

A state may boast of embodying the collective wisdom of its people but actually it represents the collective egoism usually controlled by selfish and less competent politicians. Instead of bringing out the best that the society is capable of it throws up folly, filth and sham and obtains the acquiescence of its subjects through propaganda. Like a huge soulless machine it can only manufacture and not create. But the urge of the individual is always to grow and to create. ‘Always it is the individual who progresses and compels the rest to progress,’ observes Sri Aurobindo, ‘the instinct of the collectivity is to stand still in its established order. Progress, growth, realisation of wider being, give his greatest sense of happiness to the individual; status, secure ease, to the collectivity. And so it must be as long as the latter is more a physical and economic entity than a self-conscious collective soul.’⁵⁴ Even in the democratic societies of today there is an organised annihilation of individual liberty in the form of a tyranny of the majority over the minority. No doubt the State has been a means for material progress and also provided the external framework of psychological unity but it cannot be an ideal frame for human unity. The usurpation of all power by the nation-state is a prelude to its fall. The coming of the new order is rendered certain by the crisis and collapse of the old. Just as in the past the clans, tribes and smaller groups became subordinated to the larger nation, so too the nations will have to be subordinated to a human world order. In the past large human aggregates did not promote a creative and rich human life. Creative life and collective activity always prospered in small spaces and smaller organisms like those of the Greek city states and the tiny kingdoms of the Pallavas, Chalukyas, Pandyas, Cholas or Cheras. Yet human unity as Sri Aurobindo envisions is ‘part of Nature’s eventual scheme and must come about. Only it must be under other conditions and with safeguards which will keep the race intact in the roots of its vitality, richly

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 29.

diverse in its oneness.⁵⁵ The tendencies of individualism and collectivism are too equally deep-rooted in Nature. Nature aims equally at the perfection of the individual as well as the development of the State. Its attempt in its evolutionary progression has been to resolve the mighty conflict between the self-liberating individual and the authoritarian, engrossing collectivity.

In the larger aggregate there are three types: one asserts the supremacy of the State over the individual; another while asserting the State idea accords maximum freedom, power and dignity to the individual, and the third in which the State willingly abdicates the largest measure of power, freedom and responsibility to the individual. The modern State while appealing to the external interests of its peoples also refers to their highest moral tendencies. It demands the immolation of the individual egoism to the collective interest, and claims that man must live for the larger good of the community. But in the name of efficiency and organisation only a small number of ruling persons who do not normally represent the nation's best mind or its noblest aims, impose their petty, ignorant and degenerating ideas on the nation. All this invariably leads to the growth of a collective egoism, which, if not kept within limits, casts its ugly shadow in international affairs upon the vision and the conscience of mankind. The individual at least makes up for all his deficiencies by means of an ethical sense, by the fear of social disapproval or the censure by the communal law for he has something like a soul or conscience. But the State, as it has no soul, and is only a military, economic and political organisation and force, acts unhampered by any internal scruples or external checks. The state is only a convenience for common development but not an end in itself. Its claims for its supremacy as the best means of human progress is also a gross exaggeration and a myth. No doubt man lives by the community and needs to develop himself individually and collectively. But when the State usurps control of the individual and cooperative activity it makes of itself a monstrous machinery that crushes out the freedom, initiative and

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

growth of the community. 'For the State is not an organism; it is a machinery, and it works like a machine, without tact, taste, delicacy or intuition. It tries to manufacture, but what humanity is here to do is to grow and create.'⁵⁶ Freedom, fertility, creativity and natural variation are impossible in an organised state for it is essentially mechanical and soulless in its nature and is more physical and economic in its functioning rather than self-conscious.

In the present conditions of human development it is quite improbable to bring about a healthy unity of the race by State machinery, either by a grouping of big and powerful and organised nations enjoying affluence or by a single World-State. Such a grouping or welding together of big and small states may have at best a pragmatic and preparatory value for it would at least accustom the race to the idea of a common life.

Human society as a whole passes through three main stages of its evolution—the vital, the mental and the spiritual. In the first stage it is not yet self-conscious, is largely at the physical and vital level, and its growth is mostly determined by the subconscious. In the second stage the communal mind becomes self-conscious and capable of planning for itself. Here society is raised from the level of vital needs and desires to the need for higher model of thought and existence. The only serious danger attending this stage is that Reason becomes the supreme arbiter of social evolution.

