

Sri Aurobindo's Message
of
August 15, 1947

—*Some Perceptions and Perspectives*—

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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*Readers, Subscribers, Advertisers and Friends,
please note that this is a double issue.*

There will therefore be no issue dated September 2007.

August 15 is Sri Aurobindo's birthday.

It is but natural that it should have a special significance for his disciples, devotees and admirers.

But this date also acquired another significance when on this day in 1947, India achieved political liberation from the British.

Sri Aurobindo, who had been active in the political struggle for India's independence before he retired from the public field to concentrate on his spiritual pursuits, interpreted this 'coincidence' as the sanction and seal of the Divine Power, which guided his steps, on the work with which he began life.¹ All India Radio, Trichinopoly, requested him to give a message on that momentous occasion. Rather than give a formal message, Sri Aurobindo wrote of his 'five dreams'.

It is sixty years since Sri Aurobindo penned that message. Much water has flown down the Ganga since then. How far have the dreams of Sri Aurobindo borne fruit? Where are we heading? What is the import of Sri Aurobindo's words in today's world?

Mother India decided to invite some writer-devotees to explore these themes in our August 2007 Special number.

1. *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, pp. 400-01.

WORDS OF THE MOTHER

(The outline of a study project “On the Spiritual History of India” was read to the Mother. She commented:)

No! It won't do. It is not to be done that way. You should begin with a big BANG! You were trying to show the continuity of History, with Sri Aurobindo as the outcome, the culmination. It is false entirely.

Sri Aurobindo does not belong to History; he is outside and beyond History.

Till the birth of Sri Aurobindo, religions and spiritualities were always centred on past figures, and they were showing as “the goal” the negation of life upon earth. So, you had a choice between two alternatives: either

—a life *in* this world with its round of petty pleasures and pains, joys and sufferings, threatened by hell if you were not behaving properly, or

—an escape *into* another world, heaven, nirvana, moksha....

Between these two there is nothing much to choose, they are equally bad.

Sri Aurobindo has told us that this was a fundamental mistake which accounts for the weakness and degradation of India. Buddhism, Jainism, Illusionism were sufficient to sap all energy out of the country.

True, India is the only place in the world which is still aware that something else than Matter exists. The other countries have quite forgotten it: Europe, America and elsewhere.... That is why she still has a message to preserve and deliver to the world. But at present she is splashing and floundering in the muddle.

Sri Aurobindo has shown that the truth does not lie in running away from earthly life but in remaining *in* it, to *transform it, divinise it*, so that the Divine can manifest **HERE, in this PHYSICAL WORLD.**

THE MOTHER

(*On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 212-13)

* * *

By studying carefully what Sri Aurobindo has said on *all subjects* one can easily reach a complete knowledge of the things of this world.

THE MOTHER

(*On Education*, CWM, Vol. 12, p. 208)

* * *

Mother, has this day, the fifteenth of August, an occult or a simple significance? For, in history, important events occurred on this day.

What exactly do you mean? The fifteenth of August is Sri Aurobindo's birthday. Therefore, it is a date which has a capital importance in the life of the earth, from the physical point of view. So?

On August fifteenth other important events took place?...

What, the liberation of India? Is it because the liberation of India came about on the fifteenth of August? And so, it is necessary to tell you why it happened, you can't find it out by yourself, can you? It needs to be said, does it? I think Sri Aurobindo has written it also, hasn't he, in the message he gave? Hasn't he said it?*

THE MOTHER

(Questions and Answers 1956, CWM, Vol. 8, p. 265)

* Mother is referring to the message Sri Aurobindo gave on 15 August 1947. The full text is given on the next pages.

THE FIFTEENTH OF AUGUST 1947*

AUGUST 15th is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But it has a significance not only for us, but for Asia and the whole world; for it signifies the entry into the comity of nations of a new power with untold potentialities which has a great part to play in determining the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity. To me personally it must naturally be gratifying that this date which was notable only for me because it was my own birthday celebrated annually by those who have accepted my gospel of life, should have acquired this vast significance. As a mystic, I take this identification, not as a coincidence or fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power which guides my steps on the work with which I began life. Indeed almost all the world movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though at that time they looked like impossible dreams, I can observe on this day either approaching fruition or initiated and on the way to their achievement.

I have been asked for a message on this great occasion, but I am perhaps hardly in a position to give one. All I can do is to make a personal declaration of the aims and ideals conceived in my childhood and youth and now watched in their beginning of fulfilment, because they are relevant to the freedom of India, since they are a part of what I believe to be India's future work, something in which she cannot but take a leading position. For I have always held and said that India was arising, not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion, greatness, power and prosperity,—though these too she must not neglect,—and certainly not like others to acquire domination of other peoples, but to live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race. Those aims and ideals were in their natural order these: a revolution which would achieve India's freedom and her unity; the resurgence and liberation of Asia and her return to the great role which she had played in the progress of human civilisation; the rise of a new, a greater, brighter and nobler life for mankind which for its entire realisation would rest outwardly on an international unification of the separate existence of the peoples, preserving and securing their national life but drawing them together into an overriding and consummating oneness; the gift by India of her spiritual knowledge and her means for the spiritualisation of life to the whole race; finally, a new step in the evolution which, by uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of the many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and to dream of

** Sri Aurobindo wrote this message at the request of All India Radio, Tiruchirapalli, for broadcast on the eve of the day when India achieved independence, 15 August 1947. The text submitted was found to be too long for the allotted time-slot. Sri Aurobindo revised it, and the shorter version was broadcast on 14 August 1947.*

individual perfection and a perfect society.

India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom. At one time it almost seemed as if she might relapse into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. Fortunately there has now developed a strong possibility that this disastrous relapse will be avoided. The wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly makes it possible that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that the Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as for ever settled or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. The partition of the country must go,—it is to be hoped by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, the division must and will go. For without it the destiny of India might be seriously impaired and even frustrated. But that must not be.

Asia has arisen and large parts of it have been liberated or are at this moment being liberated; its other still subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done and that will be done today or tomorrow. There India has her part to play and has begun to play it with an energy and ability which already indicate the measure of her possibilities and the place she can take in the council of the nations.

The unification of mankind is under way, though only in an imperfect initiative, organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and, if the experience of history can be taken as a guide, it must inevitably increase until it conquers. Here too India has begun to play a prominent part and, if she can develop that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift development. A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For in any case the unification is a necessity in the course of Nature, an inevitable movement and its achievement can be safely foretold. Its necessity for the nations also is clear, for without it the freedom of the small peoples can never be safe hereafter and even large and powerful nations cannot really be secure. India, if she remains

divided, will not herself be sure of her safety. It is therefore to the interest of all that union should take place. Only human imbecility and stupid selfishness could prevent it. Against that, it has been said, even the gods strive in vain; but it cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will. Nationalism will then have fulfilled itself; an international spirit and outlook must grow up and international forms and institutions; even it may be such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship and a voluntary fusion of cultures may appear in the process of the change and the spirit of nationalism losing its militancy may find these things perfectly compatible with the integrity of its own outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

The spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.

The rest is still a personal hope and an idea and ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this evolution is to take place, since it must come through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.

Such is the content which I put into this date of India's liberation; whether or how far or how soon this connection will be fulfilled, depends upon this new and free India.



(Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 474-77)

[Note: Sentences from the shorter version (*Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, pp. 478-80) have been used as "running fillers" throughout this issue of *Mother India*.]

THE MESSAGE OF AUGUST 15

It is a symbolic act of fate that India, the land known through the ages for her spirituality, is celebrating her Independence on the very date on which falls the birthday of her greatest living Master of Yoga, Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo will be 78 on August 15. He stands for that deepest and highest Independence, the freedom of the soul from the shackles of mortal ignorance, the liberation of the human into the Divine Consciousness. But it is worth remembering that he was once in the van of political life—the universally acknowledged leader of Bengal in revolt against Lord Curzon's scheme to partition that province. A close friend of Tilak's, a friend whom Tilak was always eager to consult, he shaped the nationalist mind of India at a critical period and the stamp he put upon it is visible in spite of various changes that have taken place. Not once only, but three times during his political career he was charged with sedition by the British Government. Undaunted by the repressive governmental machinery, he kept in the forefront of the nationalist fight, until the call came to him for a greater and more revolutionary service.

Side by side with his political activity he had been practising Yoga for several years. A stage of development was reached when he felt that his mission was to strike out a new path of spiritual growth that would not only lead the mortal's consciousness to the Infinite and the Eternal but also bring a dynamic divinity to the world for completely transforming the world's life. He is no ascetic of the lonely Beyond: his aim is to effect a top-to-toe change in human nature, so that man the mental being may be henceforth a supramental one. The Ashram in Pondicherry that has sprung up around him is a scene of multifarious activity, a field for a hundred talents and aptitudes—men of diverse types developing by a series of inner Yogic experiences and by the expression of those experiences in outer life. The Ashram is a glowing focus of India's innate spirituality, fraught with immense possibilities of irradiating the entire life of the nation.

The Eyes of the World on Sri Aurobindo

Eyes all over the world are awakening to this centre of light. The Indian Government's Ministry of External Affairs has been receiving enquiries from individuals and institutions abroad, especially from America, about the aims and activities of the Ashram in Pondicherry. Even arrangements are being discussed now for taking documentary films of the Ashram. And recently the Government ordered, for use in Indian Embassies in foreign countries, forty sets of Sri Aurobindo's *Collected Poems and Plays* as well as his philosophical exposition of his Yogic vision of the world, *The Life Divine*, about which Aldous Huxley has remarked in a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy: "I consider it a book not merely of the highest importance as regards its content, but remarkably fine as a piece of philosophic and religious literature." Eager minds

in both England and the U.S.A. are turning to the Aurobindonian thought: two universities in the latter—Stanford and Cornell—have prescribed *Essays on the Gita* and *The Life Divine* respectively as part of post-graduate study. In India, too, Benares University has put Sri Aurobindo on its syllabus. The move, in the West no less than the East, to suggest his name for the Nobel Prize is perhaps the intensest testimony to the growing recognition of him as a world-figure of far-reaching significance.

But there was, up to very lately, a tendency amongst us to confine the significance of Sri Aurobindo to the realm of Yoga and philosophy and literature. It was not sufficiently realised that his so-called retirement from public life or even his comparative aloofness at present in the midst of his own Ashram implies no renunciation of the world's labour. Of course, visitors to the Ashram could never harbour the delusion that Sri Aurobindo had cut himself off from all earthly occupations. But the country at large was too much engrossed in leaders who seemed in more apparent ways to concern themselves with secular affairs. Two whole years of Independence had to elapse before the sense kindled up that in the strange fact of the birthday of Sri Aurobindo coinciding with the day of India's liberation there lay the clear pointer to Sri Aurobindo's being by his spiritual *tapasya* not only the secret force behind our freedom but also the one personality with whom our free future is bound up and who alone can be the architect of our true greatness.

It was indeed a sign of the times that when Pandit Nehru was recently in Calcutta a bundle of leaflets was thrown into his car, demanding of him to bring Sri Aurobindo back to Bengal. A still more lively portent is the decision taken in Bengal to celebrate on an all-India basis the birthday of Sri Aurobindo. A strong reception committee has been formed with eminent men as members. The committee has appealed to all people as also to public institutions, clubs or associations to come forward and co-operate and make the celebration a success worthy of Bengal. Here is the first distinct articulation of a new tendency in the country, trying to bring about a break-away from old moorings. Here is the dawn promising a wonderful day if only we could bestir ourselves—the dawn of an authentic vision of Sri Aurobindo's position in India—the position of a Rishi, a seer of spiritual truth who brings to mankind the creative word that becomes flesh, a bearer of the mantra whose luminous power gives life the rhythm of a divine rapture.

The Mission of a Master Rishi

The genuine Rishi is no mere poet of supernal mysteries: he lets loose upon the world through both his poetic utterance and his life-movement a spiritual force remoulding the world around him in the image of the Divine and reordering it into a harmony beyond the human. The Rishi is not the guru of just an enlightened coterie: he is the source of a whole people's culture and civilisation. Of course, he has always an intense nucleus of select disciples following the path of his Yoga and without

such a nucleus his work would never establish itself on earth; but his Yoga is meant to take up all the departments of earth's life into its fiery heart and, goldening their motives and motions, make them serve in various manners the Light that is for ever. He extends his influence everywhere, disdains no function of the national being, shirks no responsibility of world-existence. He can be the leader in all the fields, give to each thing the right touch, set going each activity along the true line, lay the profound base and direct the lofty construction of every important scheme of secular growth.

Yes, Sri Aurobindo can be the nation's leader. But let us not commit the mistake of thinking that he must act like ordinary leaders, deliver an abundance of speeches, hurry from conference to conference. No doubt, a certain amount of ordinary leadership has to be accepted but we must leave a Rishi to act as he best knows how. Jayaprakash Narain once asked Sri Aurobindo to take Gandhiji's place. The request was reverent; yet when we ponder the magnitude of the Aurobindonian mission we see the incongruity of asking him to fill the gap left by anyone, no matter what the seriousness of the gap. This mission is unique and cannot be equated with any other: it is far deeper and higher and ampler, far more radically creative. It can do all that any other can, but with an entirely different orientation, and it does not stop short with the ideals set up by morality and religion. Sri Aurobindo does not wish to preach mere brotherhood and service and honest social behaviour. All these things are compassed by his work, but the power for them he transmits from a consciousness different from the one in which even the most moral and religious man lives. Nor is a finely cultured mind—the artistic and the contemplative intellect, the consciousness of the poet-philosopher—the ultimate fountainhead of the Aurobindonian influence. Sri Aurobindo is indeed a poet-philosopher of a rare order, bringing a balanced beauty, a vivid wisdom; and the effort of the moralist and the religious man at detachment from gross animal desires and egoistic motives finds fulfilment in him; yet are they not his all-sufficient ends—they are only the means of his master-passion. His master-passion is not mental brilliance or the triumph of a human virtue. It is the sheer surpassing of the human level, the continual union with the Supreme Being and the direct expression of that Being in all the ways of our nature.

The Rishi's Threefold God-realisation

To get an inkling of the authentic Rishi's fountainhead of influence we must try to grasp what India's scriptures have meant by the Supreme Being. First and foremost the Supreme Being is a mighty transcendence of time and life, an infinite Consciousness and Bliss immutably seated above the waxing and waning of the world's years. A splendid stanza of the ancient Upanishads translated with revelatory force by Sri Aurobindo catches in words that sovereign status: "There the sun shines not and the moon has no lustre and the stars are blind; there these lightnings flash not nor

any earthly fire. For all that is bright is but the shadow of His brightness and by His shining all this shineth." The Rishi who has attained union with the Transcendence carries, among things that fade, a smiling Eternity unbarred by appearances, unmarred by phenomena. To his realisation we cannot apply our measure of moments and confine it within an age of seventy-eight or any other. The Spirit's timeless plenitude that is his fundamental self grows not old as men grow old who live in the clutch of the passing and the mortal. But the Eternity that is above time and life is not utterly the opposite of the changing and the phenomenal. When the Upanishads chant, "By His shining all this shineth," they do more than trace the source of our cosmos in the Beyond. While opening our world-beglamoured eyes to the Truth whose infinity no light on earth equals, they do not cut off earth's light from that Truth. It is God who has emanated the world, the world is at bottom His own stuff of divinity: omnipresent, He pervades occultly all phenomena. The many-sided vision of the Upanishads no sooner found tongue in the splendid stanza about the supra-cosmic "There" than it followed up with another as splendid about the cosmic "Here" of the Divine. In Sri Aurobindo's vibrant and wide-sweeping English, this Sanscrit mantra runs: "The Eternal is before us and the Eternal is behind us and to the south and to the north of us and above and below and extended everywhere. All this magnificent universe is nothing but the Eternal." The Rishi is inwardly one with a Cosmic Consciousness supporting with a limitless peace a limitless activity, a myriad variety of forms. Not the one body alone which we know as his makes the reality of him. It cannot circumscribe the far-stretching continuity of his being and his becoming. In all quarters he feels his own self at work. He overflows the span of an individual life. The march of the centuries is not alien to him, the rising and falling and rising again of the endless energy around us is part of him in the union he has achieved with the Beauty of ancient days that is ever new.

Nor, when we have seen Rishihood in its cosmic aspect as well as in its transcendence, have we said the last word about it. There is still another aspect—the individual. Our universe is not merely the occult omnipresence of the Divine: it is also intended to be His manifestation. The immense unity and the immense multiplicity are pressing forward to express in the cosmic formula a divine life developing from the individual soul-spark, the flame of the personal godhead, which is enshrined in creatures and which one of the Upanishads rendered by Sri Aurobindo sums up with intuitive intensity: "The Purusha that is within is no larger than the finger of a man; he is like a blazing fire that is without smoke; he is lord of his past and his future; he alone is today and he alone shall be tomorrow." An intricate evolution focussing itself in individuals and proceeding through rebirths of the individual soul is worked out from a beginning and a base that appears to be the opposite of everything divine. The Rishi is he who under the figure of his personality develops to the utmost the secret psyche around which mind and life-force and body are organised: he brings it to the fore, envelops all his movements with its sublimities and its sweetnesses, enters with

its pure radiance into intimate ennobling relation with fellow creatures. Moreover, he aspires to make the psyche a repository of the Transcendent Truth from which it has come and which is ultimately meant to be manifested by it. For in that Truth is the archetype, the pre-existent perfection of all that is here evolving; and the descent of this archetype into the psyche so that the mind and life-force and body organised around the soul may themselves become not only instinct with the soul's purity but also charged with the plenary knowledge and power and bliss whose delight is the soul. The individual aspect of Rishihood is perhaps the most important of all, since in it the Divine's creativity is at its most potent for world-values. More than by any mystic in the past a stress is put upon it by Sri Aurobindo.

The Aurobindonian Message

He declares that Rishihood in former ages did not sufficiently realise the meaning of evolutionary spirituality. To throw an aureole about life's hours and suggest the personal Godhead through the human figure is not enough. A bound has been felt by all mystics, an irreducible imperfection in our members that compels us finally to drop them to look for the end of our soul's journey in a plane that is supra-terrestrial—a Vedantic Brahmaloaka, a Buddhist Nirvana, a Vaishnavite Gokul or Heaven. But how then shall we satisfy the hunger that every part of us has for its own perfection? A divine mind, a divine life-force, a divine body—these are what our nature cries for: unless they are achieved, the evolutionary travail of the soul has no complete justification. Sri Aurobindo affirms that in the Transcendence there is a dynamic Consciousness waiting to incarnate on earth the ideality, the perfection of all the parts of our complex being. Ever since man awoke to his own incompleteness and to a superhuman Presence behind or within phenomena the dream of a divine earth has haunted him. He has sought the *elixir vitae* along a multitude of paths. Disappointment has met him wherever he has searched; for, the right mode of searching has never been found by him. Even his spiritual masters have told him that though the terrestrial plane can admit the paradisaical lustre he cannot hope for an integral manifestation of it. But now comes Sri Aurobindo and proclaims to us after nearly forty years of indomitable increasing experiment in mysticism that the earth-scene would never have been set by the Divine except for an integral display and manifestation of Himself and that, however strange it may seem to us, a divine mind and life-force and body are a miracle inevitable in the Yoga he is practising today and imparting to those who dwell in his Ashram.

It may not be possible for all of us to be Aurobindonian Yogis and share with him to whatever degree his integral Rishihood. But we can surely keep in contact with his harmonious being, draw to us the revealing vision that he commands, feel the direction of his fatherly hand on our day-to-day gropings, whether in private or national existence for the right gesture, the right deed. Even without his Integral

Yoga he would stand forth amongst men, a versatile genius with a mighty record as poet and thinker, politician and nation-builder, living synthesis of the cultures of the East and the West. With his unique Yoga he raises to the n^{th} degree of inspiration all his creative powers and if men could consciously establish rapport with him they would lift themselves and their country to sterling greatness.

Broad and bright as the sun the message for India is written in the twofold momentousness that marks August 15.

K. D. SETHNA
(AMAL KIRAN)

(Reprinted from the August 15, 1949 issue of Mother India)

August 15th, 1947 is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But we can also make it by our life and acts as a free nation an important date in a new age opening for the whole world, for the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity.

Sri Aurobindo

INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE AND SPIRITUAL DESTINY

At the midnight hour of 14 August 1947 Jawaharlal Nehru spoke of the solemn promise of India awaking to life and freedom. At that moment of history he was claiming Independence from the British. "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge... At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance." Sixty years have passed and it is time for assessment and introspection, as to what extent the soul of India has been able to find its authentic and fulfilling utterance, to what extent the pledges made have been implemented. Has India awakened to the greatness of her soul? Indeed, what is it that constitutes the greatness of a nation's soul? If truth-values found the greatness of a nation's or an individual's soul, the question is: Are we living in them?