The sophisticating, labouring, constructing, efficient, mechanising reason loses hold of the simple principles of a people's vitality; it cuts it away from the secret roots of its life. The result is an exaggerated dependence on system and institution, on legislation and administration and the deadly tendency to develop, in place of a living people, a mechanical State. An instrument of the communal life tries to take the place of the life itself and there is created a powerful but mechanical and artificial organisation; but, as the price of this exterior gain, there is lost the truth of life of an organically self-developing communal

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

soul in the body of a free and living people.⁵⁷

This serious error is corrected when society enters the third stage of its evolution:

When man in the collectivity begins to live more deeply and to govern his collective life neither primarily by the needs, instincts, intuitions welling up out of the vital self, nor secondarily by the constructions of the reasoning mind, but first, foremost and always by the power of unity, sympathy, spontaneous liberty, supple and living order of his discovered greater self and spirit in which the individual and communal existence have their law of freedom, perfection and oneness.⁵⁸

In this stage Reason is more an intermediary principle ordering and regulating the needs of society as an active instrument of the spirit.

Man by nature seeks the association of his fellow beings. The social life of the individual begins within the family. After the family comes the tribe, then the clan, the community and then the nation. The nation is a psychological unit and has a soul of its own, and is destined to be surpassed by the larger aggregate of mankind.

The nation-state grows by developing a central authority which becomes the determining power in bringing about uniformity in administration, legislation, education, social and economic life.

The change represents in principle an evolution from a natural and organic to a rational and mechanically organised state of society.... The intelligent will of the whole society expressed in a carefully thought-out law and ordered regulation replaces its natural organic will expressed in a mass of customs and institutions which have grown up as the result of its nature and temperament. In the last perfection of the State, a carefully devised, in the end a giant machinery productive and regulative, replaces the vigour and fertility of life with the natural simplicity of

⁵⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*, p. 25.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

its great lines and the obscure, confused, luxuriant complexity of its details. The State is the masterful but arbitrary and intolerant science and reason of man that successfully takes the place of the intuitions and evolutionary experimentations of Nature; intelligent organisation replaces natural organism.⁵⁹

The State is organised mainly for the purpose of securing the good of the collectivity; it is believed to represent the collective wisdom of the community. Actually, it embodies the collective egoism of the nation controlled by petty politicians who represent more its selfishness, incompetence and folly than its idealism or purposes. Unlike the individual the State is without a soul, and, at best, has an undeveloped ethics.

The state is at its worst when it applies its cumulative and collective conservatism and imbecility to suppress the creative individual. This organised annihilation of the individual continues even in present day democratic societies. It is this immolation of the individual to the collective egoism that prevents the flowering of a more perfectly developed society. Still the State seems to be a necessary step in the direction of human unity, for it serves the historical utility of habituating humanity to the idea of a common life, to the possibility of human unity. But certainly it is not the suitable framework for the unity of the race which is the next inevitable phase in social evolution. 'Perhaps this experience also is necessary for mankind; yet it ought to be possible for us now to avoid it by subordinating mechanical means to our true development through a moralised and even a spiritualised humanity united in its inner soul and not only in its outward life and body.'⁶⁰

The drift towards an omnipotent nation-state is only the prelude to its fall. It prepares the way for its own collapse. Collective egoism has received a setback, and the concepts of racial and cultural superiority are proved to be myths. As clans and tribes were subordinated and absorbed in the past by the nation, so also now the nation-groups are on the verge of getting absorbed in the larger group of united humanity.

⁵⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 232-3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

The nation-group has no doubt fulfilled the task of consolidation and development, but the inner impulsion for expansion must necessarily lead to a new world order.

It was hoped that in a democratic set-up with the instrumentation of a central authority expressing the will of the people there would grow a new order of free co-operation among free and equal citizens. But the secular, democratic and socialist state too as the monarchical, ecclesiastical and aristocratic state has sacrificed liberty and equality in the name of collective welfare. The reason being that individual freedom and collective efficiency and well-being can be together realised only in the soul and not through surface egoism.

The nation idea was earlier surpassed by the universal empires 'either of the centralised despotic type as the Russian of the Romanoffs and the German of the Hohenzollerns or of the federal colonial type as the French or the British'. But they failed to create a psychological unity beyond the nation principle, for mere administrative efficiency cannot produce the inner oneness necessary for such a unification of the race. The next possibility of bringing the peoples of the world together is perhaps the formation of a multi-national world state. An international organisation started with the limited objective of settling disputes, maintaining peace and helping the under-privileged nations in their social and economic development may possibly grow into a central international authority with legislative, executive, economic and military power reducing the states to mere provinces. It is likely it might exercise its control over matters of culture and with the active assistance of modern science bring about a common world culture as well and attempt and even to a large extent succeed in dissolving oppositions of race and language against the backdrop of general uniformity. Such a unification of mankind will no doubt succeed in assuring world peace, and secure the material well-being of the race and usher in an unprecedented phase in human life of peace, prosperity and mechanical efficiency. But because of the absence of an inner sense of unity the community will cease to be creative and eventually stagnate and decay.

The alternative is a free stateless society. Thus it is only

a free world union or a federation of free nations embodying the principle of unity in diversity that can be a suitable substitute for the world state. In such a free union of nations oneness and freedom would be the guiding principles of life. Fear of war and economic exploitation will be completely eliminated. Neither a world parliament nor a federation of the American type will be appropriate to satisfy the extensive diversity and liberty of the constituting nations and communities. Rather some kind of free confederation of the different nations for the removal of poverty, social inequality, and economic disparity and exploitation with full guarantee for internal freedom and the right of self-determination would be the right framework for human unity. Uniformity, lifeless unity and conformity can never promote spiritual oneness nor a living idea of human unity. Today 'man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blunderous ego and its appetites'.⁶¹

There is a feeling among some that only a world religion can become the stable basis of a new world order. Considering the nature and scope of such a world religion, there is little hope that humanity will accept any one of them for the supreme task. The moralist's ideal of constructing society too is untenable. It is because moral ideals are themselves ill-evolved, ignorant and arbitrary. Though they assert certain absolute standards in theory, 'in practice every system of ethics proves either in application unworkable or is in fact a constant coming short of the absolute standard.'⁶² Religion, as commonly understood and practised, does not have the power to transform human nature and life. It is Yoga and not religion that can bring about the transformation of man. A true Yoga does not take man away from life but supplies the true foundation on which a divine life can be realised on the earth. And it is Sri Aurobindo, following the line of the Vedas and the Gita, gives this Yogic technique of the spiritualisation of life and action. In the words

⁶¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II (Calcutta, 1944), p. 925.

⁶² Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Pondicherry, 1941), pp. 177-96.

of Sri Aurobindo

Organised religion, though it can provide a means of inner uplift for the individual and preserve in it or behind it a way for his opening to spiritual experience, has not changed human life and society; it could not do so because, in governing society, it had to compromise with the lower parts of life and could not insist on the inner change of the whole being; it could insist only on a credal adherence, a formal acceptance of its ethical standards and a conformity to institution, ceremony and ritual. Religion so conceived can give a religio-ethical colour or surface tinge, —sometimes, if it maintains a strong kernel of inner experience, it can generalise to some extent an incomplete spiritual tendency; but it does not transform the race, it cannot create a new principle of the human existence. A total spiritual direction given to the whole life and the whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself.⁶³

It is this total spiritual direction to the whole of life and nature that is aimed by the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Religions and systems of ethics are only aids to this Yoga and find their fulfilment in it. We are in an age of travail when all forms of thought and activity are being subjected to a supreme test of serviceability upon which depends their survival and are given an opportunity of rebirth and rejuvenation to help prepare a great and new future for humanity.

The malady of our age lies in its outward vision and the consequent attempt to build up social, political and economic institutions based on environmental observations. This cannot give the ultimate solution of our problems nor does it reveal the inmost truth of human life. The triple ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity formulated in France 'by a sort of primal intuition' as it were, are universal *mantras* and must first be realised in the inner life of humanity before they can be realised in the outer life. Nothing can be real in life, says Sri Aurobindo, that is not made real in the spirit. This spiritual change and inner transformation is necessary

⁶³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II (Calcutta, 1940), p. 1168.

if freedom, equality and brotherhood have to be secured in the outer human life. Asia, and particularly India, is best suited to initiate and to accomplish such a task, for from times immemorial it was primarily preoccupied with the discovery of the things of the Spirit and the organisation of life in the light of such a discovery. As long as man does not rise beyond the mental stage and does not develop the supramental or gnostic consciousness no radical change in human life is possible.

The spiritual man is one who has discovered his soul: he has found his self and lives in that, is conscious of it, has the joy of it; he needs nothing external for his completeness of existence. The gnostic being starting from this new basis takes up our ignorant becoming and turns it into a luminous becoming of knowledge and a realised power of being. All therefore that is our attempt to be in the Ignorance, he will fulfil in the Knowledge. All knowledge he will turn into a manifestation of the self-knowledge of being, all power and action into a power and action of the self-force of being, all delight into a universal delight of self-existence.⁶⁴

Once established in the manifold truth of the Spirit the Yogi brings down the infinite Truth-consciousness and Power of the Spirit into his outer life and radically transforms it. And that will be the founding of the divine life on the earth. The more important steps leading to such a transformation are Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition and Overmind. With the ascent of humanity to each of these steps more and more of the defects and imperfections which at present beset it will be removed and new powers and possibilities of knowledge, love, work and joy will be manifested on the earth eventually leading to the manifestation of the supramental. Unaided by any divine intervention or agency this ascent into the supramental will no doubt be a difficult endeavour. But once the Truth-consciousness manifests itself in the earth-nature to attain to spirituality will become more easy and simplified. It will exercise a decisive

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1050.

influence both on the individual and collective life of humanity.