Tagore had long ago such a poetic dream, that it seemed to almost come true: "I have loved India and sought to serve her not because of her geographical magnitude, not because of her great past, but because of my faith in her today and my belief that she will stand for truth and freedom and the higher things of life." The giver of the National Anthem wished India to speak words that come from the depth of truth. But when he was speaking about the "depth of truth" he was speaking not as a mystic but more as a poet:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic
walls;
Where the words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert
of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-widening thought and action—
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Do these words, these dreams bear reality in the maze of life in which we live today? One wonders. Once, while he was walking on a street in London, a beggar asked for alms. Tagore pulled out something from his pocket and gave it to him. The beggar looked at it and said: "Sorry, Sir. This is a gold coin and what can I do with it? I need a small piece, please." He returned the coin to the poet. Such poets! And such beggars! What sort of people do we have these days? It seems that there are a very few Indians

in India today. There are plenty of Americans in America, and there are plenty of French in France, and Italians in Italy, and Germans in Germany; but there are very few Indians in India. That is India's malaise, that is India's tragedy. We have won freedom at the midnight hour, but our souls are still asleep, asleep in the sleep of inertia, of *tamas*. Can a corrupt society ever have a mind without fear? For Sri Aurobindo the question of India's freedom was already settled, settled long ago; his concern, however, was, what India was going to do with her freedom. He had genuine apprehensions, of the Gunda Raj assailing the true destiny of the country. Have those apprehensions disappeared? They don't seem to have.

In his address dated 29 January 1908 given at National School in Amaravati, in Maharashtra, Sri Aurobindo regretted that the meaning of Bankim's *Bande Mataram* was not understood "because there was no patriotism, except such as consisted in making India the shadow of England and other countries, which dazzled the sight of the sons of this our Motherland with their glory and opulence. The so-called patriots of that time might have been the well-wishers of India but not certainly ones who loved her. One who loved his mother never looked to her defects, never disregarded her..." Even today, in this free India of ours, who comprehends the deep contents of that song, of that mantra?

Mother, I bow to thee!
 Rich with thy hurrying streams,
 Bright with thy orchard gleams,
 Cool with thy winds of delight,
 Dark fields waving, Mother of might,
 Mother free.
 Glory of moonlight dreams
 Over thy branches and lordly streams,—
 Clad in thy blossoming trees,
 Mother, giver of ease,
 Laughing low and sweet!
 Mother, I kiss thy feet,
 Speaker sweet and low!
 Mother, to thee I bow...

Rich with thy hurrying streams,
 Bright with thy orchard gleams,
 Dark of hue, O candid-fair
 In thy soul, with jewelled hair
 And thy glorious smile divine,
 Loveliest of all earthly lands,
 Showering wealth from well-stored hands!

Mother, mother mine!
 Mother sweet, I bow to thee,
 Mother great and free!

Is there anyone today who cries “Mother, mother mine, mother great and free”? In his speech, Sri Aurobindo said that he was exceedingly pleased that the song had become popular in all parts of India, that it was being repeatedly sung everywhere. The song, he asserted, was not only a national anthem to be looked on as the European nations look upon their own, but one replete with mighty power, being a sacred mantra, revealed to us by one who might be called an inspired Rishi. He also explained that “the mantra was not an invention, but a revivification of the old mantra which had become extinct”, because of our treachery. “He then concluded the speech,” says the reporter, “with an appeal to true patriotism and exhorted the audience to love the Motherland and sacrifice everything to bring about her salvation.” Is it the same today? So it seems.

And yet there is something interesting about *Bande Mataram*. About five years ago the BBC conducted an online survey of the world's top ten songs. Response from 155 countries showed that, following the Irish National Anthem, *Bande Mataram* got second position.

About Bankim and his song composed in 1875:

Bankim Chandra was among the first batch of graduates from Calcutta University. Soon after he had secured his BA, he was appointed as Deputy Magistrate, and eventually became a Deputy Collector. In his work, he had ready access to old papers and gazettes, and came across the documents related to the mutiny of Sannyasis in Dhaka, North Bengal, Nepal, Tarai, Dinajpur, Rangpur, and Purniya during the period from 1763 to 1780. He decided to write a novel, *Anandamath*, based on the heroic deeds of these Sannyasis. In his youth, he had witnessed the unsuccessful mutiny of 1857. Around 1870, the British rulers were trying hard to force their anthem, *God Save the Queen*, on the Indians. This made a deep impact on Bankim's sensitive mind, and he wrote *Bande Mataram* in one sitting, in a mood that must be called transcendental. He wrote the song as a prayer in which the nation ‘Bharat’ was described as ‘The Mother’. The song was later included in his novel *Anandamath*, which was published serially in his magazine *Bangadarshan* during 1880-1882. The song was heavily criticised by his friends, and also by his daughter, for the words were difficult to pronounce, and the song comprised of a mixture of Bengali and Sanskrit words. He argued that he wrote it spontaneously to express his emotions and thoughts without caring for its future. However, like a prophet, he said, “I may not live to see its popularity, but this song will be sung by every Indian like a Ved Mantra.” And that is exactly what happened after the partition of Bengal in 1905.

But there are voices which object to *Bande Mataram* as the National Anthem. Here is R. C. Majumdar, objective and bone-dry:

During the long and arduous struggle for freedom from 1905 to 1947 *Bande Mataram* was the rallying cry of the patriotic sons of India, and thousands of them succumbed to the lathi blow of the British police or mounted the scaffold with *Bande Mataram* on their lips... [But there is] no doubt that Bankim Chandra's nationalism was Hindu rather than Indian. This is made crystal clear from his other writings which contain passionate outbursts against the subjugation of India by the Muslims.

Did Bankim convert patriotism into religion, and religion into patriotism? No wonder, secular Jawaharlal Nehru rejected *Bande Mataram* as the National Anthem. There is a problem about *Bande Mataram* when we see it in the context of a multi-ethnic multi-religious society of a nation. But nor is secularism of the western mode a solution. However, let us see, contextually, Sri Aurobindo's view about India.

Speaking about one of his 'madnesses' Sri Aurobindo says:

...whereas others regard the country as an inert object, and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains and rivers, I look upon my country as the mother, I worship her and adore her as the mother. What would a son do when a demon sitting on the breast of his mother is drinking her blood? Would he sit down content to take his meals, and go on enjoying himself in the company of his wife and children, or would he, rather, run to the rescue of his mother? I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; it is not physical strength, I am not going to fight with the sword or with the gun, but with the power of knowledge. The power of the warrior is not the only kind of force, there is also the power of the Brahmin which is founded on knowledge. This is not a new feeling within me, it is not of a recent origin, I was born with it; it is in my very marrow. God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission.

"I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race... This is not a new feeling within me... I was born with it... God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission." In that mission, in the fire of that determination, in the Yajna of Freedom, was born Indian nationalism, in it was given the liberating mantra, *Bande Mataram*.

Came great souls chanting the Hymn of Freedom. Let us take an example, of young Jatin Mukherjee's. Hardly was he in his teens, and he was aware that his mission in life was to fight for the freedom of his Motherland. A great share of the credit of this spirit of his must go to his mother who was a widow. Of a powerful build and with commitment to principles, his approach was that of the revolutionary's. For him the

use of bombs and firearms was perfectly in order in the struggle for freedom. On one occasion he was in prison for fifteen months, but for want of proof the government was helpless and he was released. In the first decade of the last century a whole group of young hearts sacrificed their lives for this great cause. It seems, special souls had taken birth at the time. Even as Sri Aurobindo was sent by God, they, his ageless companions, came following him to accomplish the mission. It was the Hour of God, indeed, and weighty and historic things happened in the swiftness of time. A whole nation awoke to the truth of her soul.

The spirit that inspired the time can be put in Sri Aurobindo's words as follows:

There are times in a nation's history when Providence places before it one work, one aim, to which everything else, however high and noble in itself, has to be sacrificed. Such a time has now arrived for our Motherland when nothing is dearer than her service, when everything else is to be directed to that end. If you will study, study for her sake; train yourselves body and mind and soul for her service... You will go abroad to foreign lands that you may bring back knowledge with which you may do service to her. Work that she may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice. All is contained in that one single advice.

We must recognise that India is a land of richness, of plenty. She is rich in every respect. She is plenteous materially, vitally, mentally, spiritually. The Veda spoke of corn filled with milk in her fields. She is Bankim's land of hurrying streams and bright orchard gleams, *sujalām-suphalām*. Here flourished great kingdoms, here flourished arts and sciences and crafts, here grew industry, commerce, trade. From here spread wisdom and knowledge all over the world. This has been the ancient land of tapasya.

Even today India is rich in every respect. Indians may be poor but India is not poor. The soul of the country is as bright as the sun in a clear cloudless summer sky. But it is unfortunate that we do not live in it. We do not live in the brightness of that splendour, in its wonderful day. We do not know our own souls. We have lost contact with our inner being. We are sleeping the dark sleep of mediaeval ages. The unfortunate history of the last thousand years is weighing heavily on our mind and heart and body, on our spirit. But the backlash of time must be set aright. We must return to the foundational principles and values of our nation. We must see the causes, as to where exactly we had failed. We must awake to the call of Vivekananda, of Prabuddha Bharata, to the inspiration and message of Eternal India.

Let us see what happened during the last couple of centuries. Emperor Shahjahan spent crores of rupees in seven years to get his famous peacock throne made. It was studded with some of the costliest precious stones, with rare diamonds and emeralds. But alas! It is no more there now. The raider Nadir Shah was attracted by it and took it away with him. Later the East India Company snatched it from us and shipped it to

England. But it was not to reach that plunderers' destination. The ship carrying it sank in the sea, and the attempt to recover it proved futile.

And about the Taj Mahal? The labour cost alone, by today's wages, comes to about Rs. 2000 crores. 20,000 workers toiled for 22 years and 1000 elephants were employed to transport the construction material. No doubt here is a piece of wonder, enchanting in its life-breathing lyricism. But, then, that is how the taxpayers' money was squandered.

The ancient Indian precepts of governance were different. They affirmed that the taxes collected from the citizens represent the wages of the king. These were paid to him for the performance of kingly duties, duties towards the people of the kingdom. He was expected to give them protection. He was expected to maintain law and order. He was expected to promote activities of trade and commerce. Indeed, he must prop up not only arts and sciences and industries, but also culture. He stands for values and must unwaveringly uphold these. Performance of kingly duties, and not enjoyment or satisfying one's own wants and wishes—that is the role of the king as a public servant.

But during the period of recent history, of some thousand years, India slipped into a terrible abyss of darkness. Invasion after relentless invasion sucked away the vitality of the country. The bright days of abundant prosperity turned into the nights of spiritual and cultural destitution. When Europe was making giant strides in various walks of life, India remained covered under the *tamas* of the age. Foolish battles were fought and won for foolish gains. We were in deep unforgivable sleep.

In the 1757 Battle of Plassey Siraj-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Bengal, was defeated by Robert Clive by very dubious means. Another dishonour was inflicted on the psyche of the country. Clive claimed from the successor Mir Jafar, the crony, £40 million and a huge personal revenue of £30,000 a year. India was since then steadily and systematically plundered and reduced to a lifeless object. The land of rich hurrying streams and bright orchard gleams, *sujalām-suphalām*, became a forlorn country, as if forsaken by the Goddess of Greatness. The Plassey War Memorial is a constant reminder of the humiliation and impoverishment India suffered during the colonial days. "It is a country of inexhaustible riches and one which cannot fail to make its masters the richest corporation in the world." This is what Clive wrote back home after arriving in India. Since then, there has been the methodical "transfer of poverty" to that country of inexhaustible riches. The last ten centuries were the worst in Indian history. Hard is it to get rid of this karma.

Queen Victoria acquired the title 'Empress of India' in 1877, even as Macaulay told the British Parliament: "I have travelled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such caliber, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage, and, therefore, I propose that we

replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation.” Has much changed today from this? Not really. We consider education as a human resources development and create artificial issues of reservations, dividing the society into endless classes and groups, instead of asserting what even Macaulay discerned as “spiritual and cultural heritage”. He sensed something great and enduring about it, something noble and elevating, something that can withstand the shocks of bad times. Our so-called secularists have the least notion of it. The very phrase “human resources development” is so degrading, so repugnant that it makes an individual a tradable commodity; the individuality of the individual is absent in it. We ought to get the integral view of life in all our thousand occupations, prepare the individuals as souls with precious expectations and aspirations, that we fulfil ourselves as individuals, we fulfil as members of a larger collectivity, we fulfil God in us and in the world and in the universal manifestation. Unless that is achieved, we would not have found the true meaning of freedom; we might have thrown away the colonial rule, but we would not have established the rule of life in the nobility of the spirit. And just imagine! When Bhimsen Joshi made a rendering of *Bande Mataram* in the Parliament, not too long ago, our honourable Members of Parliament clapped enthusiastically at the end. Does one clap when the National Anthem is sung? When Churchill exhorted his people “never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense”, he was showing great character of his well-developed and mature personality. We lack it and the real question to be answered is “Why do we really lack it?” The purpose of education is to help a child to grow into a “straightforward, frank, upright and honourable” human being to fulfil himself in life and in his soul and in his spirit. The rest are simply tools and techniques. We mistake the latter for education and miss the real purpose of education.

We must remember the galvanising words of the Master:

Materially you are nothing, spiritually you are everything. It is only the Indian who can believe everything, dare everything, sacrifice everything. First therefore become Indians. Recover the patrimony of your forefathers. Recover the Aryan thought, the Aryan discipline, the Aryan character, the Aryan life. Recover the Vedanta, the Gita, the Yoga. Recover them not only in intellect or sentiment but in your lives. Live them and you will be great and strong, mighty, invincible and fearless. Neither life nor death will have any terrors for you. Difficulty and impossibility will vanish from your vocabularies.

And this is what the Mother says:

The world will be made better only in proportion as we make ourselves better.

The Vedantic truth that the world is only a projection—a function—of our consciousness is as pragmatically true as it is spiritually true. The ills that humanity suffers from—collectively and individually—stem from the errors that lie at the roots of our ignorant nature. We must be cleansed of these evils—individually first of all—if we ever hope to see a clean world outside. A yoga of self-purification is the condition precedent to a yoga of perfection.

It is of course wrong to expect that every individual of the country will rise to this prospect of the “yoga of perfection”, but not to be aware of it is a sad commentary on our state of affairs.

In this context let us quickly recall the speech given by the President of India on the eve of India’s sixtieth Independence Day. He pays respects to the freedom fighters and assures that the nation will always cherish and be inspired by their contributions towards making India independent. While speaking about the national development scene, he lists economic development towards Vision 2020, role models for educationists, teachers, doctors and nurses, information and communication technology, and rural development. Putting his faith in the strength of the country’s youth and the civilisational heritage, he pledges them to take a Seven Point Oath:

- I realise, I have to set a goal in my life. To achieve the goal, I will acquire the knowledge, I will work hard, and when the problem occurs, I have to defeat the problem and succeed.
- As a youth of my nation, I will work and work with courage to achieve success in all my tasks and enjoy the success of others.
- I shall always keep myself, my home, my surroundings, neighbourhood and environment clean and tidy.
- I realise righteousness in the heart leads to beauty in the character, beauty in the character brings harmony in the home, harmony in the home leads to order in the nation and order in the nation leads to peace in the world.
- I will lead an honest life free from all corruption and will set an example for others to adopt a righteous way of life.
- I will light the lamp of knowledge in the nation and ensure that it remains lit for ever.
- I realise, whatever work I do if I do the best, I am contributing towards realising the vision of developed India 2020.

This is perfectly fine, a well-meant exhortation and advice. But does a living nation wait for such an advice to come from the head of a state? It is the society which must recognise values and build up the national character around them. It is the concern not of the State but of the society. The mantra that must be chanted by every soul of the country is here:

Mother Durga! Rider on the lion, giver of all strength, Mother, beloved of Siva! We, born from thy parts of Power, we the youth of India, are seated here in thy temple. Listen, O Mother, descend upon earth, make thyself manifest in this land of India.

Mother Durga! From age to age, in life after life, we come down into the human body, do thy work and return to the Home of Delight. Now too we are born, dedicated to thy work. Listen, O Mother, descend upon earth, come to our help...

Mother Durga! India lies low in selfishness and fearfulness and littleness. Make us great, make our efforts great, our hearts vast, make us true to our resolve. May we no longer desire the small, void of energy, given to laziness, stricken with fear.

Mother Durga! Extend wide the power of Yoga. We are thy Aryan children, develop in us again the lost teaching, character, strength of intelligence, faith and devotion, force of austerity, power of chastity and true knowledge, bestow all that upon the world. To help mankind, appear, O Mother of the world, dispel all ills...

Mother Durga! Enter our bodies in thy Yogic strength. We shall become thy instruments, thy sword slaying all evil, thy lamp dispelling all ignorance. Fulfil this yearning of thy young children, O Mother. Be the master and drive thy instrument, wield thy sword and slay the evil, hold up the lamp and spread the light of knowledge. Make thyself manifest...

It is in this mantra that the power of the country lives and it is in it that we must live. It is not a mantra that belongs to any particular religion—it is the mantra of the Eternal. It is the aspiration of the soul to become capable of serving the cause of nobility, of slaying the evil residing in the hearts of men, of removing darkness with the lamp of the light that never dims. It is the mantra for man's manhood to grow in the values of truth and light and love and joy and strength and harmony and perfection. It is not the mantra that was given by the head of a state, by the patriarch of a society, by the president of a parliament of religion. It had its birth in the fire of a yogi and, when it repeats itself in rhythmic strains, "thought, vision, feeling, sense, the body's self are seized unalterably", and occurs in us an immortal change. We experience the rush of wisdom and knowledge and power in our entire being and, possibly, we even get ready to work in its full luminous dynamism. It is to that sense of greatness that India must arise.

In this context let us read a part of the message Sri Aurobindo had given on the occasion of the independence of India on 15 August 1947:

India today is free but she has not achieved unity... the old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems now to have hardened into a permanent political

division of the country. It is to be hoped that this settled fact will not be accepted as settled for ever or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. India's internal development and prosperity may be impeded, her position among the nations weakened, her destiny impaired or even frustrated. This must not be; the partition must go. Let us hope that that may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action, by the practice of common action and the creation of means for that purpose. In this way unity may finally come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future.

Sri Aurobindo never visualised an India partitioned on the basis of communal concerns and ideas, on the basis of sectarian, dogmatic, intolerant factors. Not only will the entry of such religious considerations in social and political life prove disastrous; there is the danger of the soul of the country sinking into the night of mediaeval sleep. We might trace some of the events that led to this preposterous situation, even while Sri Aurobindo warned of the dangers involved in it. He was alert to the issues, not only in the Indian context but also in the world context, in the context of the nobler social and spiritual destiny of mankind. Potent and mighty powers were at play and their occult implications could have far-reaching consequences in determining the evolutionary march of the race.

In this respect Sri Aurobindo's conversations with his disciples are extremely revealing. The first thing that we perhaps notice in them is the extent to which he, though confined to his remote Cave of Tapasya, was observant of the happenings in the world. Not only did he follow the significant developments during the Second World War, but he also applied his yogic force in definitively reorienting their course. His public announcement recommending the acceptance of the Cripps Proposal in 1942, *vis-à-vis* the independence of India, bears ample testimony of his active interest in it. It is a pity that it was rejected by the country's wise men of those days. Sharply reacting to it, the Mother said: "Now calamity will befall India." Sri Aurobindo, however, never ceased to be up-to-date. Apropos of these epochal events, Nirodbaran writes: "We shared with Sri Aurobindo his hopes and fears, his anticipations, prognostications and prophecies. He allowed us some glimpses into his action and gave a calm assurance of the victory for the Divine cause."

During the early phase of the War, Hitler was marching triumphantly with his panzer divisions destroying Paris. "Having won the Battle of France decisively," reports Nirodbaran, "Hitler now turned his attention to winning the Battle of Britain. He fixed 15 August 1940 as the day on which he would complete his conquest of

Western Europe and broadcast from Buckingham Palace. When Sri Aurobindo heard of this he remarked 'that is the sign that he is the enemy of our work...' But 15 August turned out to be a turning point for Britain. On that day 180 German planes were shot down in British skies... A month later, on the same date, 15 September 1940, Sri Aurobindo said smiling: 'England has destroyed 175 German planes, a very big number. Now invasion will be difficult. Hitler lost his chance after the fall of France. He has really missed the bus!' " Another force was set up against him. In the Mother's War, Sri Aurobindo took full charge of the situation. Behind Hitler's success he saw the working of a powerful Asura in the task of "enslavement of mankind to the tyranny of evil." This would have been a setback for the course of spiritual evolution for which Sri Aurobindo was working. None knew about it.