The supramental being...would not only found all his living on an intimate sense and effective realisation of harmonic unity in his own inner and outer life or group life, but would create a harmonic unity also with the still surviving mental world, even if that world remained altogether a world of Ignorance. For the gnostic consciousness in him would perceive and bring out the evolving truth and principle of harmony hidden in the formations of the Ignorance; it would be natural to his sense of integrality and it would be within his power to link them in a true order with his own gnostic principle and the evolved truth and harmony of his own greater life-creation. That might be impossible without a considerable change in the life of the world, but such a change would be a natural consequence of the appearance of a new Power in Nature and its universal influence. In the emergence of the gnostic being would be the hope of a more harmonious evolutionary order in terrestrial Nature.⁶⁵

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have by their Yoga made it possible for this supramental Truth-consciousness to descend into the earth-nature. The great task before mankind today is to prepare the ground and fulfil the conditions for its early manifestation. For it is only the advent of the supramental that will really bring about a new order of human life on this planet. Sensitive and ardent souls all over the earth giving up all egoistic and vital and physical demands and placing themselves entirely at the disposal of this Truth-consciousness can constitute themselves into the nucleus of such a new world order. The evolution of the Supermind in man and its increasing hold on human affairs is the only hope of human unity.

Religion with the passage of time should outgrow itself if it has to uplift people spiritually. But if the ways of its own transcendence are blocked or lost then it inevitably decays and falls away. Religion divorced from its originating

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1033.

Spirit becomes a hindrance to human progress. In the conscious realisation of a higher aim lies the salvation of the modern man, the realisation of the spiritual basis of life on earth. Religion, as we see today, is powerless to guide man further, and modern science too has realised its inability to provide a way out of this impasse. Exclusive preoccupation with material means and the utter neglect of inner and spiritual life has led humanity to obscurity and desperation. It is only through linking man's deepest urge with the supreme Spirit that the crisis could be overcome. The latest discoveries of science, and particularly that of the intraphysical or the more subtle physical, with an intricate atomic movement indicative of a latent indeterminacy and a dimmed suppressed intelligence of its own constitute a significant step in the desired direction. In addition to this inward turn there seems to be in modern science also the effort towards a synthesis of all the strands of thought of all the branches of scientific knowledge. Modern art, literature and psychology are attempting to create a new vision by an interior seeing and surrealist expression. In the process they have become absorbed, obsessed and obscured by their own subjectivity. Their 'interior monologue' has not helped them to rise to any luminous heights of sublime or creative self-expression, for instead of rising into the superconscious they got involved in the subconscious. It is this plunge into darkness that is responsible for the disruption, division and dissatisfaction in modern society.

Modern thought must needs outgrow its present limitations and turn towards the knowledge of the Whole Man and not merely his physical-vital-mental nature. A new and widened consciousness, a vision of the totality of human life and existence is already forcing itself through a growing number of modern thinkers. Unfortunately the average modern man is not aware of the Spirit-centre within him which is the key and the basis of individual and collective evolution. To become conscious of this luminous centre and make it effective in human affairs he must relinquish his egoistic nature. He must turn increasingly to that greater Reality of which his soul is but a spark, and of which the entire universe is but an objective self-extension. It is the realisation of the divine

nature secreted in him that leads man towards a better understanding of the universe around.

It is, in fact, the Divine Himself Who is the real integrating Power, raising man from his ignorance and darkness into a luminous awareness of the divine nature in all things. The Divine alone can mould man and reconcile the triple elements in his struggle,—that of the Truth-plane above, transcendent and seemingly remote, that of the universal movement or evolutionary force, and that of the divine Immanence in man himself, his soul-entity. God alone is the Supreme and all is His, because He is not only contained in all and in each particle and movement of the universe, but He embraces all, and yet in his own supracosmic Transcendence, He is above and beyond all movement. This is the mystery of the Supreme Divine. And to become conscious of the Divine in all appearances and statuses, in all His conditions, is the one way towards knowing the entire and integral Reality. This is a primary and basic need of modern man, who has either rejected God completely, or has reduced Him to one partial manifestation of His Infinite Being,—such as all-pervading Ether, an Absolute, an Energy, Cosmic Force or Universal Spirit, the Life or Time-Spirit, Mind Principle or Universal Mind. But He is all these at once, and infinitely more.⁶⁶

The Supreme Reality is not only supra-cosmic and transcendent but also cosmic and universal, immanent and individual. He pervades all, He is the all and is in the all. He is the Divine, the multitudinous souls as well as the All-Soul of the universe. It is supremely He who though immutable and indeterminable through self-extension becomes the universe of manifestation as well as descends into the depth of inconscience. It is this secret presence of the Divine in the world of manifestation that holds the promise and basis of divine life on the earth and the evolution of a divine order of beings and a new humanity.

⁶⁶ Nathaniel Pearson 'Spirituality and the Modern World,' in *The Advent*, April 1947, p. 112.

Mankind has been benefited broadly by two central spiritual streams which were rather complementary to each other. The one that watered the West has been essentially the aspiration for the salvation of the world, the emancipation of humanity and for the descent and manifestation of the Divine's Grace, Compassion and Love for its accomplishment. The other that got perfected in the East and especially in India, was the liberation of the individual through his ascent into the Divine himself. An exclusive stress on the first results in a preoccupation with the material world, whereas the all too exclusive preoccupation with individual liberation leads to a complete disregard of the world of humanity. An integration of these two ways, a wider and luminous fusion of their insights, will provide a tangible and enduring basis of spiritual life on the earth. The supreme Reality has two aspects—the negative or static aspect and the positive or dynamic aspect. The realisation of this double truth of Reality alone can ensure world unity and integration. The development and stress on the physical basis of life has proved a necessary and significant step in human evolution. For it has helped mind to penetrate into the depths and mysteries of material nature. But mind is neither the final stage nor the most perfect instrument of terrestrial evolution. Man is not the term of evolution, nor reason the supreme expression of Nature. It is only when the supramental Truth-consciousness which is the very dynamic light and power of the Divine emerges and takes full possession of the earth-life that the world will witness the beginning of a new order of life and existence based on unity, harmony and universal love.

Evolution according to Sri Aurobindo, is the progressive unfoldment of Spirit on the earth. As man passes from the vital to the mental and from the mental to the higher levels of consciousness, society moves through several stages of evolution. From the clan, the tribe and the community it grows into a nation, and finally into some form of human fellowship. Similarly, as man discovers within himself the deeper oneness of the spirit, the ideal of human unity will crystallise itself into some tangible form.

Sri Aurobindo in his masterly and prophetic presentation of

the ideal of human unity is extremely cautious about prediction. He aims at the supreme heights, but his method is fully rational and looks beyond only when reason has been allowed to run its full gamut. Unity must be realised first in the inner being before it is manifested in the outer life of the community. The religion of humanity will be objectivised only when mankind realises its innate oneness in the Spirit. But there is no rule of priority as such between spirit and form and any of the two, the nation idea or the state, may precede the other.⁶⁷

The Age of Reason passes through three phases namely, democracy, socialism and anarchism. The overwhelming concentration of power in a socialist state leads to a natural reaction against it in favour of anarchism. If capitalist democracy and socialist totalitarianism accommodate each other then anarchism may not succeed so soon the socialist order. Only in a spiritual society can socialism and democracy coalesce without prejudice to both. This needs a total transformation of human consciousness, a radical change of his nature. This process will be quickened with the manifestation of the supramental consciousness on the earth-nature.

Sri Aurobindo's *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle* not only comprehend the relevant facts and events of history through the ages but also outline the unfoldment of human destiny and the scheme of things which Nature has been secretly working out for man. It is significant that Sri Aurobindo views the problem of human unity in the general background of Nature's evolutionary progression. He clearly perceives in the workings of Nature the unfoldment of a secret purpose and the fulfilment of a supreme will. Nature seems to work out slowly but steadily the ideal of human unity through the vicissitudes of history. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

The emergence of an ideal in human thought is always the

⁶⁷ For example in Germany the nation idea appeared first and then the body of the state got materialised, whereas in the United Kingdom the State comprising the units Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland preceded the nation-idea.

sign of an intention in Nature, but not always of an intention to accomplish; sometimes it indicates only an attempt which is predestined to temporary failure. For Nature is slow and patient in her methods. She takes up ideas and half carries them out, then drops them by the way-side to resume them in some future era with a better combination. She tempts humanity, her thinking instrument, and tests how far it is ready for the harmony she has imagined; she allows and invites man to attempt and fail, so that he may learn and succeed better, another time. Still, the ideal having once made its way to the front of thought, must certainly be attempted, and this ideal of human unity is likely to figure largely among the determining forces of the future; for the intellectual and material circumstances of the age have prepared and almost impose it, specially the scientific discoveries which have made our earth so small that its vastest kingdoms seem now no more than the provinces of a single country.⁶⁸

This being the basic intention of Nature, Sri Aurobindo sees in the many wars, conflicts and the aggressive postures of nations the secret strategy or the attempt of Nature to fulfil itself. It also points to and inevitably leads mankind towards some sort of international authority and unity. For unity is not an arbitrary idea; it is the very basis of life. It is at the foundation of all things and evolutionary Nature is moved towards its conscious realisation. And humanity too must one day realise it.