Not only did he apply his yogic force when such catastrophic events were taking place; he and the Mother also made a monetary contribution to the War Fund. In their letter to the Governor of Madras dated 19 September 1940 they declared: "We feel that not only is this a battle waged in just self-defence and in defence of the nations threatened with the world-domination of Germany and the Nazi system of life, but that it is a defence of civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and of the whole future of humanity. To this cause our support and sympathy will be unswerving whatever may happen; we look forward to the victory of Britain and, as the eventual result, an era of peace and union among the nations and a better and more secure world-order." Who in this land of ours had the idea of the disaster that was waiting for mankind in the victory of the Nazi way of life, of Hitler's running over nations and countries? None. It seems that we had lost our heads and our souls. If at all, there was the charismatic appeal to the gullible to side with the devil in his doings. Here was Mahatma Gandhi with the ethico-religious mind recommending submission to the Falsehood that was at the basis of this dark creation. His *Times* letter in July 1940, addressed to the British, runs as follows: "I want you to fight Nazism without arms, or, if I am to retain the military terminology, with non-violent arms. I would like you to lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity. You will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possessions. Let them take possession of your beautiful island, with your many beautiful buildings. You will give all these but neither your souls nor your minds. If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourselves man, woman and child, to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them." Putting such an ultra-Christian doctrine on the highest pedestal of ethical excellence, making it an eminent principle of administration in the daily mode of life of the individual as well as of a whole society is not only to dwarf them; in fact, in its cruellest sense, it is to turn all towards anti-humanity.

These are exceptionally important issues even as they have bearings on the fate of India's freedom. India's willing participation in the War effort was necessary and

the British Prime Minister of the time, Winston Churchill, had made a proposal through Sir Stafford Cripps to the Indian leaders with the possibility of Dominion Status to the country after the War. Sri Aurobindo saw in it India becoming free and remaining united and extended his explicit and precise support to it. In a telegram to Cripps dated 31 March 1942 he said:

I have heard your broadcast. As one who has been a nationalist leader and worker for India's independence, though now my activity is no longer in the political but in the spiritual field, I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself, and organise in all liberty of choice, her freedom and unity, and take an effective place among the world's free nations. I hope that it will be accepted, and right use made of it, putting aside all discords and divisions. I hope too that friendly relations between Britain and India replacing the past struggles, will be a step towards a greater world union in which, as a free nation, her spiritual force will contribute to build for mankind a better and happier life. In this light, I offer my public adhesion, in case it can be of any help in your work.

Sir Stafford Cripps replied:

I am most touched and gratified by your kind message allowing me to inform India that you who occupy a unique position in the imagination of Indian youth, are convinced that the declaration of His Majesty's Government substantially confers that freedom for which Indian Nationalism has so long struggled.

Behind the Cripps Mission the British thinking was to secure Indian cooperation and support for the War efforts, and not so much the concern for India's freedom. On this issue the Congress was divided, with Mahatma Gandhi opposing the Indian involvement in the War, something unethical he would not like to enter into. Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, however, supported the effort.

The proposals made by Cripps had essentially the following points: The Dominion Status to India after the War envisaged a common allegiance to the Crown but in no respect subordinate to it; India would be free to frame her own constitution; the task of organising the military, moral and material resources would be the responsibility of the Government of India in cooperation with the peoples of India. In the event of non-acceptance of the proposals "the responsibility for the failure," warns Cripps in no uncertain terms, "must rest with them." Sri Aurobindo knew the British psychology of doing things in stages and explained it so to his disciples, that the proposals effectively amounted to freedom which also assured unity. Not only that. He sent Doraiswamy Iyer, his disciple and the famous Madras lawyer, as an envoy to Delhi with a brief advocating to the leaders to accept the proposals. The

Mahatma proclaimed that the Cripps proposals were a post-dated cheque drawn on a bank that was crashing. He also retorted that, as Sri Aurobindo had retired from politics, he had no business to interfere in these matters. In the rejection of the proposals in spite of Sri Aurobindo's advocacy, the Mother saw a greater calamity befalling India, reports Nirodbaran. We know the bloodbath that followed in the wake of India's partitioned freedom. We are still reaping its consequences.

Pertinent to this aspect is the brief but significant reference to the special interviews granted during later years by Sri Aurobindo to some of the prominent political figures of the time, dignitaries like K. M. Munshi, Sir C. R. Reddy, Surendra Mohan Ghose, etc. We must also mention here that Surendra Mohan was very keen that Sri Aurobindo should consent to have an interview with Mahatma Gandhi which he did but, unfortunately, it did not materialise. "Fate stepped in and foiled what could have been a momentous meeting," says Nirodbaran. Perhaps it was not meant to be. Perhaps Fate saw that it did not happen. There were also a number of important letters Sri Aurobindo had dictated during this period.

Apropos of India's partition and the forces that worked behind it, we have the account by Munshi based on what Sri Aurobindo had told him in the course of an interview in 1950. India's integrity and spiritual destiny always remained the concern of Sri Aurobindo. In the course of the interview, Munshi was taken aback when Sri Aurobindo surprised him with the unexpected question: "When do you expect India to be united?" He himself then said: "India will be united. I see it clearly. Pakistan has been created by falsehood, fraud and force. It must be brought under India's military ambit." He went out of his way and spoke of the military ambit.

Today we dismiss those words as time-barred, forgetting that he had put his yogic force in them in the context of what he saw as falsehood and fraud. By forgetting them, we are entrenching ourselves more and more into falsehood and fraud. We are strengthening falsehood and fraud more and more. Has the power which Sri Aurobindo put in his words waned and disappeared? Or is it that we are putting more and more obstacles in its working? It seems there is no end to our stupidity.

In this context we have to only remember the Nehru-Liaquat Pact and the Pakistan Government's refusal to sign a joint declaration, stating that in no event should there be recourse to war. This was on the political level; we don't know things that were present in the occult world. Therefore, when Sri Aurobindo spoke of the military ambit then, surely, it meant that there was a distinct possibility at that time, but it didn't materialise,—because the lamps were not kept trimmed in the Hour of God, because we were not ready to receive the gifts of the three Mothers, because we had no conviction in the words of the Avatar. One recoils despicably when there is the disregard for things that come from the knowledge founded on the workings of the spirit.

But we should not take Sri Aurobindo as "Read-Only Text" frozen for all time without the contents of dynamism in time. We should lend ourselves to its dynamism,

to its mantric efficacy. In a letter about that time Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple that India's marching to East Bengal and the war in Kashmir would have resulted in the end of Pakistan. "The object we had in view would have been within sight of achievement." It is at times said that in the present conditions it makes more sense to work to achieve a culture of spiritual unity in India rather than the unification of India and Pakistan. But to speak of spirituality where there is falsehood is to be ignorant of things.

Let us recall one of the early conversations Sri Aurobindo had with his disciples, as recorded by A. B. Purani in the *Evening Talks*, in 1923. It brings out one specific aspect of the Hindu-Muslim unity. About the Muslims, Sri Aurobindo says that their fanatic faith in their religion is harmful to everybody, even for themselves. It is necessary that they inculcate liberal ideas, of right and liberty. The mildness of the Hindus has always given way in the face of the Muslim aggressive approach. The best solution would be to allow the Hindus to organise themselves and the Hindu-Muslim unity would take care of itself; it would automatically solve the problem. Here is the clue available to us. Though spoken in 1923, its fundamental truth, of liberal ideas for the Muslims and the Hindus organising themselves, remains valid even today.

In contrast to that, Mahatma Gandhi had different views. Take the example of the Ottoman Empire. It was breaking down at the end of the First World War. But in India it was seen as a blow to the prestige of Islam. Therefore, it became a part of political calculation to oppose the move. Thus was born the harmful Khilafat movement. In the context of the freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi writes about it as follows: "To the Musalmans Swaraj means, as it must, India's ability to deal effectively with the Khilafat question." He further adds: "It is impossible not to sympathise with this attitude... I would gladly ask for postponement of the Swaraj activity if we could advance the interest of the Khilafat." What was in the Ottoman Empire that we should have sold ourselves for it? When the Western world was making tremendous strides in different branches of learning, in science, technology, industry, commerce, here was a decadent regime that had outlived its purpose. Khilafat could not be more precious than Swaraj. In it India's freedom had a lower priority. In it India was denied India's nationhood. This was unfortunate, if not calamitous. Today to speak of it is blasphemy.

Sri Aurobindo saw the necessity of the freedom of India differently. For him India was not an inert piece of matter. He saw in her a mighty Shakti. He called that Shakti India. She was for him Bhavani Bharati. He knew her as the Mother and worshipped her so. How could he rest content if she remained chained? How could he postpone her freedom even for a day? He entered into politics to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom. When he saw that the freedom of India was an assured fact, he moved on to greater issues, issues of existence itself. For that he attempted all and, in the process, achieved all. He invoked the supreme grace to descend and transform the lot of our mortality. The grace has come down to bestow

on us the boons of her plenty and prosperity. We have to only open ourselves to her wonderful gifts of happiness. That is the expectation from us.

But what about today? Are we awake? Maybe we are just emerging out of the distasteful sleep of history. But we have not yet shed the dullness of the night which is still weighing heavily on our souls. We have not recovered our true and proper national identity. We are still slaves of habits that have no business to persist. In every field of our activity we want to be *à la mode*, adapting ideas and manners of the industrially advanced societies. We are apish. We are copyists, twice removed from reality; we are a copy of a copy. And, then, a corrupt society can never be creative. Imitative societies can never be taken seriously. Once a young French student wrote: "The pyramids have been eroded by the desert wind, the marble broken by earthquakes, and gold stolen by the robbers. But the Veda is recited daily by an unbroken chain of generations."

But today we have lost contact with the Veda. We are importing ideas from the Western masters. We are adopting their models. We are after the "winner's version" of life, the so-called life. We have been looking outside India for everything—ideas, values, comforts, jobs, opportunities. We want to have food as prepared in 'advanced' countries. The socio-political system we have embraced is not really our own. We need a Mountbatten to solve—or is it to create?—a Kashmir problem. We have mortgaged our thinking, as if to please alien masters. We take pride in the family, in dynasty, not in the country.

In this context let us recall the historical proceedings of the March 1940 All India Muslim League annual session held at Minto Park, Lahore, paving the path of the Lahore Resolution or the Pakistan Resolution. Jinnah first narrated the sequel of events preceding the conference and continued to present his own solution to the Muslim problem. He said that "the problem of India was not of an inter-communal nature, but manifestly an international one and must be treated as such." This implied the creation of two states based on religious division.

In Jinnah's words:

Hindus and Muslims derive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics, different heroes and different episodes. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other, and likewise, their victories and defeats overlap. To yoke together two such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent and final destruction of any fabric that may be so built up for the government of such a state.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was the first exponent of the Two-Nation Theory in the modern era. "He believed that India was a continent and not a country, and that among the vast population of different races and different creeds, Hindus and Muslims

were the two major nations on the basis of nationality, religion, way-of-life, customs, traditions, culture and historical conditions.”

In the 1944 Gandhi-Jinnah talks, Gandhi told Jinnah that “he had come in his personal capacity and was representing neither the Hindus nor the Congress. Gandhi’s real purpose behind these talks was to extract from Jinnah an admission that the whole proposition of Pakistan was absurd.” But, again, Jinnah maintained “that Muslims and Hindus are two major nations by any definition or test of a nation. We are a nation of a 100 million. We have our distinctive outlook on life and of life. By all the canons of international law, we are a nation.” Gandhi, on the other hand, held that India was one nation and saw in the Pakistan Resolution “nothing but ruin for the whole of India. If, however, Pakistan had to be conceded, the areas in which the Muslims are in an absolute majority should be demarcated by a commission approved by both the Congress and the Muslim League. The wishes of the people of these areas will be obtained through referendum. These areas shall form a separate state as soon as possible after India is free from foreign domination. There shall be a treaty of separation which should also provide for the efficient and satisfactory administration of foreign affairs, defense, internal communication, custom and the like which must necessarily continue to be the matters of common interest between the contracting countries.” This was not acceptable to Jinnah; in fact he saw in it a ploy to thwart the expectations of the Muslims when the British would leave the country. He argued that the referendum would be manipulated by the majority Hindus. Jinnah was bent upon the creation of an independent Muslim state.

The British Parliament passed the Indian Independence Act on 18 July 1947. The Act created two dominions, Indian Union and Pakistan. It also provided for the complete end of British control over Indian affairs from 15 August 1947.

Thus the deed was done. But let us read what Irfan Husain, in Jinnah’s *Dawn* coming from Karachi, wrote recently about the plight of the Muslims in the world: “The truth is that the problems we face in much of the Muslim world are often so intractable that we escape reality by looking abroad. Matters like poverty, disease, political instability and institutional meltdown are too difficult to be tackled by the inefficient and corrupt elites much of the Muslim world is cursed with. To deflect blame, they fulminate against the West for its perceived anti-Islamic attitudes.”

However, let us get back to India. Today India is free. Her freedom was god-ordained. Exceptional souls had come here to make it a reality. They came and paid the price for winning it. They came and did National Tapasya. They have done their splendid bit and now we must attend to our duties. We must perform the duties in the greatness of our national spirit. The living spirit of the country will undoubtedly lead us to truer glories, only if we go by it. Freedom has come, but we have forgotten the Veda. We no longer remember the spirit that had inspired us to live and grow in the nobility of the nation. We are as yet slaves to others. The Macaulayan hold on our minds has not disappeared.

During the colonial days there was a set of people who thought that, for them, there should always be an England in India. Now there is a similar group which thinks that, there should be for the neo-professionals and neo-elite an America in India. There should be for them American banks, American industries, American management, American institutions, even American restaurants and American food. Bangalore must be San Jose.

No wonder, we lack the spirit of authentic nationalism. No wonder we do not have our own programmes. We are ashamed of singing the National Anthem in the company of foreigners. We do not have our own priorities. No wonder that we do not have our own science, our own literature, our own national life. There can be Indian life only when India recovers its Indianness. That is the imperative. When we Indians shall live according to the nation's *swabhāva* and *swadharma*, then only will there be India's happy fulfilment. Indians must know India. They shall prove the heroes who will steal the Promethean fire from the Hearth of the Spirit. We are looking for adventurers marching in celebration of the Truth. Only from the Fire of Sacrifice, National Yajna, can India rise to lead the countries of the world, assert herself in the march of mankind.

We do not have men "fit for the times". But there is the expectation that the soul of the country shall awake. It shall arise from the Yajna of the Tapasvins. It shall arise like a radiant goddess. The ancient Rishis lived in the forests, but one-sixth of their tapasya went as a state tax for the welfare of the land. It is that which sustained every excellence of the society. We have to do that kind of national tapasya.

We Indians believe that everything should be done for us by the government. We do not say what we are going to do for the country. We forget that religion is not a state subject; nor is education, nor can be arts and literature and sports and advancement of knowledge. Organisation of Art and Culture activities by a government office is a strange laughable matter. Never will a dynamic society allow these things to happen. A government's concern should be governance. It is the society that has to build cultural foundations. It has to put forward progressive social aims. It has to generate awareness to fulfil its own longings. It must do things in the nobility of its creative-expressive spirit.

India must hearken to the call of her national dharma. She was alive, says Sri Aurobindo, to the greatness of material laws and forces. She also saw the invisible that surrounds the visible. She knows that man has power to exceed himself. She saw the myriad gods beyond man, God beyond the gods, and beyond God his own ineffable eternity. Then with a calm audacity of her intuition she declared that man could grow in the spirit, become a god, become one with God, become the ineffable Brahman. Man's manhood lies in becoming godly.

This means that we must get back to the native power of the spirit. We must discover it and live in it. This is the great agenda for us to work upon. If spiritual unfolding is the hidden truth, then man as he is cannot be the last term of this evolution.

His mind is capable of opening to what exceeds it. Therefore there is a possibility that man will arrive at supermanhood. This is what Sri Aurobindo asserts. It is towards it that the Mother had been working all along. The authentic post-human potential finds its meaning and contents in such a possibility.

When this is recognised and carried out, we might say that we stand on the verge of the last definitive transformation. When it is achieved, the passage of the soul through the abyss of ignorance shall get terminated, leading it into the realms of knowledge. Supramental Truth and Light and Force shall descend. This shall open out the way for the appearance of the gnostic life upon the earth. The epiphanic possibilities of the spirit shall become a part of the evolutionary growth and manifestation. That will be the beginning of the new era in the evolutionary history of the earth.

Sri Aurobindo presented his world-vision and God-vision in the possibilities of the future of the human race in the very opening issue of the monthly philosophical review *Arya* that he launched on 15 August 1914. It begins as follows: “The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation... is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality.”

The formula of God, Light, Freedom, Immortality was discovered long ages ago, and many were the attempts made for its application in the course of evolving cycles of human destiny, cycles turning through rough and strenuous, even recalcitrant times. Great religions came, philosophies sprang up, and social institutions busied themselves to advance the cause of man, even as deeper esoteric pursuits brought fruits of unexpected wonders. However, this “transient and sorrowful world” has yet remained sorrowful and transient. Stretched and tortuous has been the path on which imperious history marched. Thinkers and saints and prophets moulded the destiny of mankind and took it nearer and yet nearer towards its seemingly unattainable goal. But, unfortunately, all these thousand ceaseless strivings have been, at their best, only partially successful. We are still struggling to meet God in God’s vast creation.

In recent times, the problem of humanity’s prospects is posed in a different manner—as a fixating aspect of post-human destinies for the advancement of human capabilities and human expectations. Very often the tremendous gains of our science and technology are taken as reassuring gains to bring to man and society the marvels of some unknown but rewarding satisfaction and abundance. It is vigorously claimed that Aldous Huxley’s “human potential” will be in a position to deliver all the wonderful goods man endeavours to have. The development of human faculties, including the tools of cognition, is no doubt a very desirable step in the direction of man’s progress; but there is no clue whatsoever in the thesis of human potential belonging to the social and intellectual milieu, nothing in its claim for happiness and in its creativity to suggest that his own assets and capabilities can actually take him beyond himself. The “human potential” approach might sound perfectly rational, but that

itself is its severe limitation.

The human potential movement basically emphasises the so-called secular individual values and human capabilities within its understandable boundaries. This certainly is an asset when there is so much of inelegance and *à peu près*, so much of obscurantism of one kind or the other. There is also a suggestion that the psychology of individuation can correct the wrongs of the human psyche. But such itself could just be a matter of belief, and the very restrictive approach would keep the will of man, his emotions, his aesthetic pursuits, his genuine religious and spiritual aspirations, the cosmic sense, the universality of the spirit, and the deeper longings of his soul away from the bright possibilities of his vision. The immortal in the mortal would continue to languish, and what would get sharpened might be only the outer persona, the surface self and not the inner reality that constitutes his inner personality and his true being. An integral view of life fulfilled in an integral way, as of an individual or of a group-soul, can alone be the valid and enduring foundation for the new age. Recognition of this spiritual fact and movement in its dynamism can alone assure the opening of horizons of the new consciousness in the glory of the spirit. This is what an enlightened soul, wherever it be, must strive to achieve.

If the authentic human potential has to emerge in the transformative action of the human race, then it is necessary that, by a sustained effort, we should discover ourselves first and, in that discovery, identify our will with the higher will. This is what we see in the intense as well as extensive yogic tapasya of Sri Aurobindo and the total identification of the Mother's will with the Supreme's Will. The Mother was concerned with the almighty powers that are locked in the physical; she awoke them and the result was that, even the body's cells started spontaneously responding to the Divine's Presence. Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1928: "The supramental change is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of the earth-consciousness..." The supramental change was decreed by him and he and the Mother had set themselves to work out this inevitability.

Our hope lies in being open to the subtler nuances of the working of the forces of life that operate always within and around us. In the totality of our approach we will have to perhaps move from the rational to the luminous intuitive modes and tools of knowledge and action. Fortunate we will be if we can accept, understand and apply what has been given to us by the Seer of the New Age. The vastness of Sri Aurobindo's vision embraces the human difficulties in their several dimensions and offers to them fulfilling solutions. The real problem of the society, as in the case of the individual, is for it to find its soul, the true collective soul. Certainly, it is that which alone can guide it on its evolutionary march towards the emergence of a spiritualised humanity. In its absence, the external ego-self is bound to prove to be a false light; this will also imply that excessive subjectivism of the crude vitalistic kind cannot but lead it to disintegration and destruction. There has to be a conviction that culmination of the social development into the Age of the ageless Spirit is the secret

urge and motivating force behind the evolutionary Nature's long painstaking and patient working. Humanity's conscious participation in it will assuredly hasten this triumph and this glory. The soul of India has the intuition of perceiving these possibilities and India's freedom is meant for its growth in the progression of the manifesting spirit. If this can be kept as the focus, the celebration of India's sixty years of independence will then be truly significant.

R. Y. DESHPANDE

August 15th is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition.

Sri Aurobindo

UNTOLD POTENTIALITIES: INDIA AND THE WORLD IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

AMONG the great events of the twentieth century, none promised to have more lasting consequences for vast numbers of people than India's attainment of independence on 15 August 1947. The lifting of the yoke of foreign rule from hundreds of millions in the subcontinent was followed by the rapid decolonisation of the rest of Asia and Africa. Meanwhile the United Nations had been founded at the end of World War II. An era of freer, closer and more equal relations among the earth's peoples seemed to have dawned.

From Third World to Superpower?

Freedom for countries such as India did not translate at once, however, into a role in world affairs commensurate with the size of their populations or the greatness of their cultures. The Cold War intervened and the important players were divided into two camps. Most of the newly liberated former colonies found themselves relegated to the "Third World". But the Cold War came to an end and gradually things began to change. By the 1980s, there was speculation that the twenty-first century might turn out to be the Asian Century. Today it is common to speak not only of China, but also of India, as a potential superpower.