Sri Aurobindo lays great emphasis on the psychological and spiritual transformation of human nature if the ideal of human unity has to be a living fact. Unity must be achieved but not at the expense of diversity. Nature attempts at a perfect spiritual unity and not uniformity. Unlimited diversity and perfect unity are in fact complementary principles. Uniformity can never be the basis of unity, for, indeed, it is not the law of life. Life exists by diversity, and in fact insists that each individual while one with the rest of the group in its essentiality and universality shall be in some ordered detail of variation unique and singular. Nature

⁶⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, pp. 19-20.

secures variation and diversity through division into groups but insists on freedom from uniformity by the innate force of individuality in the members of the group. The unity of the race must therefore be founded on the deepest laws of life—on the free and unfettered union of nations, and the nations themselves must be natural associations of free individuals.

But the ideal of human unity itself would remain an utopia if individuals and nations are not guided in their development by the supreme social trinity—Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The ideal of liberty which has been so loudly proclaimed by the so-called progressive nations of the world has yet remained only mechanical and operated only in the outward sphere and not touched the inner core of their life. Equality too that has been so much sought and struggled for has been equally mechanical and unreal. And so far as fraternity is concerned it is not even considered as a practical ideal and efforts are afoot to substitute for it either the principle of equal association or a comradeship of labour. This is because humanity as yet lives mostly either on the physical or on the vital plane. Social, political and constitutional freedom, equality and 'mutual help in an equal association may by themselves be most useful, but do not constitute the central core of the inner life of humanity. They are useful only as means for man's development towards a change of his inner nature, and when the change is once effected as an outward expression of that change. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

Freedom, equality, brotherhood are the three godheads of the soul; they cannot be really achieved through the external machinery of society or by man so long as he lives only in the individual and the communal ego. When the ego claims liberty, it arrives at competitive individualism. When it asserts equality, it arrives first at strife, then at an attempt to ignore the variations of Nature, and, as the sole way of doing that successfully, it constructs an artificial and machine made society. A society that pursues liberty as its ideal is unable to achieve equality; a society that aims at equality will be obliged to sacrifice liberty. For

the ego to speak of fraternity is for it to speak of something contrary to its nature. All that it knows is association for the pursuit of common egoistic ends and the utmost that it can arrive at is a closer organization for the equal distribution of labour, production, consumption and enjoyment.

Yet is brotherhood the real key to the triple gospel of the ideal of humanity. The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be founded on anything else. But brotherhood exists only in the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else. For this brotherhood is not a matter either of physical kinship or of vital association or of intellectual agreement. When the soul claims freedom, it is the freedom of its self-development, the self-development of the divine in man in all his being. When it claims equality, what it is claiming is that freedom equally for all and the recognition of the same soul, the same godhead in all human beings. When it strives for brotherhood, it is founding that equal freedom of self-development on a common aim, a common life, a unity of mind and feeling founded upon the recognition of this inner spiritual unity. These three things are in fact the nature of the soul; for freedom, equality, unity are the eternal attributes of the spirit. It is the practical recognition of this truth, it is the awakening of the soul in man and the attempt to get him to live from his soul and not from his ego which is the inner meaning of religion, and it is that to which the religion of humanity also must arrive before it can fulfil itself in the life of the race.⁶⁹

The ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity are therefore the attributes of the soul and not the products of mental or ethical perfection. They will have to be realised first in the soul of humanity before they would be truly manifested on the surface. The need for political and administrative unification of the race through some external agency is no doubt great, but it can be enduring and perfect only when humanity discovers its oversoul and by it the true law of its life and growth.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 314-15.

The modern religion of humanity is mostly intellectual in content and 'is the shadow of a spirit that is yet unborn, but is preparing for its birth'.⁷⁰ And it is therefore in the Spirit that true unity can be realised and the three *mantras* of human fellowship find their fulfilment. Unity, order and harmony can be achieved only when humanity gets ready to discover, live and work from its soul-status. More than this is the all-effectuating force and light of the supramental Truth-consciousness which alone has the power to change the very nature of inconscience and ignorance. Sri Aurobindo speaks of its increasing emergence and action in the earth-nature aimed at the radical transformation of the physical, vital and mental. With its progressive manifestation on the earth the nature of the individual as well as the collectivity will be radically transmuted making human unity a living, shining fact. Man, therefore, needs to discover his soul, and having discovered it to live in it and through it open himself fully and unreservedly to the transforming power and light of the Supermind. For it is the Supermind that will not only bring about a lasting human unity but eventually lead to the emergence of a gnostic race.

In the conditions of the world at present some kind of world union becomes not only necessary but seems inevitable. This world union can only stem out of a spiritual life—a divine life. The spiritual perfection of the individual is the first condition of this perfected life on earth. The second is the perfection of the spiritual and pragmatic relation of the individual with the rest of the world around him. This implies a complete universality and oneness with all life. The third is the radical change in the total life and consciousness of humanity which alone ensures a perfected collective life on the earth. But a perfected collective life of this kind can be founded only on the emergence of the supramental consciousness.

The many secrets of nature placed at the disposal of mankind by science are misused by the individual or communal ego and not for the discovery or realisation of a higher and fuller life of unity and peace. The result is increasing unrest,

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

conflict and rivalry for the possession and enjoyment of the world. Perhaps this is the Nature's strategy to arrive at a more stable international order based on freedom, mutual trust and cooperation. There is already in the atmosphere the idea of a new world order and sensitive people all over have begun to feel a strange kinship uniting them. The age of reason seems to give in to a new age of subjectivity. Meanwhile the progress of reason in the social, economic and political fields seems to experiment with the systems of democracy, socialism and anarchism. These are the three stages in the evolution of a new polity for our times. The first is individualistic and increasingly democratic and has liberty for its fundamental principle; the second is the socialistic that has equality and the State for its basic principle, and the third the anarchistic with brotherhood and not government for its basis. The strength and utility of reason will be tested by its capacity to take mankind from the first two stages to the third. It is now slowly dawning upon the race that reason cannot solve the problems of its interrelated and conflicting egoisms, and to bring about within it a perfect principle of unity it must give way to a higher principle and guide.

The pursuit of democratic ideal brings about the rule of the economically dominant class over the ignorant mass and in the process promotes a war of classes which ends in the survival, as Sri Aurobindo says, not of the spiritually, rationally or physically fittest but of the vitally successful and the most lucky ones. And its failure paves the way for socialism which aims not only at an organised economic battle but an organised order and peace. Democratic freedom demands only a rational, will-distribution of freedom, but socialism goes a step further and lays emphasis on social and political equality and ultimately claims full control of the entire social, political and economic order. 'For so only can the collective reason and intelligent will of the race overcome the egoism of individualistic life and bring about a perfect principle and rational order of society in a harmonious world.'⁷¹ In the attempt to minimise this total subordination of the

⁷¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, p. 250.

individual to the collectivity democratic socialists are often subjected to strange illogicalities. For they try to combine individual freedom with the collectivist emancipation without trying out the full possibilities of socialism.

Liberty protected by a State in which all are politically equal, was the idea that the individualistic democracy attempted to elaborate. Equality, social and political equality, enforced through a perfect and careful order by a State which is the organised will of the whole community, is the idea on which socialist democracy stakes its future. If that too fails to make good, the rational and democratic Idea may fall back upon a third form of society founding an essential rather than formal liberty and equality upon fraternal comradeship in a free community, the ideal of intellectual as of spiritual Anarchism.⁷²

The claims for equality like the thirst for liberty is essentially individualistic in its origin. The social Reason concedes in the beginning only theoretical liberty, namely, political equality before the law, but not effective political equality. Later it attempts a more complete communal justice on the basis of a political, economic, social and educational equality. But eventually 'equality like individualistic liberty may turn out to be not a panacea but an obstacle in the way of the best management and control of life by the collective reason and will of the community'⁷³, if it is an artificial or superficial equality. If both equality and liberty disappear from the scene then we will be left with the third element of the democratic trinity, namely, brotherhood. But brotherhood without the first two will be empty and ineffective as the social basis of life. Under the absolute control of the collectivist socialist State 'the only liberty left at the end would be the freedom to serve the community under the rigorous direction of the State authority; the only equality would be an association of all alike in a Spartan or Roman spirit of civic service with perhaps a like status, theoretically equal at least for all functions; the only brotherhood would be the sense of comradeship in devoted dedication to the

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 251-2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

organised social Self, the State.⁷⁴ A socialist polity in its eagerness to remove internal competition, exploitation, and to enforce co-ordination and perfect functioning of the society threatens to culminate inevitably in totalitarianism. Rigorous totalitarianism on the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat amounts to the dictatorship of one political party in the name of the people. Non-proletarian totalitarianism is much worse for it discards democratic equality no less than political liberty.