Such speculations are based largely on economic trends. Despite forbidding problems, there are heartening forecasts of prosperity for a region that has known so much misery in the last few centuries. But if prosperity is achieved by the single-minded pursuit of wealth for its own sake, one wonders whether the future South Asian superpower will be anything more than an exotic imitation of American consumer society.

One can imagine India becoming a rich and powerful Westernised country in a thoroughly Westernised world. The higher values it has represented through the ages would be forgotten. Decades after winning political freedom, India would have lost the crucial struggle for intellectual and spiritual freedom. The twenty-first century might come to be called the Asian Century, or even (as some have suggested) the Indian Century; but if this is based purely on economic success and the triumph of materialism, it would be Asian—or Indian—only in name. The loss would be not only Asia's and India's, but humanity's.

An Alternative Vision

Some who worked for India's freedom cherished a more exalted image of their country's future. One such person was Sri Aurobindo. He had entered the freedom struggle in its early days when, as he later wrote,

the ideal of independence... was regarded... by the vast majority of Indians as unpractical and impossible, an almost insane chimera. It was thought that the British Empire was too powerful and India too weak, effectively disarmed and impotent even to dream of the success of such an endeavour.¹

During a year in prison he had a series of profound spiritual experiences. In 1910, the year after his release, he withdrew from political activity to concentrate on spiritual work, shifting his focus from national liberation—which he saw to be inevitable—to the still more challenging question of what India would do with her freedom once it was achieved.

In August 1947, Sri Aurobindo was asked to give a message to be broadcast on the eve of India's independence, which coincided with his own seventy-fifth birthday. According to his original message (shortened for the actual broadcast), the birth of free India signified

the entry into the comity of nations of a new power with untold potentialities which has a great part to play in determining the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity.²

This was a bold statement at the time, when India was just coming into existence as a modern nation. Sixty years later, as the global balance of power begins to tilt toward Asia, it is easier to envisage India as playing a major role in shaping the future. But what kind of role in what kind of future?

Sri Aurobindo maintained that India was arising, “not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion, greatness, power and prosperity,—though these too she must not neglect,” but to contribute to a more harmonious and enlightened life for mankind. He believed the time to be not far off when a “new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.” India could help to bring about human unity by recovering and extending her ancient spiritual knowledge and, politically, by developing “that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer”.³

Conquest, Assimilation and Progress

The changes that have swept the world in the last century have been partly a reversal and partly a continuation of the process that brought Europe and its offshoots to a position of global dominance. Any attempt to look into the future has to take this paradox into account. The dismantling of colonial empires and the rise of aspiring Asian superpowers are part of a transformation in political and economic relations with possible cultural implications. But many of the results of the age of Western expansionism remain and can hardly be reversed. The shrinking of the earth by

technology is one of these. Globalisation in one form or another is evidently here to stay and the only practical question is what to do with it. Modernisation seems unstoppable and is hard to distinguish from Westernisation. The potential role of India has to be considered in this context.

Let us glance briefly, then, at the last half millennium and consider where it has brought us. There are two starkly contrasting views of this period. Some regard it uncritically as an era of spectacular progress. For others, especially in the East, it was an upsurge of barbarism that overwhelmed societies more refined but less well-armed than that of Europe.

Perhaps it was both these things. Some reported remarks of Swami Vivekananda suggest a way to reconcile the contradiction by showing how civilisation can progress despite a contrary appearance of the most disconcerting setbacks. The Swami described a pattern that can be observed in various forms throughout history:

A certain race becomes civilised. Then comes a nomad race. Nomads are always ready to fight. They come and conquer a race. They bring better blood, stronger physiques. They take up the mind of the conquered race and add that to their body and push civilisation still further.⁴

Vivekananda was restating the essence of a theory put forward in the fourteenth century by the Arab historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldun. The theory can be formulated more generally; the conquerors need not be nomads, strictly speaking, nor is it always physical strength that gives them their main advantage—Ibn Khaldun emphasised the cohesion of tribes in contrast to urban societies, while in more recent times the decisive factor has been technology. But whatever the details in a particular case, the general pattern is common enough: the conquest of the more civilised by the less civilised, who then proceed to absorb elements of the culture they have overpowered.

The warlike Romans conquered much of the ancient world, but took their culture largely from the Greeks. Eventually, they adopted a religion that had originated in a corner of their empire among a gifted but unfortunate Near Eastern people known as the Jews. The Roman empire, in turn, succumbed to Germanic tribes who converted to Christianity. Centuries later the descendants of these barbarians began to assimilate the legacy of classical antiquity transmitted to them by the Arabs. They also made their own improvements on technological innovations, including gunpowder, that came to them from as far away as China.

Soon these and other developments propelled them to an unprecedented expansion that brought most of the earth under their sway. The aggressive energy of the young civilisation of Europe drove it to subjugate older civilisations such as that of India which had already reached an advanced stage and begun to decline in vitality.

But Asian civilisations have shown extraordinary resilience, surviving into an age of intense global interchange whose outcome is difficult to foresee. At a time of

increasing interaction and cultural fusion, two possibilities stand out. If the present direction of influence continues, Westernisation may prevail, swallow up what remains of other types of civilisation and produce a global monoculture with few meaningful variations. On the other hand, it now seems increasingly likely that non-Western cultures will successfully reassert themselves, retain their own distinctive identities—hopefully not by a reactionary clinging to the past, but by a creative evolution in response to new conditions—and make significant contributions to whatever world-civilisation may emerge.

Surprisingly, the cycle of catastrophes described by Ibn Khaldun need not lead to a pessimistic view of history. In Vivekananda's version of the theory, the net result at each stage is to "push civilisation still further."⁵ However much we may deplore the injustices of imperialism, it is possible to see progress of a certain kind as the overall outcome of the last few centuries, providing a starting-point for a new leap forward.

Liberty and Her Sisters

It is on its idealistic side that the Western mind comes closest to the Eastern spirit. Whatever good may have come out of the colonial era is largely due to this mitigating factor derived from a blend of the Greek and Christian heritage of Europe. It is here that mutual comprehension and cultural synthesis might be most fruitful for the future.

Among the most positive effects of the worldwide influence of Western culture must be counted the spread of three kindred ideals. *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* was the motto of the French revolution, inspired by the thinking of the European Age of Enlightenment. Since the late 1700s, the spirit of that revolution has made a strong impact on the collective life of humanity—not least by stimulating revolts against Western imperialism.

The modern attempt to create a society animated by the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity has met with remarkable successes in some directions and equally striking failures in others. Unfortunately, there was from the beginning a contradiction between these humanistic ideals and the violent methods sometimes adopted to achieve and spread them. To make things worse, the three ideals soon came into conflict with each other. The political and economic freedom offered by democracy and capitalism did not turn out to be a guarantee of equality. Communism therefore tried to enforce equality by sacrificing liberty. The impulse of fraternity has been limited in its inclusiveness and most vigorous in communitarian movements which, again, have little use for individual liberty.

Non-Western peoples were ironically introduced to modern conceptions of freedom and equality by white men who robbed them of their independence and treated them as inferior races. This contradiction did not escape the notice of the subject peoples. Nevertheless, their best minds often appreciated the value of the

ideals themselves, apart from the hypocrisy of those who professed them.

In India, for example, Vivekananda realised it was India's social stagnation and decadence that had allowed foreigners to take over the country. He saw an opportunity to recreate India. The people were not to confront their alien masters, but to ignore them and take the regeneration of their society into their own hands. Vivekananda's stirring utterances remind us of the revolutionary mood in which the cry for liberty, equality and fraternity was first raised:

Bread! Bread! I do not believe in a God, who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal bliss in heaven! Pooh! India is to be raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread.... More bread, more opportunity for everybody!⁶

Vivekananda was especially perceptive on the subject of liberty. He regarded the Western and Indian conceptions of it as complementary and wanted to unify them:

The Greek sought political liberty. The Hindu has always sought spiritual liberty. Both are one-sided.... To care only for spiritual liberty and not for social liberty is a defect, but the opposite is a still greater defect. Liberty of both soul and body is to be striven for.⁷

This contrast between the Greek and the Hindu is a simplification, no doubt, but suggests the main trends in the West and the East. The distinction between political and spiritual liberty may be compared with the distinction between "negative" and "positive" liberty made by certain Western thinkers. For Isaiah Berlin, negative liberty means "not being interfered with by others". Positive liberty, on the other hand, is the freedom of self-mastery or "rational self-direction". It includes "the traditional self-emancipation of ascetics and quietists, of stoics or Buddhist sages". It is to the first ideal, that of freedom from external compulsion, that Berlin gave his unconditional approval. He was uncomfortable with positive liberty, as he defined it, because he saw in it an affinity with despotism:

The reason within me, if it is to triumph, must eliminate and suppress my 'lower' instincts, my passions and desires, which render me a slave; similarly (the fatal transition from individual to social concepts is almost imperceptible) the higher elements in society... may exercise compulsion to rationalise the irrational section of society.⁸

But Vivekananda's conception of spiritual liberty is not open to this objection. He explicitly rejects the error of justifying any kind of compulsion—what Berlin would see as the abrogation of negative liberty in the name of positive liberty:

India has always had this magnificent idea of religious freedom, and you must remember that freedom is the first condition of growth. What you do not make free, will never grow. The idea that you can make others grow and help their growth, that you can direct and guide them, always retaining for yourself the freedom of the teacher, is nonsense, a dangerous lie which has retarded the growth of millions and millions of human beings in this world. Let men have the light of liberty. That is the only condition of growth.⁹

Democracy and Spirituality

After the passing of Swami Vivekananda, we find Sri Aurobindo taking up some of the same themes and shedding new light on them. Shortly before his imprisonment in Alipore Jail he wrote in *Bande Mataram* of “the mighty opportunity which the impact of Europe gave” to India. Instead of merely rejecting European influence, Indians were to learn all they could and draw on their own spiritual resources to find the deeper truth behind Western ideals. India’s mission in the modern world is, in effect, to complete and fulfil the work begun by the French revolution. India is to lead humanity

to the true source of human liberty, human equality, human brotherhood. When man is free in spirit, all other freedom is at his command.... When he is liberated from delusion, he perceives the divine equality of the world which fulfils itself through love and justice.... When he has perceived this divine equality, he is brother to the whole world, and in whatever position he is placed he serves all men as his brothers by the law of love, by the law of justice.

This perception of the real significance of liberty, equality and brotherhood and their innate harmony is the basis of what Sri Aurobindo saw as “the Asiatic reading of democracy which India must rediscover for herself before she can give it to the world.”¹⁰

A few years later, when he wrote *The Ideal of Human Unity*, he explored further the spiritual dimension of the revolutionary *mantra*. He ascribed its formulation in the eighteenth century to “a sort of primal intuition.”¹¹ But for that reason, its full implications were beyond the grasp of a rationalistic and materialistic age preoccupied with the external machinery of society and politics.

Liberty, equality and fraternity have become conflicting values because their inner meaning has been missed. A selfish liberty leads to competitive individualism and an exaggeration of inequalities. Therefore an acceptable degree of equality can only be achieved, it would seem, by restraining those who are inclined to use their freedom at the expense of others. This restraint, if carried too far, may undermine the vigour of a free society. A sense of fraternity might be expected to act as a natural

deterrent to the misuse of freedom. But the passion for fraternity or collective identity tends to do more than that. It may unduly limit the liberty of individuals by imposing conformity within the group. It also commonly degenerates into tribalism in relation to other groups.

Sri Aurobindo found the solution to this dilemma in a reinterpretation of all three terms, but especially in a new understanding of the last of them, which he saw to be the key. The function of fraternity should be to counteract the egoism that brings liberty into collision with equality. But if it does this by subordinating the individual ego to the collective ego, the result can be an intolerable restriction on the legitimate demand for freedom. Besides, the brotherhood of any narrow community becomes a cause of strife with other communities, creating an explosive situation in today's global village.

What is needed, according to Sri Aurobindo, is a sense of human brotherhood that "is not a matter either of physical kinship or of vital association or of intellectual agreement."¹² Belonging to something deeper in us which may be called the soul, this can create "a psychological oneness not dependent upon any intellectual or outward uniformity"¹³ On this basis, adopting the most positive meaning of freedom and a spiritual interpretation of equality, the terms become complementary and inseparable:

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.¹⁴

Oneness in Diversity

In an age marked by the clash of divisive identities, as Amartya Sen has pointed out, "It makes a difference how we choose to see ourselves."¹⁵ The choice of how one sees oneself—one's identity—is the most basic exercise of freedom. I may see myself first and foremost as a human being, not allowing any lesser identity to narrow my self-perception. But included in this primary identity I also have a number of other identities as a member of various large or small subdivisions of the human race. The endless possible variety of these gives human life much of its richness. But the hardening of the boundaries of limited identities to the detriment of the sense of our common humanity causes antagonism among communities. Individually also, a too rigid identity fixed from birth and imposed by society can become a prison from

which the inborn urge for liberty compels us to seek escape.

In India it has been held, from time immemorial, that all are embodiments of the one Self (Atman). *Ekatva*, the oneness of existence, is central to the teaching of the ancient scriptures. Linked with it are the companion ideas of *mukti* or inner freedom and *samatā*, the equality of all as manifestations of one infinite Reality. If we choose to see ourselves in such terms, this vision of oneness will give spiritual depth and intensity to the growing idea and feeling of human unity. The sense of global identity which is emerging on this increasingly interconnected planet will become more living and effective.

If India's resurgence is to have a genuinely transformative impact on the world, that impact is likely to be connected with the spread of this kind of self-perception, which may be summed up in the word spirituality. Spirituality is by no means unique to India, but it has been cultivated there for millennia with unparalleled persistence, passion and insight.

Needless to say, the influence of Indian spirituality on the world would depend on the fate of spirituality in modern India itself. It might be argued that spirituality is the last thing India needs today, that it will take the country back to the past rather than forward to the future, that it will be confused with religion, that religions quarrel and that Indians would do better after all to stick to secular ideas borrowed from the West. But perhaps India and the world are Westernised enough already and could benefit from some Easternising to set right the balance. In any case, the failure to distinguish divisive religious conservatism from the liberating and unifying force of spirituality is an error that ought to be corrected rather than unthinkingly indulged.

It might seem unrealistic to expect spirituality to have a practical effect on the world we live in. No doubt, masses of people are not going to rise very soon to the heights attained by the ancient Rishis or a Sri Ramakrishna or Sri Aurobindo. But if it is true that freedom, equality and unity are the nature of the soul, it is reasonable to suppose that these inner realities can come to the surface and reshape the collective life, as has happened often enough in the case of individuals. The question then is whether the time has come when such a collective change is feasible. This question can be answered only by making the attempt.

Sri Aurobindo hoped to see a renaissance in India "governed by the principle of spirituality". At the same time he clarified that by spirituality he did not mean "the moulding of the whole type of the national being to suit the limited dogmas, forms, tenets of a particular religion". He added that "clearly such an attempt would be impossible, even if it were desirable, in a country full of the most diverse religious opinions".

Spirituality, he went on to say, "is much wider than any particular religion".¹⁶ At the time when he was writing, the neologism "Hindutva" (Hinduness) had not yet been coined. The notion of Hindu nationalism was in the air, however. Sri Aurobindo unequivocally distanced himself from this idea and stated explicitly that he did "not

understand Hindu nationalism as a possibility under modern conditions".¹⁷ Not Hindutva, but Ekatva—oneness—should be the ideal.

For many centuries the characteristically Indian recognition of the unifying factor of spirituality as the essence of religion permitted the extraordinary religious variety of the subcontinent to flourish with remarkably little friction. India's irrepressible spiritual tendency may yet reassert itself in an even more dynamic way than before and play a decisive role in overcoming the many challenges the country still faces. It would be short-sighted to limit our expectations from this vast people who are the heirs to such a splendid past and possess an incalculable potential for the future.

RICHARD HARTZ

Notes and References

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, p. 47.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 474.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 475-77.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 9, p. 272.
5. The same idea underlies Sri Aurobindo's unfinished epic *Iliion*. In "The Book of the Gods" (*Iliion*, 1989 ed., p. 103), Zeus foretells the course of events as he addresses the other gods on the eve of the fall of Troy:

Troy that displaced with her force and her arms the luminous ancients,
Sinks in her turn by the ruder strength of the half-savage Achaians.
They to the Hellene shall yield and the Hellene fall by the Roman.
Rome too shall not endure, but by strengths ill-shaped shall be broken,
Nations formed in the ice and mist, confused and crude-hearted.
So shall the darker and ruder always prevail o'er the brilliant
Till in its turn to a ruder and darker it falls and is shattered...
So shall it last till the fallen ages return to their greatness.
For if the twilight be helped not, night o'er the world cannot darken;
Night forbidden how shall a greater dawn be effected?
6. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 4, p. 368.
7. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 86.
8. Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 170, 191, 182, 196.
9. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 2, p. 115.
10. Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram: Political Writings and Speeches, 1890-1908, II*, CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 931-32.
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12. *Ibid.*, p. 570.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 578.
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15. Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 148.
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A NEW POLITICAL SYSTEM FOR INDIA

Introduction

ON the 15th August 1947, India attained its independence from British rule and Sri Aurobindo was requested to give a message on that occasion. Here is an extract from the message:

I have been asked for a message on this great occasion, but I am perhaps hardly in a position to give one. All I can do is to make a personal declaration of the aims and ideals conceived in my childhood and youth and now watched in their beginning of fulfilment, because they are relevant to the freedom of India, since they are a part of what I believe to be India's future work, something in which she cannot but take a leading position. For I have always held and said that India was arising, not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion, greatness, power and prosperity,—though these too she must not neglect,—and certainly not like others to acquire domination of other peoples, but to live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race.

(*SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 401)

Sri Aurobindo worked actively in the political field for the freedom of India and for awakening her to her mission of leading the world towards spirituality. His political career was short—only four years from 1906 to 1910. But the Indian nation was always in his consciousness and he strove to raise it to its highest destiny. In the words of the Mother:

Sri Aurobindo always loved deeply his Motherland. But he wished her to be great, noble, pure and worthy of her big mission in the world. He refused to let her sink to the sordid and vulgar level of blind self-interests and ignorant prejudices.

25 April 1954

(*CWM*, Vol. 13, p. 128)

Sri Aurobindo retired from active political life in 1910. But this did not mean, as it was then supposed, that he had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning.

Consequently even in his retirement, Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever

necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action.

The Mother too kept a close watch on developments in India and openly intervened now and then; at other times she sent messages to Indian leaders or sent answers to disciples on questions relating to India.

In 1970, the Mother made some observations. We are quoting some portions of those remarks:

What must be done to pull the country out of its difficulty? Sri Aurobindo has foreseen all the troubles and he has given the solution. Just now we are approaching his Centenary; it seems arranged, you know, divinely arranged, because this would be a wonderful occasion to spread his teaching all over the country: the teaching, the practical teaching, his teaching about India, how to organise India, the mission of India.... And it is only this that gives a clue to all these difficulties.

About all that has happened and all that is happening now, he has said clearly that to go back to it is useless. We must give the country its true position, that is, the position of relying on the Divine....

...And this is above politics, you see.... It is above all politics. It is to organise the country beyond politics. And it is the only way. In politics it is always fight and ugly fight—ugly. And it has become so bad. He was telling me always that things would become worse and worse, because it is the *end* of this age. We are entering into an age where things must be organised differently. It is a difficult time because of that.

Because we know what will come, we can help to make it come sooner and with less turmoil. There is no hope in going backwards; it would make things last endlessly. We must go forward, absolutely, and go beyond, beyond party. And nobody can explain that better than Sri Aurobindo, because he was so much, *so* much beyond party; he saw the advantages and disadvantages of all parties and he stated them exactly.

If you read carefully what he has written—so much—you will find the answer to all these questions. And at the same time you will know that you will have the full support of the Divine Power. The Power that was behind him is behind this transformation. It is time for transformation. We can't cling to the past.

The best way to go beyond politics is to spread the message of Sri Aurobindo. Because he is no more a political element wanting to take power; there are only his ideas and ideals. And, of course, if people could understand and realise his programme, the country could be very strong, very strong....

Politics is always limited by party, by ideas, by duties also—unless we prepare a government that has no party, a government that admits all ideas because it is above parties. Party is limitation; it is like a box: you go into the

box (*Mother laughs*). Of course, if there were some people who had the courage to be in the government without a party—“We represent no party! We represent *India*”—that would be magnificent.

Pull the consciousness up, up, above party.

And then, naturally, certain people who couldn't come into political parties—that! that is truly working for tomorrow. Tomorrow it will be like that. All this turmoil is because the country must take the lead, must go above all these old political habits. **Government without party. Oh! it would be magnificent!** (*Emphasis added*)

25 May 1970

(CWM, Vol. 15, pp. 426-28)

In the following article, we are making an attempt to study some of the problems which India is facing today and to suggest solutions in the light of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The Present State of India

It is 60 years since India attained its independence. It will be useful and instructive to do some stocktaking and see what India has achieved in these six decades and then to see what more needs to be done.

Let us start with the positive elements.

Soon after attaining independence, India gave herself a constitution and became a democratic and socialistic Republic. India became formally a Republic on 26 January 1950 and has since been governed by its Constitution. This was indeed a great achievement, more particularly when one looks at some of the countries in our neighbourhood and even around the world. For it established a system of governance, a sound legal system and a fairly sound basis for a democratic socialistic society where elections are held regularly and the popular mandate is respected.

We may thus say that the democratic system has been fully established and accepted as an indispensable part of Indian political life; undoubtedly there are some serious shortcomings and these need to be corrected sooner or later. But the very fact that democracy has become an integral part of Indian political life is a positive and great gain. There are sometimes doubts cast on this system suggesting that a dictatorial system—often referred to as ‘enlightened dictatorship’—would have served India better. This proposition is doubtful although one can admit its necessity in certain exceptional circumstances. On the whole however, a democratic system is always more desirable. The justification for this can be found in the following statements of Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Human Cycle*:

Man needs freedom of thought and life and action in order that he may grow,

otherwise he will remain fixed where he was, a stunted and static being. If his individual mind and reason are ill-developed, he may consent to grow, as does the infrarational mind, in the group-soul, in the herd, in the mass, with that subtle half-conscient general evolution common to all in the lower process of Nature. As he develops individual reason and will, he needs and society must give him room for an increasing play of individual freedom and variation, at least so far as that does not develop itself to the avoidable harm of others and of society as a whole.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 211)

Similarly in the first decade of the twentieth century, Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Bande Mataram*:

Socialistic Democracy is the only true democracy, for without it we cannot get the equalised and harmonised distribution of functions, each part of the community existing for the good of all and not struggling for its own separate interests, which will give humanity as a whole the necessary conditions in which it can turn its best energies to its higher development.

(‘Caste and Democracy’: CWSA, Vol. 7, pp. 684-85)

Along with this democratic structure we have adopted, India has taken great strides in many other areas.

A strong industrial base has been developed.

Agricultural production has increased greatly and we have become more or less self-sufficient in food production.

In the economic field there is great progress and India is being viewed as one of the super powers in the next few decades.

In the scientific and technological fields, India ranks among the leading powers whether it is in space research, bio-technology or information technology.

Even in education, we have made great strides with an educated population of over 150 million Indians.

India has become the third largest reservoir of skilled scientific and technical manpower, the fifth military power, the sixth member of the nuclear club, seventh in the space race and the tenth industrial power.

Consequently, India’s voice is being heard today on the international plane with respect. That is a great gain and portends well for the future.

Despite all these positive factors, there are whole areas in which there is a lot to be disturbed about; consequently there is a great deal of despondency in the country. Many intelligent observers are wondering as to where we are going and sometimes the question is even asked whether India as a nation will remain united and survive. In this context, I am paraphrasing portions of an article written by Aparajita Mehta. She says:

Numerous technological, scientific and other significant achievements have definitely taken place in our country. From automobiles, to satellites and to computers and the internet, the list is endless and deserves praise. But will computers alone, however sophisticated and all-embracing, bring about the desired multi-sided revolution that is envisaged in the next decade or two?

She moves on to point out some of the serious shortcomings in India today:

With several anti-national and secessionist trends gaining strength, India has in recent years, developed several fissures and fractures, some of them highly disconcerting in character. The hope of reversing these negative trends is vanishing and the prospects for the future seem disheartening. Must India break up into splinters and fragments?

There are more fractures in Indian society today, than bonds of unity; there are more splits and discords than wholesome fraternal bonds and accords. Communal wrangling continues to persist, despite all the tall talk of cohesion. Behind the dazzle and display of prosperity, lie the fears, miseries and deprivations of millions.

Since independence, much of our social structure has been torn by hatred, tensions and inter-caste rivalry; and this is not all! India's vast area, illiteracy and the massive burgeoning population is one big cause for alarm. Clashes over religion are prevalent. Corruption is reigning in every field of national activity. Sincerity, honesty and the true spirit of service, which can help check these negative trends, are not much in evidence. Politics at the state and national level, is fast losing its motto of "patriotism and duty".

Today, the image of the political class in India is very poor; even the present Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Somnath Chatterjee, had this to say recently:

...the images of "intrigue, venality, disorder and anarchy" held by people about politicians needed to be corrected urgently.

Here is an extract from an article by M. R. Venkatesh (on Rediff.com, April 11, 2007). He starts his article with a quote from Winston Churchill:

"Power will go to the hands of rascals, rogues and freebooters. All Indian leaders will be of low calibre and men of straw."—Winston Churchill on the eve of Indian Independence.

Sometimes facts speak louder than comments. The following are some extracts from the Approach Paper to the 11th Five-Year Plan, prepared and published by the Planning Commission last year.

Coming from the highest echelons of the Government, these remain an authentic and a grim reminder of what has gone wrong since Independence. Consider these dismal facts from this document of the Planning Commission:

Official poverty stands at 28 per cent. Significantly, one has to appreciate that the current definition of poverty is hopelessly inadequate. It is defined on the premise of whether a person can afford to consume 2,400 calories of food in rural India or 2,100 calories of food in urban India per day. Naturally, this limited definition ignores the other bare minimum necessities required for a decent living. Obviously, if one were to consider a more realistically defined poverty line, based on the basic needs for a decent living, the number of poor in India could be far more than the officially stated figure of 30 crore (300 million).

The abhorrent practice of manual scavenging continues even today.

Quality of education and curative health services are beyond the reach of the common man and those provided by the private sector are costly and of variable quality.

A major institutional challenge is that even where service providers exist, the quality of delivery is poor and those responsible for delivering the services cannot be held accountable.

In the health and education systems, there is a large number of staff vacancies that have not been filled up due to resource constraints.

The cost of displacements of our tribal population is high and the compensation tardy and inadequate.

Corruption is now seen to be endemic in all spheres and this problem needs to be addressed urgently.

The legal system in India is respected for its independence and fairness but it suffers from notorious delays in dispensing justice. Delays result in denial of justice.

Literacy rate is still below 70 per cent.

The most difficult task is to ensure good quality of instruction and the position in this respect is disturbing. A recent study found that 38 per cent of the children who have completed four years of schooling cannot read a small paragraph with short sentences meant to be read by a student of class 2. About 55 per cent of such children cannot divide a three-digit number by a one-digit number.

Drop-out rate in primary schools for the country as a whole was at a staggering 31 per cent in 2003-04.

While some of our institutions of higher education compare well with the best in the world, the average standard is much lower.

India's infant mortality rates, under-five mortality rates, maternal mortality rates and immunisation rates are higher than that of Sri Lanka, China and Vietnam.

The biggest constraint in achieving a faster growth of manufacturing is the fact that infrastructure—roads, railways, ports, airports, communication and electricity is not up to the standards prevalent in our competitor countries.

Indian roads are very accident-prone and claim a large number of lives representing an enormous human and economic loss.

The Accelerated Power Development and Reform Programme (APDRP) initiated in 2001 was expected to bring down the Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses to 15 per cent by the end of the Tenth Plan. In fact, the average for all states is closer to 40 per cent.

The net result is that today India languishes at the bottom half of the global Human Development Index (HDI) wedged between underdeveloped countries like Namibia, Sao Tome and Principe, and Solomon Islands. Even countries endowed with a lesser amount of natural resources and lower calibre of human capital have performed better, perhaps even miraculously. This has been largely due to effective, responsive and effective governance. India definitely deserves better.

I have quoted these extracts just to highlight the sense of despondency that is prevalent and widespread among many serious political thinkers in India.

In sum, the problems facing India are:

- *A political system borrowed from the West which is hampering all progress and dividing the polity.*
- *Serious anti-national and secessionist trends.*
- *A society deeply divided in the name of religion, caste and even gender.*
- *Corruption at all levels and particularly at the higher political levels; India ranks high among the corrupt nations.*
- *An absence of national feeling leading to regionalism and parochialism where local interest becomes more important than the national interest.*
- *The enormous gap between the rich and the poor despite a vigorous economic growth.*
- *The dangers emanating from our neighbourhood, where most of the nations are facing serious tensions and seem to be heading towards being called “failed States”.*
- *The shortcomings in the educational system both in quality and quantity and its failure to uplift the nation as a whole.*

We shall now try to see where the root causes for this situation lie. For, it is only after finding the causes that we can think of applying the remedy.

Viewed from the point of view of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the root of the problem is as follows:

- *The first cause is the adoption of the present political system.*
- *The second cause is the acceptance of the Partition of India as final and not merely as a temporary aberration and an accident of history.*

There are undoubtedly other causes, but these two are the primary causes.

We shall start with the first problem, that is to say the political system.

The Political System in India

The first and most pressing problem that the nation is facing today lies in the Constitution of India which has led to the political system we have adopted. In this article we shall try to analyse the political system that we have adopted and suggest some remedies, both short term and long term.

The political system that we have adopted in India is basically the modern version of Democratic Socialism; it has been developed first in the Western nations more particularly in Great Britain and has been adopted with some variations in almost all the countries of the world. It should however be noted that democracy is not something new to India. History shows us that ancient India had a vigorous democratic system. Indeed there was a strong democratic element and even institutions that present a certain analogy to the parliamentary form; but in reality these features were of India's own kind and not at all the same things as modern parliaments and modern democracy. It did not in any way resemble the scrambling and burdensome parliamentary organisation of the party system and veiled oligarchy, which is what the modern form truly represents.

The one principle permanent in ancient Indian polity was the principle of an organically self-determining communal life,—self-determining not only in the mass and by means of the machinery of the vote and a representative body erected on the surface, representative only of the political mind of a part of the nation, which is all that the modern system has been able to manage, but in every pulse of its life and in each separate member of its existence. A free synthetic communal order was its character, and the condition of liberty it aimed at was not so much an individual as a communal freedom.

However that be, our present political system has been mainly taken from the British system, the Parliamentary form of government.

Since we have taken our political system mainly from the British and other Western powers, it will be necessary to understand the fundamental principles on which it was based and how it applies to the Indian nation.

The Principles of Democracy in the Modern World

The modern age of mankind may be characterised as an attempt to discover and

work out the right principle and secure foundations of a rational system of society. It was in Great Britain that the first attempts on the social and political plane started and this led to the system of individualist democracy. This system developed naturally as a direct consequence of the Renaissance and the Reformation. In the period before the Renaissance and the Reformation, Faith and Religion were the chief pillars of society; but, as a consequence of these movements, Faith and Religion were dethroned and Reason was enthroned as the supreme instrument of knowledge. Modern democracy is founded upon a few basic assumptions. These may be summed up as:

- *The conviction that the highest instrument of knowledge at the disposal of man is Reason.*
- *Human society can best progress and grow by the application of Reason to all the details of individual and collective life.*
- *In the individual life of man, each one has the right to live his own life governed by his reason, as long as he respects the same right in all other individuals.*
- *In the collective life of man, it is the collective reason that has to be applied.*

Individualistic Democracy

The application of these principles created the modern political system of individualistic democracy, whether of the Parliamentary or the Presidential form. It was believed that with the application of Reason to human life, we would eventually arrive at a harmonious and ideal society.

However, in its application to society there was a shortfall in the expected results. The reasons were firstly, that a large number of individuals in the society had not yet sufficiently developed their rational faculties and secondly that even those who had developed them did not generally use them for the search of truth; rather, reason was used more to justify the satisfaction of their interests, desires and preferences.

The inevitable corrective to this situation was the introduction of universal education; for if man was not by nature a rational being, he would by education become one. However, even after the introduction of universal education, a new problem has revealed itself. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

But here a new and enormous defect has revealed itself which is proving fatal to the social idea which engendered it. For given even perfect equality of educational and other opportunity,—and that does not yet really exist and cannot in the individualistic state of society,—to what purpose or in what manner is the opportunity likely to be used? Man, the half infrarational being, demands three things for his satisfaction, power, if he can have it, but at any rate the use and reward of his faculties and the enjoyment of his desires. In the old societies the possibility of these could be secured by him to a certain extent according to

his birth, his fixed status and the use of his capacity within the limits of his hereditary status. That basis once removed and no proper substitute provided, the same ends can only be secured by success in a scramble for the one power left, the power of wealth. Accordingly, instead of a harmoniously ordered society there has been developed a huge organised competitive system, a frantically rapid and one-sided development of industrialism and, under the garb of democracy, an increasing plutocratic tendency that shocks by its ostentatious grossness and the magnitudes of its gulfs and distances. These have been the last results of the individualistic ideal and its democratic machinery, the initial bankruptcies of the rational age.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 199-200)

The Socialistic Principle

The natural corrective to this state of affairs was the introduction by Reason of the principle of Socialism. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, the aim and justification of Socialism is as follows:

Socialism sets out to replace a system of organised economic battle by an organised order and peace. This can no longer be done on the old lines, an artificial or inherited inequality brought about by the denial of equal opportunity and justified by the affirmation of that injustice and its result as an eternal law of society and of Nature. That is a falsehood which the reason of man will no longer permit. Neither can it be done, it seems, on the basis of individual liberty; for that has broken down in the practice. Socialism therefore must do away with the democratic basis of individual liberty, even if it professes to respect it or to be marching towards a more rational freedom. It shifts at first the fundamental emphasis to other ideas and fruits of the democratic ideal, and it leads by this transference of stress to a radical change in the basic principle of a rational society. Equality, not a political only, but a perfect social equality, is to be the basis. There is to be equality of opportunity for all, but also equality of status for all, for without the last the first cannot be secured; even if it were established, it could not endure. This equality again is impossible if personal, or at least inherited right in property is to exist, and therefore socialism abolishes—except at best on a small scale—the right of personal property as it is now understood and makes war on the hereditary principle. Who then is to possess the property? It can only be the community as a whole. And who is to administer it? Again, the community as a whole. In order to justify this idea, the socialistic principle has practically to deny the existence of the individual or his right to exist except as a member of the society and for its sake. He belongs entirely to the society, not only his property, but himself, his labour, his capacities,

the education it gives him and its results, his mind, his knowledge, his individual life, his family life, the life of his children. Moreover, since his individual reason cannot be trusted to work out naturally a right and rational adjustment of his life with the life of others, it is for the reason of the whole community to arrange that too for him. Not the reasoning minds and wills of the individuals, but the collective reasoning mind and will of the community has to govern. It is this which will determine not only the principles and all the details of the economic and political order, but the whole life of the community and of the individual as a working, thinking, feeling cell of this life, the development of his capacities, his actions, the use of the knowledge he has acquired, the whole ordering of his vital, his ethical, his intelligent being. 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.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 200-01)

But even at its best the collectivist idea contains several fallacies inconsistent with the real facts of human life and nature. The central defect through which a socialistic State is bound to be convicted of insufficiency and condemned to pass away before the growth of a new ideal, lies in the pressure of the State organisation on the life of the individual; in fact many political commentators complain that it has reached a point at which it is ceasing to be tolerable.

Again in the words of Sri Aurobindo:

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, if, that is to say, it becomes patently undemocratic or remains pseudo-democratic, then it will be this falsity through which anarchistic thought will attack its existence. But the innermost difficulty would not disappear even if the socialistic State became really democratic, really the expression of the free reasoned will of the majority in agreement. Any true development of that kind would be difficult indeed and has the appearance of a chimera: for collectivism pretends to regulate life not only in its few fundamental principles and its main lines, as every organised society must tend to do, but in its details, it aims at a thoroughgoing scientific regulation, and an agreement of the free reasoned will of millions in all the lines and most of the details of life is a contradiction in terms. Whatever the perfection of the organised State, the suppression or oppression of individual freedom by the will of the majority or of a minority would still be there as a cardinal defect vitiating its very principle. And there would be something infinitely worse. For a thoroughgoing scientific regulation of life can only be brought about by a thoroughgoing mechanisation of life. This tendency to mechanisation is the inherent defect of the State idea and its practice. Already

that is the defect upon which both intellectual anarchistic thought and the insight of the spiritual thinker have begun to lay stress, and it must immensely increase as the State idea rounds itself into a greater completeness in practice. It is indeed the inherent defect of reason when it turns to govern life and labours by quelling its natural tendencies to put it into some kind of rational order.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 212-13)

Modern India

In India the Central Government has not adopted the Socialistic system in its purity and entirety. However, in some States like West Bengal and Kerala where the Communists have been in power, a more or less complete Socialistic Government has been functioning.

The Central Government has pursued the middle path adopting the democratic socialist system.

While this seems to be the most rational way, there is today in India a great deal of dissatisfaction with the present political system. Many political commentators are wondering whether a change in the system is necessary and even inevitable. Sri Aurobindo points out:

And just as the idea of individualistic democracy found itself before long in difficulties on that account because of the disparity between life's facts and the mind's idea, difficulties that have led up to its discredit and approaching overthrow, the idea of collectivist democracy too may well find itself before long in difficulties that must lead to its discredit and eventual replacement by a third stage of the inevitable progression. Liberty protected by a State in which all are politically equal, was the idea that 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 socialistic 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.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 202)

Before we proceed further, let us see what are the gains of the democratic system that we have adopted in India.

The Gains of the Democratic System

What are the gains of the parliamentary system in India? In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

Parliamentarism, the invention of the English political genius, is a necessary stage in the evolution of democracy, for without it the generalised faculty of considering and managing with the least possible friction large problems of politics, administration, economics, legislation concerning considerable aggregates of men cannot easily be developed. It has also been the one successful means yet discovered of preventing the State executive from suppressing the liberties of the individual and the nation.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 472-73)

The other gain of modern democracy is a full freedom of speech and thought. And as long as this freedom endures, the fear of a static and unprogressive condition of humanity and subsequent stagnation seems to be groundless,—especially when this freedom is accompanied by universal education which provides the largest possible human field for producing an effectuating force. Freedom of thought and speech—the two necessarily go together, since there can be no real freedom of thought where a padlock is put upon freedom of speech—is not indeed complete without freedom of association; for free speech means free propagandism and propagandism becomes effective only by association for the realisation of its objects. This third liberty also exists with more or less of qualifying limitations or prudent safeguards in all democratic States including India.

The Limitations of the Democratic System

The dissatisfaction with the present democratic system has raised some very pertinent questions. These may be summed up as follows:

Is the present democratic system truly democratic?

Is there not the danger of constant instability in the present form of Government?

A third point that is constantly raised in respect to the Parliamentary form of Government is the very slow process of decision making which accords ill with the need of efficient government. And so far, it has not yet been found possible to combine the parliamentary system and the modern trend towards a more democratic democracy; it has been always an instrument either of a modified aristocratic or of a middle-class rule. Besides, its method involves an immense waste of time and energy and a confused, swaying and uncertain action that “muddles out” in the end some tolerable result. This method is contrary to the more stringent ideas of efficient government and administration that are now growing in force and necessity and it might be fatal

to efficiency in anything so complicated as the management of the affairs of such a large country as India. To illustrate this point, here is an extract from a news item from *The Hindu*, April 2, 2007:

Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram has decried the “Indian brand of deliberative democracy” having innumerable checks and balances that often “paralysed decision-making,” leading the country to accept “sub-optimal solutions” with enormous costs in terms of time and money in implementing a programme. Pointing out that China owed its progress to its “one country, two systems” theory, he regretted that India followed “one country, one system and as many interpretations as there are political parties.” This “Indian brand of deliberative democracy” must change and the time had come when, in the case of development programmes, the country, after due deliberations, must adopt a system and work it to the best advantage of the people, eschewing conflicting interpretations.

Again, Parliamentaryism means too, in practice, the rule and often the tyranny of a majority, even of a very small majority, and the modern mind attaches increasing importance to the rights of minorities.

Finally, the party system is creating great obstacles to the development and growth of India.

As a matter of fact the sole democratic elements today are, public opinion, expressed through the media or through public agitations, periodical elections and the power of the people to refuse re-election to those who have displeased them. The government is really in the hands of the bourgeoisie, the professional and business men, the landholders,—where such a class still exists,—strengthened by a number of new arrivals from the working class who very soon assimilate the political temperament and ideas of the governing classes.

In a comment on democracy, Sri Aurobindo writes:

Democracy is by no means a sure preservative of liberty; on the contrary, we see today the democratic system of government march steadily towards such an organised annihilation of individual liberty as could not have been dreamed of in the old aristocratic and monarchical systems. It may be that from the more violent and brutal forms of despotic oppression which were associated with those systems, democracy has indeed delivered those nations which have been fortunate enough to achieve liberal forms of government, and that is no doubt a great gain. It revives now only in periods of revolution and excitement, often in the form of mob tyranny or a savage revolutionary or reactionary repression. But there is a deprivation of liberty which is more respectable in appearance, more subtle and systematised, more mild in its method because it has a greater force at its back, but for that very reason more effective and pervading. The

tyranny of the majority has become a familiar phrase and its deadening effects have been depicted with a great force of resentment by certain of the modern intellectuals; but what the future promises us is something more formidable still, the tyranny of the whole, of the self-hypnotised mass over its constituent groups and units.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 508-09)

In this context, we quote some extracts from a very insightful article written by Sajitha Bashir. She writes:

The only logical political power that the people are given in all these countries is the right to vote and hence formally speaking, the power to elect a government of their choice. [...] even this power is circumscribed by the electoral mechanism and the political process in which political parties play a dominant role in the choice of candidates [...]. The main issue at stake is that beyond the right to vote that is given to them every few years, there is no other constitutional power that the people enjoy in terms of the governance of their society once they have voted, they surrender all their powers to the elected representatives. Thereafter, they are effectively forbidden by law to participate in the governing of society. Political power formally derives from the people but in practice vests in Parliament, and in a much smaller group of people called the Cabinet. What is meant by popular sovereignty in a parliamentary democracy is, in fact, the sovereignty of the legislature. At all times, except at the instant of casting a vote, political power is actually wielded by the representatives of the people, with the people themselves being only the subjects of the rulers.