In Russia the Marxist system of Socialism has been turned almost into a gospel. Originally a rationalistic system worked out by a logical thinker and discoverer and systematiser of ideas, it has been transformed by the peculiar turn of the Russian mind into something like a social religion, a collectivist mystique, an inviolable body of doctrines with all denial or departure treated as a punishable heresy, a social cult enforced by the intolerant piety and enthusiasm of a converted people. In Fascist countries the swing away from Rationalism is marked and open; a surface vital subjectivism has taken its place and it is in the name of the national soul and its self-expression and manifestation that the leaders and prophets teach and violently enforce their totalitarian mystique. The essential features are the same in Russia and in Fascist countries, so that to the eye of the outsider their deadly quarrel seems to be a blood-feud of kinsmen fighting for the inheritance of their slaughtered parents—Democracy and the Age of Reason. There is the seizure of the life of the community by a dominant individual leader, Fuhrer, Duce, Dictator, head of a small active minority, the Nazi, Fascist or Communist party, and supported by a militarised partisan force; there is a rapid crystallisation of the social, economic, political life of the people into a new rigid organisation effectively controlled at every point; there is the compulsory casting of thought, education, expression, action into a set iron mould, a fixed system of ideas and life-motives, with a fierce and ruthless, often a sanguinary repression of all that denies and differs; there is a total unprecedented compression

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 254-5.

of the whole communal existence so as to compel a maximum efficiency and a complete unanimity of mind, speech, feeling, life.⁷⁵

When this trend becomes universal then the age of Reason comes to an end and makes the world open for the ways of a deeper spirit. It is at this stage that Anarchism begins to gain weight in proportion as the pressure of the State on the individual increases. Anarchism, then, assumes various forms: there is the egoistic vitalistic anarchism which reacts against all forms of authority and asserts the fundamental right of man to live his own life. And there is a higher intellectual anarchism which cannot tolerate the rule of man by man for according to it any form of government is a violation of the supreme principle of nature, which, when left to operate by itself, will naturally bring about the perfection of the human race. This is because reason and love are inherent in man, and an enlightened individual who loves freedom will certainly recognise it in others. The power that can blend the aspirations of all in a community is that of love, fellow-feeling and natural sympathy. The two powers of reason and love will among themselves lead humanity towards free cooperative communism. It is governmental compulsion that hinders cooperation and free union among fellow men. This idealism does not take sufficient account of the vital egoism and the infrarational nature of man. As such a free communist society will either degenerate and disrupt or give way to a new form of collectivism. According to Sri Aurobindo:

The solution lies not in the reason but in the soul of man, in its spiritual tendencies. It is a spiritual, an inner freedom that can alone create a perfect human order. It is a spiritual, a greater than the rational enlightenment that can alone illumine the vital nature of man and impose harmony on its self-seekings, antagonisms and discords. A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfound law of love is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution no other can replace it. But this brotherhood and

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-6.

love will not proceed by the vital instincts or the reason where they can be met, baffled or deflected by opposite reasonings and other discordant instincts. Nor will it found itself in the natural heart of man where there are plenty of other passions to combat it. It is in the soul that it must find its roots. For so only can egoism disappear and the true individualism of the unique godhead in each man found itself on the true communism of the equal godhead in the race; for the Spirit, the inmost Self, the universal Godhead in every being is that whose very nature of diverse oneness it is to realise the perfection of its individual life and nature in the existence of all, in the universal life and nature.⁷⁶

It is only in a spiritualised society that each will be the divine law unto himself, a soul living in the divine. Liberated from the ego he will be guided by the law of his own divine nature. The idea that mankind is a divine reality was first born in the minds of the eighteenth century rationalists who presented humanitarianism as an ideal substitute for the ecclesiastical religion. Their great ideals were those of social justice and international peace, prevention of cruelty in any form to living beings and human unity. This intellectual need for unity is not the end; it becomes enduring only when it stabilises itself upon the deeper foundation of the spirit. If human unity has to be real and enduring 'Man, the individual, has to become and to live as a universal being; his limited mental consciousness has to widen to the superconscious unity in which each embraces all; his narrow heart has to learn the infinite embrace and replace its lusts and discords by universal love and his restricted vital being to become equal to the whole shock of the universe upon it and capable of universal delight; his very physical being has to know itself as no separate entity but as one with and sustaining itself the whole flow of the indivisible Force that is all things; his whole nature has to reproduce in the individual the unity, the harmony, the oneness-in-all of the supreme existence-Consciousness-Bliss.'⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 273-4.

⁷⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Vol. I (Calcutta, 1943), p. 133.

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