In the course of the development of parliamentary democracies, even the sovereignty of Parliament, or of the elected representatives, has been eroded and today the real sovereign power is vested in the government of the day. The emergence of the party form of government and its concomitant, the modern system of cabinet government, has meant that after the elections, the party with the majority of seats in Parliament virtually controls the entire legislative and executive authority of the state. The role of Parliament from one of acting as the tribunal of the people with the role of controlling the executive and removing it in cases of abuse of power, has been reduced to one of ventilating grievances and airing opinions or as in our country, offering some vulgar entertainment to the populace. The original power of Parliament as the initiator of legislation and control over the executive has been all but eliminated. Today, it is common practice for the government of the day to initiate all legislation. Further, the executive is in practice not bound by Parliament, let alone by the electorate, for as long as it commands a majority of votes in Parliament either through party mechanisms or through the medium of money power, its position is unassailable.

All this only goes to show that the modern democratic system, despite all appearances, is hardly democratic and is not fulfilling the purpose for which it was created. The question naturally arises: How do we make the democratic system truly representative of the people and their aspirations?

Since the democratic system is based on the governing of life by Reason, it follows that only when the population has more or less developed the power of Reasoning, can it be truly effective. As of now, a very large section of the people have not yet developed this faculty as they have not been given sufficient opportunities to get educated. *The first step therefore is to provide universal education which will lead to a rational education.*

The tremendous importance of the power of thinking was underlined by Sri Aurobindo in a letter written in 1920. This is what he wrote:

It is my belief that the main cause of India's weakness is not subjection, nor poverty, nor a lack of spirituality or religion, but a diminution of the power of thought, the spread of ignorance in the birthplace of knowledge. Everywhere I see an inability or unwillingness to think—incapacity of thought or “thought-phobia”. This may have been all right in the medieval period, but now this attitude is the sign of a great decline. The medieval period was a night, the day of victory for the man of ignorance; in the modern world it is the time of victory for the man of knowledge. He who can delve into and learn the truth about the world by thinking more, searching more, labouring more, gains more power.

(Translated from the original Bengali and published in the journal *Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research*, April 1980, p. 19)

But there arises another problem. Even in those who are getting a sound and good rational education, there is a glaring deficiency. For what after all is a rational education? Sri Aurobindo writes:

But a rational education means necessarily three things, first, to teach men how to observe and know rightly the facts on which they have to form a judgment; secondly, to train them to think fruitfully and soundly; thirdly, to fit them to use their knowledge and their thought effectively for their own and the common good. Capacity of observation and knowledge, capacity of intelligence and judgment, capacity of action and high character are required for the citizenship of a rational order of society; a general deficiency in any of these difficult requisites is a sure source of failure. Unfortunately,—even if we suppose that any training made available to the millions can ever be of this rare character,—the actual education given in the most advanced countries has not had the least relation to these necessities.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 198)

The Parliamentary debates today are very illustrative of this shortcoming. We see clearly how the power of Reason is being used only for narrow party interests even at the cost of national interest and worse still even of Truth. The political class seems to be interested only in their smaller goals most often at the cost of the nation. Much worse, they take full advantage of the simplicity and gullibility of the ordinary people who have not yet developed their power of reasoned understanding. Sri Aurobindo, describing the modern politician, writes:

...he does not represent the soul of a people or its aspirations. What he does usually represent is all the average pettiness, selfishness, egoism, self-deception that is about him and these he represents well enough as well as a great deal of mental incompetence and moral conventionality, timidity and pretence. Great issues often come to him for decision, but he does not deal with them greatly; high words and noble ideas are on his lips, but they become rapidly the claptrap of a party. The disease and falsehood of modern political life is patent in every country of the world and only the hypnotised acquiescence of all, even of the intellectual classes, in the great organised sham, cloaks and prolongs the malady, the acquiescence that men yield to everything that is habitual and makes the present atmosphere of their lives.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 296-97)

In a book written by G. S. Bhargava, titled *Star Crossed India: Let Down by Leadership*, the author points out the failure of the political class right from 1970 onwards. Reviewing this book M.V. Kamath writes (in *The Organiser*, April 1, 2007):

Reading this book is like re-living the history of India from 1970 onwards in all its foul details, the chicanery of politicians, the various riots and the pig-headedness of petty politicians. Bhargava's contention is that "India is star-crossed because its leaders undoubtedly great and promising individually, repeatedly failed the people...turning out to be persons with clay feet".

The Party System

India adopted the system of democratic socialism immediately after attaining independence. For the first few decades after independence, it seemed to be working reasonably well; the Congress Party won a two-thirds majority in the first few elections and consequently there was political stability. But with the maturing of Indian democracy, many other parties have come up and today it seems that there is no chance of a single-party majority in the near future. All signs point to an era of coalition governments. As of now it is affecting the stability of the political system. Therefore many political observers feel that it is necessary to have a two-party system or at the

most three or four recognised national political parties. In their opinion, all other regional parties or smaller parties should not be allowed to contest the national election. While appreciating the intention behind these proposals, it seems to be an ill-judged endeavour which is not likely to succeed. For this goes against the very grain of the Indian temperament. The Indian subcontinent which is so vast has such a tremendous diversity in every detail that it is almost impossible to have a unified system—political, economic or cultural. There will inevitably be parties with differing perceptions which will not only play a role in their states, but also would like to be heard in the national arena. We have therefore to find another solution which respects the Indian temperament of unity in diversity and yet ensures political stability. More important, the party system is proving to be very divisive and is hampering all development and growth.

To sum up, these are the deficiencies of the present Parliamentary democratic system being practised in India:

- *As seen already, the democratic system can function only when the capacity and habit of reasoning becomes universal. Unfortunately, even today a very large number of Indians lack this faculty because of inadequate educational opportunity. The consequence is that a very large number of Indians are being taken for a ride and cheated by political parties by slogans and catchwords.*
- *It is not truly democratic, for power rests in the hands of a very small number of persons who are in some way supposed to represent the people of India. The decision-making process is in the hands of a small coterie. The present Parliamentary system has in practice come to mean the rule and often the tyranny of a minority, even of a very small minority. P. C. Alexander, in a speech in Parliament, warned of the danger of the present system which could even lead to a development where: "...we may create an oligarchical system where a few people will be benefited while the integrity and strength of the country as a whole would have got eroded."*
- *The party system is proving to be very divisive.*
- *The Parliamentary method is very slow and takes a very long time with all its inevitable consequences.*
- *A habit of Machiavellian statecraft has replaced the nobler ethical ideals of the past; aggressive ambition is left without any sufficient spiritual or moral check and there seems to be a coarsening of the national mind in the ethics of politics and government. This tendency which manifested itself quite some time back was held in abeyance by a religious spirit and high intelligence, Dharma. It needs to be revived so that politics can be raised to a higher level.*

The Solution

Where then is the solution?

Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1911:

Spirituality is India's only politics, the fulfilment of the Sanatana Dharma its only Swaraj. I have no doubt we shall have to go through our Parliamentary period in order to get rid of the notion of Western democracy by seeing in practice how helpless it is to make nations blessed. India is passing really through the first stages of a sort of national Yoga. It was mastered in the inception by the inrush of divine force which came in 1905 and aroused it from its state of complete tamasic *ajñānam* [ignorance]. But, as happens also with individuals, all that was evil, all the wrong *saṁskāras* [imprints] and wrong emotions and mental and moral habits rose with it and misused the divine force. Hence all that orgy of political oratory, democratic fervour, meetings, processions, passive resistance, all ending in bombs, revolvers and Coercion laws.... God has struck it all down,—Moderatism, the bastard child of English Liberalism; Nationalism, the mixed progeny of Europe and Asia; Terrorism, the abortive offspring of Bakunin and Mazzini.... it is only when this foolishness is done with that truth will have a chance, the sattvic mind in India emerge and a really strong spiritual movement begin as a prelude to India's regeneration. No doubt, there will be plenty of trouble and error still to face, but we shall have a chance of putting our feet on the right path. In all I believe God to be guiding us, giving the necessary experiences, preparing the necessary conditions.

(*Sri Aurobindo: Archives and Research*, December 1977, p. 84)

Later, in another conversation dated 27 December 1938, Sri Aurobindo refers to the Parliamentary form of Government:

Parliamentary Government is not suited to India. But we always take up what the West has thrown off....

[About an ideal government for India:] There may be one Rashtrapati at the top with considerable powers so as to secure a continuity of policy and an assembly representative of the nation. The provinces will combine into a Federation, united at the top, leaving ample scope to local bodies to make laws according to their local problems.

(Purani: *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, pp. 564-65)

On 6 October, 1969, the Mother gave a message to Mrs. Indira Gandhi:

Let India work for the future and set the example. Thus she will recover her true place in the world.

Since long it was the habit to govern through division and opposition.

The time has come to govern through union, mutual understanding and collaboration.

To choose a collaborator, the value of the man is more important than the party to which he belongs.

The greatness of a country does not depend on the victory of a party but on the union of all the parties.

(CWM, Vol. 13, p. 377)

Regarding the application of spiritual ideas to collective life in the past history of India and more particularly to political life, Sri Aurobindo writes:

The spirit and ideals of our civilisation need no defence, for in their best parts and in their essence they were of eternal value. India's internal and individual seeking of them was earnest, powerful, effective. But the application in the collective life of society was subjected to serious reserves. Never sufficiently bold and thoroughgoing, it became more and more limited and halting when the life-force declined in her peoples. This defect, this gulf between ideal and collective practice, has pursued all human living and was not peculiar to India; but the dissonance became especially marked with the lapse of time and it put at last on our society a growing stamp of weakness and failure....

And now survival itself has become impossible without expansion. If we are to live at all, we must resume India's great interrupted endeavour; we must take up boldly and execute thoroughly in the individual and in the society, in the spiritual and in the mundane life, in philosophy and religion, in art and literature, in thought, in political and economic and social formulation the full and unlimited sense of her highest spirit and knowledge.

(CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 91-92)

At the same time Sri Aurobindo points out the difficulty in the attempt to bring higher ideals in society and politics. He writes:

The master idea that has governed the life, culture, social ideals of the Indian people has been the seeking of man for his true spiritual self and the use of life—subject to a necessary evolution first of his lower physical, vital and mental nature—as a frame and means for that discovery and for man's ascent from the ignorant natural into the spiritual existence. This dominant idea India has never quite forgotten even under the stress and material exigencies and the externalities of political and social construction. But the difficulty of making the social life

an expression of man's true self and some highest realisation of the spirit within him is immensely greater than that which attends a spiritual self-expression through the things of the mind, religion, thought, art, literature, and while in these India reached extraordinary heights and largenesses, she could not in the outward life go beyond certain very partial realisations and very imperfect tentatives,—a general spiritualising symbolism, an infiltration of the greater aspiration, a certain cast given to the communal life, the creation of institutions favourable to the spiritual idea. Politics, society, economics are the natural field of the two first and grosser parts of human aim and conduct recognised in the Indian system, interest and hedonistic desire: Dharma, the higher law, has nowhere been brought more than partially into this outer side of life, and in politics to a very minimum extent; for the effort at governing political action by ethics is usually little more than a pretence. The coordination or true union of the collective outward life with Moksha, the liberated spiritual existence, has hardly even been conceived or attempted, much less anywhere succeeded in the past history of the yet hardly adult human race. Accordingly, we find that the governance by the Dharma of India's social, economic and even (though here the attempt broke down earlier than in other spheres) her political rule of life, system, turn of existence, with the adumbration of a spiritual significance behind,—the full attainment of the spiritual life being left as a supreme aim to the effort of the individual—was as far as her ancient system could advance. This much endeavour, however, she did make with persistence and patience and it gave a peculiar type to her social polity. It is perhaps for a future India, taking up and enlarging with a more complete aim, a more comprehensive experience, a more certain knowledge that shall reconcile life and the spirit, her ancient mission, to found the status and action of the collective being of man on the realisation of the deeper spiritual truth...

(CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 397-98)

The question that presents itself to modern India is: How do we incorporate the higher spiritual ideals into Indian political life? What are the practical implications of these statements? For that we must first understand what is meant by Spirituality, and then how to bring Spirituality into politics.

In that context, Sri Aurobindo writes that if India is to play its true role in the world and fulfil its higher destiny, it

must insist much more finally and integrally than it has as yet done on its spiritual turn, on the greater and greater action of the spiritual motive in every sphere of our living.

(CWSA, Vol. 20, p. 32)

The Meaning of Spirituality

But first let us say what we do not mean by this ideal of spirituality. For there is a great deal of misunderstanding and sometimes even a refusal to understand the true meaning of spirituality.

- Firstly, it does not signify that we shall regard earthly life as a temporal vanity so that we may become—all of us as soon as possible—monastic ascetics, and frame our social life into a preparation for the monastery or cavern or mountain-top or make of it a static life without any great progressive ideals but only some aim which has nothing to do with earth or the collective advance of the human race.
- Secondly, spirituality does not mean the moulding of the whole type of the national being to suit the limited dogmas, forms, tenets of a particular religion; clearly such an attempt would be impossible, in a country full of the most diverse religious opinions and harbouring too three such distinct general forms as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, to say nothing of the numerous special forms to which each of these has given birth.
- Spirituality is much wider than any particular religion, and in the larger ideas of it that are now coming on us, even the greatest religion becomes no more than a broad sect or branch of the one universal religion, by which we shall understand in the future man's seeking for the eternal, the divine, the greater self, the source of unity and his attempt to arrive at some equation, some increasing approximation of the values of human life with the eternal and the divine values.
- Thirdly, it does not mean the exclusion of anything whatsoever from our scope, of any of the great aims of human life, any of the great problems of our modern world, any form of human activity, any general or inherent impulse or characteristic means of the desire of the soul of man for development, expansion, increasing vigour and joy, light, power, perfection. Therefore spirituality will not belittle the mind, life or body or hold them of small account: it will rather hold them of high account, of immense importance, precisely because they are the conditions and instruments of the life of the spirit in man. Necessarily we would like modern India to seek the same end in new ways under the vivid impulse of fresh and large ideas and by an instrumentality suited to more complex conditions; but the scope of her effort and action and the suppleness and variety of her mind will not be less, but greater than of old.
- *Spirituality is not necessarily exclusive; it can be and in its fullness must be all-inclusive.*

What then is the place of political and social and economic development from this point of view?

Politics, Society and Economy

In the first form of human life, politics, society, and economy are simply an arrangement by which men can collectively live, produce, satisfy their desires, and enjoy life and progress in bodily, vital and mental efficiency.

But the spiritual aim makes them much more than this. It makes them:

- First, a framework of life within which man can seek for and grow into his real self and divinity.
- Secondly, an increasing embodiment of the divine law of being in life.
- Thirdly, a collective advance towards the light, power, peace, unity, harmony of the diviner nature of humanity which the race is trying to evolve.
- This and nothing less, this in all its potentialities, is what we mean by a spiritual culture and the application of spirituality to life.

The application of these aims will mean a radical change in our attitude to life. The commercial and materialistic aims of society and the nation will have to be replaced by the higher spiritual aims. Evidently this is a task of no mean order and to expect the whole nation to move in this direction is like asking for the moon—it is just not possible. But it should be possible that a small section of the Indian nation, the élite of Indian society from all walks of life, including the political class, the administration, the judiciary and all others who have a stake in the development of the nation should be able to grow into this attitude and show it in their lifestyle and be a living example for others to emulate.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Sri Aurobindo wrote in one of his articles:

What is needed now is a band of spiritual workers whose *tapasya* will be devoted to the liberation of India for the service of humanity.... We need an institution in which under the guidance of highly spiritual men workers will be trained for every field, workers for self-defence, workers for arbitration, for sanitation, for famine relief, for every species of work which is needed to bring about the necessary conditions for the organisation of Swaraj. If the country is to be free, it must first organize itself so as to be able to maintain its freedom. The winning of freedom is an easy task, the keeping of it is less easy.

(‘Caste and Democracy’, *CWSA*, Vol. 7, p. 939)

Similarly, the Mother had stated in February 1954, that there has to be a group which could manifest the Divine will. She writes:

There must be a group forming a strong body of cohesive will with the spiritual knowledge to save India and the world. It is India that can bring Truth in the world. By manifestation of the Divine Will and Power alone, India can preach her message to the world and not by imitating the materialism of the West. By following the Divine Will India shall shine at the top of the spiritual mountain and show the way of Truth and organise world unity.

(CWM, Vol. 13, p. 361)

Today, there are in India a large number of idealistic youth who have formed groups and are trying to bring in a different atmosphere based on a sincere and deep national feeling. It would be a great step forward if all these groups could pool their resources and work together. They should accept the spiritual ideal and move in this direction and that by itself will make an impact on the polity of the nation.

However, it will be far more effective immediately if a section of the political class accepted this ideal and put it into practice. It will indeed be a great day for the nation when the Prime Minister, the leaders of all the parties and important dignitaries who are the decision makers can state loud and clear that their only aim in life is to manifest the Divine and work for it in their own ways and in their own areas. That, by itself, will mark a turning point in the history of India.

The Union of Parties

The next question is: how do we bring about a system where there is a union of parties?

The union of parties can come about only by moving towards the spiritual ideal, where the national interest is paramount, and not the party interest, local interest or self-interest. India will have thus to evolve its own political system.

The Paradigms of the Party System

The present party system that we have borrowed from the West is based on two fundamental assumptions.

The first assumption is that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Therefore there has to be a constant vigil on the ruling power and the way to do that is by creating an opposition party.

The second assumption is that each political party represents an ideology. An ideology is in this view a mental principle arrived at by the process of a rational and scientific study. We have thus in the economic and political fields, the ideologies of Democracy and Socialism, Public sector and Private sector, Globalisation and Swadeshi and so on. All these ideologies are pitted as representing opposing viewpoints and one has to choose between them.

Let us briefly analyse these two basic assumptions.

There is no doubt that in the present state of human consciousness power does corrupt and that consequently checks and balances have to be constantly kept in place. This has resulted in the creation of an opposition with the aim of keeping a constant vigil on the ruling party. But unfortunately this has been carried to the point where opposition is made for the sake of opposition and the consequence of this is that the party has become more important than the nation. This is visible in the political life of almost all nations and more so in India. It is therefore indispensable that, while admitting the need of an opposition, an element of harmony leading to consensus is brought into the political system. The present system that encourages vote bank politics has to be replaced by a system which reflects the national aspiration. This is of great importance and it is imperative and urgent that political parties come together to work out a solution.

The second principle, which is based on the assumption that the mind and Reason can give us the whole of Truth is an error and yet contains a truth. Indian culture and psychology have always known that although the mind and Reason are powerful and useful instruments of knowledge, they cannot arrive at the whole of Truth. Reason cannot arrive at any final Truth because it can neither get to the root of things nor embrace the totality of their secrets; it deals with the finite, the separate, the limited aggregate, and has no measure for the all and the infinite. But at the same time it is evident that Reason does give us one aspect of the Truth. Each system or ideology represents one aspect of the Truth, but not the whole Truth. Therefore insisting on one side of the Truth does not help a nation or society to progress. On the contrary, it is only in the harmonious blending of opposites that any true progress can take place. There has to be an attempt to synthesise these apparently opposite ideas. Freedom and discipline are not contrary ideas; rather both of them are needed for the progress of a society and nation. In the same way we can see that democracy and socialism, Globalisation and Swadeshi, development and ecology have to be synthesised and harmonised. In fact, one might say that the art of life and in particular of political life lies in harmonising opposites.

All these issues are reflected in the manifestos of political parties. Unfortunately, the mind being what it is, the natural tendency is to stress on one of these ideas at the cost of the other. But life cannot be based on one idea alone; each idea has to be given its due importance and place. As a result of the party system and the natural stress on one idea almost exclusively, there comes in the natural principle of compensating reactions. The law of action and reaction, which is valid in physical Science, is in human action, which always depends largely on psychological forces, a more constant and pervading truth. That in life to every pressure of active forces there is a tendency of reaction of opposite or variative forces which may not immediately operate but must eventually come into the field or which may not act with an equal and entirely compensating force, but must act with some force of

compensation, may be taken as well established. It is both a philosophical necessity and a constant fact of experience. For Nature always works by a balancing system of the interplay of opposite forces. When she has insisted for some time on the dominant force of one tendency as against all others, she seeks to correct its exaggerations by reviving, if dead, or newly awakening, if only in slumber, or bringing into the field in a new and modified form the tendency that is exactly opposite. After long insistence on centralisation, she tries to modify it by at least a subordinated decentralisation. After insisting on more and more uniformity, she calls again into play the spirit of multiform variation. The result need not be an equipollence of the two tendencies; it may be any kind of compromise. Or, instead of a compromise it may be in fact a fusion and in result a new creation, which shall be a compound of both principles. This is visible in the political history of independent India. Without elaborating in any detail, the change of governments in the last three decades testifies to this truth and law of action and reaction.

Much worse is the blatant misuse of power by the leaders of the parties to promote their party interests in the garb of ideology in the most shameless manner at the cost of the national interest. All the most specious arguments are used to justify their own positions and the more intelligent one is, the more blatant is the misuse of their reason. The only way to get rid of this disease is to create a system where there will be a national Government.

The Need of a National Government

One might therefore reasonably conclude that it is only by the harmonising of all these apparently opposite viewpoints that one can arrive at a settled and secure national growth and development. The political system must reflect this vision of things and only then can we move on a sound and stable curve of progress and fulfilment. Probably, Nature herself is pushing India in this direction by the formation of coalition governments at the Centre. Let us therefore collaborate with Nature and move ultimately towards a national Government, which will inevitably create a harmonious synthesis of ideas, overriding all narrow political interests.

Some suggestions for putting this into practice are given here.

- It is most urgent and imperative that the whole population should be given a sound educational basis; otherwise the democratic process will not function properly. Universal education must be a priority. It must be also noted that a rational development is in the mass the first step to a higher spiritual growth.
- In the present system the Prime Minister is elected by the party winning the largest number of seats. It is suggested that the Prime Minister should be elected by all the members of the Parliament and not by the majority party.
- The Ministry should be formed by the Prime Minister and should include

members of all parties with more than 20% of the electoral vote. That might mean a Ministry made up of two or three parties. It will be the first step in the union of parties.

- The method of proportional representation should be discussed by the parties for introduction into the electoral system.
- A far greater decentralisation of power giving much more autonomy to the States should be seriously considered. This should be discussed in some detail by the political parties and States.
- As a first step the Panchayats should be empowered.

Sri Aurobindo said:

...nowadays people want the modern type of democracy—the parliamentary form of government. The parliamentary system is doomed.

...one should begin with the old Panchayat system in the villages and then work up to the top. The Panchayat system and the guilds are more representative and they have a living contact with people. They are part of the people's ideas. On the contrary, the parliamentary system with local bodies—the municipal councils—is not workable. These councils have no living contact with the people. The councillors make only platform speeches and nobody knows what they do for three or four years. At the end they reshuffle and rearrange the whole thing, making their own pile during their period of power.

Feb 2 & 3, 1939 (Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, pp. 230, 234-35)

Here is another passage by M. R. Venkatesh from the article (Rediff.com, April 11, 2007) quoted earlier to illustrate this point:

The solution to this over-centralisation of power lies in thinking beyond the current template. This can be done through a grand design of involving the Panchayathi Raj Institutions (PRIs) as a delivery mechanism. Unfortunately, PRIs are largely ornamental pieces of legislation in an otherwise sublime Constitution. We need to leverage these institutions and churn the system so as to make the development projects the responsibility of these local bodies and 'un-bundle' the State and Central Governments of the same.

Unfortunately, under the present three-tiered Constitution, responsibilities are mostly vested with the Centre or the State or both, with very little functional mandate extended to the third tier, viz., the PRIs.

The spirit of Part IX of the Constitution, which deals with the PRIs, goes beyond the concept of political empowerment. It is a majestic idea towards self-governance. By design it is the State (hence eminently suited for the purpose) in all its majestic manifestation but with a vital difference—by its very design it will be 'participatory', especially in a country like India.

The time for unleashing the power of the idea of PRIs has come. It has to be noted such an empowerment of the PRIs must include direct fund transfer by both the State and the Central Governments—of all possible developmental programmes.

Importantly, the crucial role of developmental process must be piloted by the PRIs. Naturally, it would at once trigger a movement for grassroots democracy and with it developmental economics to flourish.

Our resistance to change and vested interests that feed on the extant system mean that the PRIs are essentially non-starters even after two decades since their introduction in the statute book.

It has to be noted that the ideas as suggested above, though illustrative, could well trigger a massive movement as the programmes are meaningfully under the control of the intended beneficiaries. One sincerely believes that this is the only way out to deal with the imperial demand of India's social sector. Else Winston Churchill will continue to chuckle.

It would be well to remember that in India the one principle permanent in the political system was the principle of an organically self-determining communal life,—self-determining not only in the mass and by means of the machinery of the vote and a representative body erected on the surface, representative only of the political mind of a part of the nation, which is all that the modern system has been able to manage, but in every pulse of its life and in each separate member of its existence. A free synthetic communal order was its character, and the condition of liberty it aimed at was not so much an individual as a communal freedom. We should try to reproduce this in modern India.

- Probably the most important suggestion is that there should be a group of persons in Parliament itself who will come together and state clearly that their allegiance is only to the nation and not to any party. It will be good if they contest the elections on a non-party plank with national interest as their sole ideology.
- A very important step in governance is transparency. A step in this direction has been taken by passing the Right to Information Act. This must be carried to its logical conclusion. This will reduce corruption to a great extent.
- Serious thought must be given to changing the present Parliamentary system to the Presidential system. A national dialogue should be initiated. Probably, in the Indian context, the Republican system or Presidential form of government will be better.

One suggestion was made by former President Venkataraman. Here is an extract from the article based on his lecture delivered at the India International Centre, New Delhi on 16 October 1999:

Modern democracy is based on the rule by the majority which means that 50.1% rules the country, excluding 49.9% from participation in administration. It rests on confrontation between the government and opposition. It excludes a large section of the people from participation in decision-making through their representatives. It breeds jealousy among the deprived and arrogance among the rulers. It leads to abuse of the government machinery for strengthening the party in power. In mature democracies the opposition is reconciled to bide its time till the next general election though it tries to defeat the government on popular issues. Nascent democracies attempt to destabilise the government from the very next day after the formation of the government. Engineering defections and purchase of political loyalties are resorted to without any care or concern for the nation and the people. The tendency to substitute duels for debates is growing in legislatures. Parliamentary dignity and decorum are found only in textbooks of political science. We have all been witnesses to these unseemly activities in our legislatures.

Indian tradition has been different. Panchayats were not run by the majority to the exclusion of the minority, but by consensus of the elders. There were no political parties and no confrontation between administration and opposition. Decisions were reached by a consensus, not by counting of heads. Similarly, justice was rendered by the Panchayat seeking the truth and not by adversary proceedings where each contending party tries to establish the truth. Likewise class conflicts in Trade Unions had replaced the paternal relationship that prevailed in agriculture which was the main source of employment in the earlier economy. In retrospect I realise the British innovation of confrontation through party government adversary proceedings in rendering justice and class conflict in industrial relations had deflected the country from its age-old system of reaching solutions by consent, consensus, cooperation and compromise.

We must therefore devise a system of government with adequate participation of sections of opinion represented by political parties in the place of a majority party rule. This will involve some changes in our constitution but not a wholesale redrafting of it. Any attempt to rewrite the constitution will lead to utter chaos and confusion which it is not necessary to create.

The scheme may be called National Government for India or Government by Consensus or a Stable Government for India for the purposes of our discussion.

Under this scheme: There shall be a President of India elected in the same manner as at present or otherwise but not directly by the people of India. The election of a President by popular vote will create a second centre of authority in the State and will breed conflicts between the President and the Prime Minister. The President shall continue to be symbol of the State.

In fact, in ancient India there are many instances of this form of Government being practised.

In one of his conversations Sri Aurobindo said:

The Indian system grew out of life. It had room for everything and every interest. There were monarchy, aristocracy, democracy. Every interest was represented in the Government, while the Western system grew out of mind. In Europe they are led by reason and want to make everything cut-and-dried without any chance of freedom or variation. If it is democracy, then democracy only and no room for anything else. They cannot be plastic.

India is now trying to imitate the West. Parliamentary government is not suited to India. And we take up what the West is throwing off.

(Nirodbaran: *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, p. 65)

It is our hope that all political parties will make a sincere attempt to realise these ideals and evolve a system suitable to the genius of India.

One point needs to be emphasised strongly and remembered constantly. It is that all these suggestions and proposals that have been made deal with changes in the system and are therefore external in their nature. But spirituality is by its very nature inward and demands a change of attitude in the psychological being. But it is hoped that with this system the legislators will be compelled to work together and as a natural consequence will gradually learn to work together. In this case we are proceeding from the outer to the inner. However, it is evident that whatever the value of the system and however one might fine-tune it or refine it, ultimately it is the psychological change that is needed. Without this inner change, any system can be exploited for narrow and selfish ends. It is also evident that one cannot expect this change from the mass or even from a large number of persons immediately; but the élite of the nation and especially those who are in power and who are the decision makers must rise up to this level and standard.

As an intermediary step before attempting the spiritualisation of the collective life of man, it is indispensable to take into account the ancient Indian ideal of the Dharma. The Indian concept of life was that spirituality is only the last step in the psychological evolution of man. They knew that the initial movement of life is that form of it which develops the powers of the natural ego in man; self-interest and hedonistic desire are the original human motives,—*kāma*, *artha*. Indian culture gave a large recognition to this primary turn of our nature. These powers have to be accepted and put in order; for the natural ego-life must be lived and the forces it evolves in the human being must be brought to fullness. But this element must be kept from making any too unbridled claim or heading furiously towards its satisfaction; only so can it get its full results without disaster and only so can it be inspired eventually to go

beyond itself and turn in the end to a greater spiritual Good and Bliss. An internal or external anarchy cannot be the rule; a life governed in any absolute or excessive degree by self-will, passion, sense-attraction, self-interest and desire cannot be the natural whole of a human or a humane existence; this is the first truth that the political class must become aware of.

Next, they must become aware that different types of men cannot have the same law. The man of knowledge, the man of power, the productive and acquisitive man, the priest, scholar, poet, artist, ruler, fighter, trader, tiller of the soil, craftsman, labourer, servant cannot usefully have the same training, cannot be shaped in the same pattern, cannot all follow the same way of living. All ought not to be put under the same tables of the law; for that would be a senseless geometric rigidity that would spoil the plastic truth of life. Each has his type of nature and there must be a rule for the perfection of that type; each has his own proper function and there must be a canon and ideal for the function they have to perform. There must be in all things some wise and understanding standard of practice and idea of perfection and living rule,—that is the one thing needful for the Dharma. A lawless impulsion of desire and interest and propensity cannot be allowed to lead human conduct; even in the frankest following of desire and interest and propensity there must be a governing and restraining and directing line and guidance. There must be an ethic or a science, a restraint as well as a scope arising from the truth of the thing sought, a standard of perfection, an order.

If this much is practised with sincerity and steadfastness by the legislators and the political class in general, the nation will be ready for the next stage of evolution—the governing of collective life by the principle of spirituality.

It is only on this basis that the beginning of a true development and unity of India can be brought about.

It is therefore necessary to start making the necessary corrections.

However, it is our firm belief and conviction that whatever our human shortcomings, India will finally and definitely rise to the height of its mission. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

***For this thing is written in the book of God
and nothing can prevent it,
...that the national life of India
shall meet and possess
its divine and mighty destiny.***

(CWSA, Vol. 7, p. 1077)

THE YOGA OF THE INDIAN NATION

It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not and will surely not happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there.

Sri Aurobindo

(SABCL, Vol. 26, p. 412)

Part I

Times of Transition

THESE are times of transition when we are moving from one Age to another or to put it more succinctly from the Age of Kali to the Age of Satya. The gift of Kali was man's discovery of the secrets of our material existence. It was an Age when all else was veiled as if by a thick iron curtain except our physical self. As a deft surgeon working upon one part of our body covers up the rest with a thick clean sheet so that his vision and mind are not distracted so did the operations of Kali drape our souls with the thick sheet of Ignorance so that nothing was visible to us except our physical bodies. Our mind was anaesthetised or rather hypnotised into believing that there was nought else save our material universe and its forces and man's sole business was to survive and protect himself physically against the threat of other forms of physical life and of course by physical means alone. But as we walk into the New Cycle where a greater Truth dawns upon man, we wake up slowly from our swoon to a New Light and with it to new seekings and a renewed labour. Therefore we have today very clearly two seemingly opposite and conflicting tendencies driving man or rather pulling him in apparently different directions albeit towards the same end of a grand synthesis of human existence itself. These two tendencies can be broadly considered for want of better terms, as the material and the spiritual. The material pull and attraction for physical betterment, comfort, etc. is the remnant of our immediate past. It is the strong hold of Kali rooting our consciousness into the very physical stuff of things. On the one side, this rooting into the physical has grounded us well into the body preventing an easy exit out of the physical universe, testing and retesting everything in the crucible of the physical and its power to change the physical world even as turning our gaze to earth and terrestrial aims provides a strong foothold on material life and material things. To make its task perfect and easier, in this Age of Kali that we leave behind us, a veil is put upon the mother of wisdom, mother India, so that the world is not blinded by her intense Light and leaving the work upon earth too soon and incomplete, we do not vanish into some beyond of Nirvana and Bliss. But the side-effect of this prolonged engagement with matter is that we have

been led into a state of hypnosis that fails to see or recognise anything but matter and judges everything by material appearances alone. Of all the hypnotics and anesthetics known to man, matter, especially when endowed with a vital glow, is the most powerful. But on the other side we are being slowly pulled out of our slumber with new openings and new discoveries and new powers waking up out of matter's sleep. There is an increasing interest the world over in the powers of life, as is evident in the emergent systems of alternate energy healing such as Reiki; in powers of the mind with biofeedback, guided imagery, creative visualisation, mind-body medicine, psychoneuroimmunology coming into the forefront of the human play. The authentic spiritual powers are yet waiting in the dusk of transition while their mental and vital dupes are being sold in marts of an imitative spirituality. That India has a great role to play in this new emergence is beyond question since it is India that has traditionally been the guardian of the keys to the doors of the Spirit. But whether India will take the definitive lead in this matter and instead of being continuously hypnotised with the physical and vital aspects of existence that Kali magnified no end, it will dehypnotise itself and the world and show once more the ways of the Spirit, or else throw away this golden chance and opportunity and go the way the rest of the world goes tumbling on its head towards a progressive sinking into the oblivion of the atomic void is the still unanswered question.

When we look at the surface, the appearances are no doubt dismal. What problems of the world have not been given as more than its fair share of India's destiny? Its very rebirth in modern times has been a fractured one. And then the two important aspects that are necessary for a nation's outer growth,—wealth and power—have been usurped by the Asura in man. Cutting across party lines the managers of the nation stand united in corruption and legalised loot. Of deception they have made a decent profession and falsehood lurks in every corridor of the high and mighty where decisions of crucial importance are being taken. The forces of division still continue to divide us along lines of language, caste, religion and all the rest and are even craftily hidden under cover of acceptable names such as social justice, equality, secularism, tradition, and all the rest that men use as a shield to hide their evil intentions. This combined with the unconscious masses driven blindly by the whip of fear and passion, while the rest goaded by greed and given to crudity in every form makes an ugly sight to watch. It is as if the devil had adopted its most cunning strategy for subverting the truth by joining its bandwagon as a helper and loots it on the way rather than openly oppose it. Not to speak of poverty and population and a host of illnesses and natural disasters. It is as if the spirit of Time had collected the bundle of unsolved problems of the human race since man's quest and struggle began beneath the stars and placed it in India's bag of destiny to resolve them.

Thus we see in India paradoxes aplenty. Here tradition and modernity, conservative orthodoxy and the progressive spirit, the space age and the bullock cart, the acme of virtues and sacrifice and the symbol of selfishness and dishonesty move

close to each other. But has it not been always thus with India; the greatest Avatars and givers of Light as well as the darkness embodied as the Asuras; Rama and Ravana, Krishna and Kansa, Yudhishtira and Duryodhana meet each other on the same plane. It is as if the ancient adversary force met the “burdened great” to test their strength to suffer and to save. It is as if the gods sanctioned the paradox that the bringer of Light must be thrust into the densest darkness to heal the abyss and transform the valleys of death with the deathless Light and the flowers of an unflinching courage and faith. It is as if the body and mind of the mighty nation called India had become the field of the world’s inner conflicts and its deepest afflictions, for so alone could a cure be found. It is as if a great and noble and mighty seer had drunk the bitter cup of poison as a representative of humanity so that the debt of man was paid and his strength confirmed that the wine of immortality could be released for earth.

Of course, the problems that India is facing are neither new nor unique to India. Only, in India we find them in their acuteness of severity as if a sick and desperate man was knocking at the hospital doors to find some radical cures for an intractable malady. These problems have been partially contained rather than treated in other nations by strong and violent remedies with many side-effects in the passing. True, there is a time and place for such measures,—judicial, administrative, political,—yet these are temporary solutions. They appear powerful and instantaneous but in the end they solve nothing. Only the symptoms are suppressed for the moment. Sooner or later, they re-emerge, wear other names and forms, and baffle us again. They were not cured but masked, only to return at a later date. India is perhaps destined to find the deeper radical cure; therefore the problems that it confronts are not only severe but appear almost intractable.

The Problem of Unity: An Illustrative Example

To understand what this deeper cure is and how we can find it we have to first understand India’s complexity. For the being of a nation as ancient as India is bound to be complex and rich with a many-sided experience. There are at least three layers at which India exists. First of course is the surface India which people notice when they look at India superficially. This surface gives the impression of a huge building broken in several places with the walls cracked and the plaster disfigured. But right behind this we also find it bubbling with activity and dynamism as if a lot of outworn things needed mending and a lot of work was going on. When we have borne this first shock and moved a little towards its inner being, we feel the sweetness of a fresher air, a different atmosphere the kind of which one finds nowhere in the world, it is literally so to say Air India. This inner atmosphere carries in itself something that supports and nurtures hope, washes off cynicism and gives strength and peace despite all outer appearances. While most nations exist largely on the material and intellectual plane we find in India the sudden surprise of meeting life in many shades

and colours. We are led into the inner India through many a door, each carved with rich artistry even though the door appears as if it had gathered dust over the centuries. We begin to feel the magic of India of the old, its many-tiered existence with wonderful creative possibilities for the future. And if, like the rare few, we can venture into India's great and mighty soul we are wonderstruck with its magnanimity of thought, nobility of feelings, its heart rich with the mysteries of the Beyond. We see an ancient face full of deep wisdom and compassion, as of a graceful goddess that has been long suffering and yet carries a Light upon her face and a Strength in her bosom that yet can save the world. It is this inmost India, the soul of India, the mighty goddess and the wise and compassionate Mother that we must first discover as a nation, love her and identify with her. Then alone can we truly help in the task of national resurrection. Then India herself will reveal her secrets and the way to truth and harmony and progress. But now she hides herself in oblivion, in a shroud of darkness, her dress covered with dirt and smoke thrown upon her by her own children whom she loves and gives shelter in her arms. On the surface is the shadow, in the depth she carries a Light that is greater than reason and thought, and if brought to the forefront, this Light can solve problems that seem insoluble to the human race.

One illustrative example is the problem of unity that threatens India and the world today, perhaps more than any other problem. It is in fact one of the core problems that the world faces, for much of our earth's resources are sapped out, much of the disparity generated, much of war and famine and eco-disasters spring from this one core issue of division between one group of humanity and another. With regard to this diversity India is incomparable so much so that the term 'subcontinent' has been coined for it. India has this big problem of an amazing range of diversity of groups,—ethnic, religious, cultural, temperamental, social, political, ideological, even philosophical. What India needs most at this moment is unity and what India suffers most from is division. And it is prevented from solving the problem arbitrarily by either repressing one group or another or else blurring out all distinctions. The politicians who profess to solve it only deepen the divide further either through the politics of appeasement or through the politics of revenge. The politics of reservations and the politics of discrimination stand at par and are two aspects of the same farce,—the force of division and disunity. Both of these stand at the same level and the existence of one is justified by the existence of the other. They are like counterbalancing forces. Another way must be found, the right key to harmonise all without each one losing its separate identity. It must discover the means to fulfil that which Nature secretly intends,—to create unity in diversity. And this cannot be done by any mere surface manipulation, whether political, governmental, social or legislative means. We must find a more durable way, some secret key lost within our own being. For it is true that Nature never gives a problem without first creating the means to solve it, and never are we given a difficulty without being given at the same time the strength to endure and resolve it. And India must find that lost key.

Strangely the soul of India carries the memory of an earlier solution which can be applied even today, albeit modified to our own times. In far ancient times when the spiritual impulse was strong, India saw human beings as children of one family, the family of the One Divine immanent in man whom no sole religion or group or cult could monopolise, whom all could discover and discover their secret oneness with all. This inner Self cut across the boundaries of class and caste, race and religion, custom and tradition, country and education, it was one for all. Deep inside, mankind shares a common aspiration, or let us say, some common aspirations and it is in that that we must unite. This aspiration is not simply about food, shelter and clothing as our more biologically oriented friends may suggest. In fact it is the distortion of a profound truth. We are indeed one and we have a common seeking but it is not simply a common seeking to satisfy our most basal animal needs but a seeking for something lasting and permanent, something that transcends the human mould and yet fulfils it,—an aspiration for lasting Peace, durable Happiness, true Knowledge, unconditional Love,—in short a perfect life here upon earth irrespective of our beliefs and non-beliefs. It is these that must be emphasised as the enduring needs of the race and the basis of our mutuality. The success story of Science is partly due to its attempt to satisfy these common seekings of the race and no wonder very soon it gathered almost a mass following trampling under its feet as it marched, religion and orthodoxy and whatever else governed the world in the Middle Ages. But Science has its limitations; it can bring diverse groups of humanity together in its common seeking for practical knowledge and material comfort; its limitation is that it cannot satisfy man's hunger for the Permanent, the Real and the Eternal. It cannot fulfil our thirst for Love and Joy and Beauty and all that makes life hope and dare and dream and endure despite being haunted by failure, defeat, and even death. But just as Science is the gift of our physical mind playing with matter and the body of the universe, there exists in man, in his own depths the gift of goodness, beauty and joy that can endure, the gift of love that triumphs over division and death. Man must be shown the way to contact these depths beyond the outer forms of his beliefs and non-beliefs, religious or otherwise, or even through these initial scaffoldings to pass beyond them to the reality that the religious symbols represent. This cannot be done merely through intellectual debates and discussions, though that can be a starting point, but most of all by the force of realisation. The more such realised men arise, men who live and breathe upon the summits of consciousness, men who have drunk the nectar-wine of truth and love and joy in their own depths, the sooner they will create a force-field for unity to thrive and blossom and spread. And who knows, as an ancient Indian saying goes, each such spiritually realised man may neutralise a hundred-thousand-fold the darkness of the human race. And who else but India must lead the way.

That this has happened and can still happen is exemplified in India's own history of the Sufi movement. It was indeed Nature's first strong experiment in recent times to see how far the spiritual force can unite even extremely diverse groups such as the

Hindu and the Musalman, diverse not only in language, customs, traditions and beliefs, but also in temperamental cast of the inner being. One comes from a large-spirited, calm, secular and richly complex refreshingly rejuvenating spiritual striving of the Hindu, the other is born of a breakaway fiery and passionate spirit of a narrow and exclusivist religious outlook, full of zeal and fervour, that easily borders onto fanaticism. Yet, the Sufi mystics found no contradictions in it and easily reconciled the two. Their body and outer mind, their vital nature, habits and customs belonged to the religious tradition to which they were born, while their soul soared into oneness and radiated the spirit of Truth and Love. Both Hindus and Muslims approached these living embodiments of Light, whether they came from the Hindu background as Guru Nanak Dev did, or a Muslim background as Sheikh Salim Chishti and Hazrat Nizamuddin, or a doubtful background as Saint Kabir. All differences of caste and creed and orthodox religion melted in their spiritual embrace and even enriched each other. That the movement could not sustain itself was due to various reasons. The movement was largely limited to the heart, its appeal was to some deeper emotion from where some rejuvenating streams of love could flow out and unite us in a common spiritual bond. But the intellect and the crude vital was not touched. It was subdued or sublimated but not purified. Therefore the movement could not involve our entire being. The conflicts were not healed but overridden for a moment by a strong spiritual impulse that uplifted us beyond the limits of our pettiness and smallness,—but only for a moment. The subconscious parts pulled us back again but not without showing that there exists in us a strong force of unity in our own depths. Perhaps the masses were not yet ready and the movement dwindled, lacking in the force that comes from realised men. Perhaps the time had not yet come and more water had to flow before the bridge could be ready. Most of all, the movement started taking more and more an other-worldly turn and began losing its grip on earthly realities and failed to check the onslaught of the adverse powers there. The fanatics like Aurangzeb and the cunning divisive policies of the British came in and occupied the outer field left unconquered by these great mystics. Yet they prepared the way for a more complete realisation to come later on and showed in their passing the first promise and hint in our more recent memory of reconciling outer differences by the force of an inner truth.

It is little wonder then that the forces of disruption and division targeted the very centre of this unity. For though Sufism travelled from Persia to India, it flourished most along the banks of the Indus and Sutlej and Beas in regions that we know today as Pakistan and Punjab. In the beautiful valleys of Kashmir it grew not only in its spirit but also in its outward expressions. The glad and friendly co-existence of the chaste Kashmiri Pandits and the devout Muslims, the rich and happy confluence of the two traditions became widely appreciated and known as “*Kashmiriyat*”, which in essence reflected the natural outflowing of the Sufi culture. It is no wonder then that Kashmir became the target of violent attacks of the worst kind, for if Kashmir or

rather "*Kashmiriyat*" remains, then there remains a possibility of uniting two diverse streams of spiritual and vital energies, of uniting two diverse strains of national thought and ideologies and making each stronger and richer by this union. In fact the Sufi movement may well have been an attempt for the collective consciousness of Islam to find its own soul, but it could not endure it for long and ended up confusing its hardened vital will for the authentic soul. The heart was ready but the mind was small and narrow, not ready for receiving its soul intimations, the vital forceful but obstinately rigid lacking in plasticity and suppleness. It is only for a brief period that a few Mughal kings, coming in contact with the Indian ethos, developed their own deeper aesthesis and suffused a touch of gentleness and beauty and grace in an otherwise savagely warring lot of humanity. The Muslims like the Christians came to India to learn from her the deeper ways of unity and the eternal truths of life. But instead they paid the great mother's debt by plundering or dismembering her. Yet the great mother took them in her fold as one would take a sick child in one's arms to heal his misery and anguish by a deeper Light and Love.

Therefore the forces of division and disorder that wish to delay the manifestation of unity have furiously attacked this centre of a rare kind of unity. In fact one may well say that Kashmir is of crucial importance to the very existence of Islam, it is the only hope left today for Islam to yet find its true soul and integrate with the great evolutionary impetus that is carrying the world today with a mighty force. If Kashmir falls to the radicals then Islam may well lose its way and fail to live up to its own aspiration for a fairer and equal world that belongs to God. How the forces of evolutionary transformation would deal with such a scenario is anybody's guess but the signs are growing clearer. But if Kashmir lives, not just physically but spiritually (for which it must remain part of India), then it may well become a strong force-field for unity. The very same Kashmir that we consider today as part of the problem carries in itself the seed of its own remedy. If applied rightly it would become not only a means and a force for uniting India and Pakistan but also generate a larger movement for uniting the best in Islam with the best in Hindu thought. And who knows if this symbolic union will not spread to other groups spontaneously as a contagion. Kashmir is making the two nations talk; it bleeds with fate's whip so that both the nations can look deeper to discover the inner solution to the problem of their own self-identity. What appears today as the hard bedrock of difficulties, may well be the seat of solution tomorrow. But it is unlikely that this solution can come about by any mere political means. Rather if the political interference is reduced to a minimum from both sides of the fence, if the state of Kashmir is allowed to discover its own hidden springs of harmonious energies, it will bring out of its own depths the force for unity. The main focus of any facilitator solving the Indo-Pak problem should be to encourage the emergence of the true composite culture of Kashmir, its "*Kashmiriyat*" that expressed itself through the lips of the Sufi mystics and the rest will follow. Unfortunately it is this that the terrorists and hard-core Islamic radicals have targeted and largely

destroyed,—in form but not yet in spirit and essence. And everything must be done to preserve and bring it to the forefront and even actively popularise it among the hardened groups on both sides. Such efforts as cultural exchanges through Sufi music and poetry may seem small in their power to solve big problems but they act like homeopathic medicines that if rightly used in optimal dilution, can create sudden reversals and great effects. Happily such a movement has begun. The sharing of common sentiments whether in cricket or the earthquake further cement the fault-lines. What seem today as opposites and therefore a source of conflict for the group-ego are in reality complementarities for the soul.

Part II

The Need for a National Yoga

How will unity in diversity come about, how will this sense of complementarity grow? It has to be tackled at three different levels of our being. At the outermost level it will help to engage representatives of different groups and nations “together” in a common action, a common sentiment, a common ground of association. There are many issues of common interest where a joint action would be much more beneficial to both than each going its way alone. These issues can be sports, environmental, commercial, ecological, resource management, scientific, etc. and we are actually being pushed towards this by necessity rather than choice, by negative means such as terrorism and ecological disasters rather than positive means such as resource pooling and commerce for mutual benefit. In this sense Science and Commerce are doing well to link up the different units of the world into a unity of necessity. But this is not enough. A second and deeper work is needed at the level of the inner being of the nation-unit. This inner being is best represented through “culture” in its deepest sense. This inner and deeper side of each culture needs to be brought out and rightly represented through media and cultural exchange programmes. Unfortunately, most often this “inner side” is neglected or wilfully ignored and what is presented is simply a set of customs and traditions. One has to simply tune in to the TV documentaries on “India” which will show ash-smeared half-naked “sadhus” with begging bowls, taking a dip in the Ganges, the crowded temple-streets, the weird practices of piercing the tongue, etc. as a representative of Indian culture. This is either a wilful misinterpretation or a gross ignorance. It has only generated confusion or an idle curiosity for something “different” rather than bridging the gaps and building bridges through a deeper intellectual and philosophical understanding of different ethos. Finally, and most importantly there has to develop a nucleus of persons who can go deeper within themselves not merely as individuals (that is indeed the first step) but as representatives of different groups. These must discover the group-soul that they belong to and by a natural spiritual extension rediscover their complementary oneness with other groups.

The more such human beings of deeper understanding and spiritual unity grow, the more shall we have Peace and unity upon earth. Indeed, Auroville is precisely such a threefold effort at unity.

What applies to the problem of unity applies in every field of humanity. Corruption, greed, hate, conservatism, fanaticism are all basically spiritual problems. They arise because the individual and the group live in the sense of the ego and not in their soul. What India therefore needs most is not just a national reconstruction but a national yoga. For along what lines are we going to construct a new India if we have not the vision to reconstruct,—along the lines of Western polity and science that revel in well-polished external surfaces and a crafty manipulation of outward things while the inner being remains hollow, lacklustre, struggles and suffers since stifled by appearances? Or along the lines of our own native genius that built such a mighty nation once by the ancient power of yoga, that it has resisted millenniums of shocks, invasions, subjugation and calamities? True, its centuries of struggle, especially in the past few hundred years have made it weary and tired. Its resistance against foreign invasions and influences has hardened into fixed tradition its own fluid adaptability to evolutionary forces. But these are momentary lapses and temporary setbacks. The Indian genius will bounce back and rediscover the splendours of the spirit and restore the true glory of life by connecting it to its divine origin. That is India's unique and difficult and dangerous task fulfilling which it will fulfil its highest destiny. And failing which it will frustrate itself and frustrate the world in its attempt to create a new world order. Of all the nations India is most suited for this purpose, given its deep spiritual background and several strata of spiritual experience in its inner being and the subconscious memory of the race, its unique and complex temperament and subtle intelligence combined with deliberate faith and qualities of the heart, its sense of the collective, its resilient vital are especially suited for such a work. But it has to do it now under difficult circumstances due to the various admixtures that have taken place but in the process the results are going to be far more superior in quality and universal, applicable to the whole human race, since now it carries upon itself the additional imprint of the Middle East and the Western world.

The Initiating Mantra

The national yoga of India had indeed started in 1905 when goaded by the forces of division the cry of '*Bande Mataram*' rang through India's heart. It was an invocation not only to the Soul of India but also to the World-Mother, *Shakti* of the Supreme, to come and manifest in the land of India, to liberate it from error, falsehood and division; to awaken it out of its *tamas* and darkness in which it had sunk deep. This was and still is the initiating mantra of this nation. Its aspiration,—*pūrna swarāj*, a perfect self-conquest, self-mastery, self-rule; its path,—*satyameva jayate*, victory to the Truth, a constant choice of the growing Truth over the falsehoods of our mental, vital,

physical nature. The World-Mother did arrive in India, in her physical embodiment, but few recognised her. Her coming from the Western world towards the East was itself a clear indication that while the drama of the previous millennium, the Age of rational enlightenment, was played out with Europe as its centre, the next Act of Her creative play would be played out in the East with India as the main stage. The path of Truth, *satya panthā* did open up and the boon of *pūrna swarāj* was brought close to our trembling hands, but our limbs were too weak to receive it. India responded to the descending Light of Truth first with a flurry of *rājasic* activity engaged in acts of petty violence driven often by a blind sentimental patriotic fervour. As was inevitable, this force soon spent and exhausted, the nation lapsed into *tamogūṇa* again with the few elements embodying the *sāttwic* impulse and the spirit of authentic sacrifice carrying the flag further. That freedom still came was a boon and a grace, indeed the result of a silent *tapasyā* of Sri Aurobindo who had indeed initiated the nation and awakened its aspiration. But as happens, the *sāttwic* and *rājasic* elements took the credit and went on to glorify their own greatness refusing to see the Hand of the Eternal, refusing to listen to the voice of the prophet of Life Divine and the true progenitor of Indian nationalism. The story of the Pandavas believing themselves to be the cause of the victory; the story of the gods narrated in the *Kena Upanishad* believing theirs was the victory was repeated again. And once again the Eternal had to break our *sāttwic* and *rājasic* egoism so that kneaded as dough by the divine Hands we may become supple and pliant to the Light that has dawned and is already active upon earth.

Indeed we forgot the very mantra that woke our soul from its slumber and replaced it with an artificial mental light! A long period of preparation must now intervene, the period when the Pandavas are repeatedly exiled from the Kingdom and the Kauravas loot the nation and enjoy the booty. Yet this too is grace, for when we refuse to wake up to the call of the flute and rush to join the dance of Krishna, then we need to hear the world-shaking, world-destroying laughter of Kali. For the purification must be as thorough as the crown of victory that we seek. Therefore we see broken again like helpless reeds even the strong and the mighty, slain with their dreams buried under their eyelids. For these are dreams of men who wish to see in India only a show of military strength, political power, and the rupee swaying the world market in a swoon of luxury and comfort. But wherefore is her greatness born—only for these perishable gifts? These boons of the vital gods creating an imitation of heaven upon earth, luring us with false glimmers towards a blinding abyss are not for India. These boons are for lesser hearts, for nerves that tire too soon, minds that are entrapped in the hedge of the senses, and its charmed fragrances. India has asked for more and therefore India must meet with a much greater challenge. For it is a subtle law of life that the difficulties we meet are in proportion to our capacities and the scope of our destiny. India has lived through the ages to deliver a greater Light to the world and therefore greater must be the darkness that it must slay and deeper the

abyss that it must fill with the Light and heal. For this too is a subtle law of life that the higher the prize we demand the greater must be our endurance and the obstacles to conquer. India lives to deliver not only itself but the world, therefore must India be riddled with all the problems and must become symbolic of all the representative difficulties of the world. For this too is a subtle law of our growth that the wider we grow in our consciousness, our own being begins to take a more and more universal character, both in terms of the possibilities and also in terms of the difficulties. The little pool of clear reflecting water with a garden around it may be an idler's dream to rest and relax but mighty spirits born to tame the sea must be prepared to meet the whales and the sharks, to rise with the billowing waves and fall into the blue deeps till one day they make the storms their companions and delight in the strong piercing gaze of the sun-god, and the tossing manes of the wind-gods. That which lesser hearts dread and fear, the strong must meet and bear and conquer.

This rather long period of preparatory purification is a threefold process. First is the period when the nation must confront its unique as well as universal problems. It must come face to face and acknowledge not only the problems of the present moment but those buried deep into its own and the earth's subconscious memory. Next, it must try the various physical, vital, mental ways to solve them. Finally as a result of the growing pressure within and outside and the failure of outer means it must perforce seek its own true identity and in the process end up finding its national soul. The first part of this process is nearly over, the next is going on even as we are beginning to have the first few glimpses of the third. It is interesting to note that the question of a national identity is being raised before the Indian nation through various means and circumstances. And during the first anniversary of India's spiritual new birth, that is the year 2005 (the anniversary of '*Bande Mataram*') it was made clear that the issue of our national identity is far from being settled. True, our impatient hearts may find this long period of preparation painful and indeed it is long compared to the human lifespan. But what are fifty years or even a hundred or five hundred years but its growth from childhood into adolescence moving into youth. Truth cannot be seen by impatient eyes, *tamatmasthan yenu paśyanti dhīra*, nor felt by nerves that succumb under duress and shatter under pressure of adverse circumstances. Those would serve India's interest best who can thus grow vast, who can look beyond the immediate gains into the deeper forces that are at work and the Light that is slowly but steadily emerging from its depths.

The Complexity and Difficulty of the Task

We must therefore understand that the task of reconstructing India is not a simple one and there are no quick-fix solutions as our childish minds may rush to suggest. Firstly, India is not a new nation. It had many lives and as happens with souls that have lived many lives, the Indian temperament has become exceedingly complex.

This happens because several layers or states of consciousness and memories pile up in its subconscious and subliminal layers with complex knots of karmic energies that need to be disentangled, worked out, their own truths discovered, reintegrated with the whole in the Light of a greater Truth. This is no easy task even for an individual, what to speak of a nation. Unlike other nations, the Indian psyche is very complex and lives at many levels at the same time. It is reflected even in its physical components. The Space Age mingles here with the Stone Age; the jet aircraft and the bullock cart exist in the same city and, the ancient Vedas are recited in the same house where complex atomic problems are being tackled in the light of the discoveries of modern physics. Deep inside, India is always spiritual, it has an innate intelligence that is subtle and plastic but there has also gathered as a result of its recent past experiences the rule-book mind and the school-master mentality. Such a method cannot work with India; its nature is too complex to accept it. The impersonal law, the dictat of a faceless government is too unimaginative to the Indian mind that has peopled its inner worlds with gods and demons. It is much more likely to accept a religious authority, obey the command of a spiritual master, even perform extraordinary sacrifices in a fit of emotional and religious fervour, or else logically analyse and think out for itself what it should do or should not do in a certain situation than simply follow a rule because some government made it legal. This applies to simple things like observing traffic rules, to filing I.T. returns truthfully and honestly. The sense of Government, the idea of 'legally binding' and the feeling of political unity that prevails in the world do not easily take root here. The Indian will more readily unite for sentimental, religious, cultural and social reasons than for the sake of law and administration for its own sake. He acts either because moved by some vital interest or deep emotion or a logical thought or else a soul motivation. In either case, as is true for most complex beings, he must find his *locus standi* inside. Indeed India is best adapted to discover the psychic law and live by it rather than by man-made mental rules.

This complexity of the Indian temperament creates another difficulty. His being is like a melting pot of many things,—sacred and profane. He is moved by passion, struck by emotions, haunted by logicising and philosophising reason, attracted by vital charm; yet long periods of asceticism create in him a poor hold on outer life. He is drawn to soul depths, yet holds parleys with the demons at night. The gods and the djinns both visit him in his dreams and therefore the Indian often experiences more internal conflict, becomes less focused not because of any deficiency of concentration but rather because he has too many internal things to handle which prevent him from being one-pointed. He has many simultaneous goals that are often self-contradictory, from making a quick and huge buck to solving his family problems and emotional issues, to satisfying his social expectations, enjoying a quiet time with friends as well as spending time in isolated contemplation on cosmic problems. He loses a lot of creative energy in internal conflicts and therefore takes a long time to succeed

outwardly in anything. But once he has worked out a path through the complex maze of his inner nature, his victory is much more complete, stable and enduring. And he arrives at this stability and victory by finding his spiritual reference point. The Light of Buddha, the word of Krishna, the call of Vivekananda, the cry of the Vedas, the myths and legends of the Puranic literature, the fascination for Sanskrit and many such high achievements have not only endured but continue to grow and inspire mankind. The greatest of Indian empires were built and governed in a spiritual mood; its greatest works of art and science and polity and law inspired by its spiritual genius. Even as many empires fell and vanished, great traditions collapsed or are on their decline and in the passing, the Indian 'shine' still endures and its light though covered with the dust of centuries still attracts and illumines. By his very nature and temperament the Indian lives in large spaces of time. He is more subjective, imaginative, and personal than objective, concretely real and impersonal. Therefore he lacks the killer instinct though not for that matter the survival instinct. In fact the latter is more developed, the adaptability to foreign atmospheres much more, the ability to take defeat as a passage rather than a permanent failure,—the resilience factor, quite developed. On the one hand it snatches away from him the do-or-die mentality and the sense of urgency and expediency or for that matter a thing as simple as punctuality. But in return it arms him with an endurance and forbearing perseverance that is useful in the long run. The yoga of the Indian nation has to carve its way through this uniqueness of the Indian temperament; it cannot be otherwise.

There are however two more difficulties that the national soul must tackle which are like the obverse and reverse side of a single problem before it can be fit for national yoga. It comes from its more recent past of a couple of thousand years when India lost the original Vedas in its heart and replaced it with a dubious script of other-worldly salvation, *mokṣa*, *mukti*, *nirvāna* as the primary goal and the abrupt close of the creative delight of God. This has led to a loss of hold over physical reality and the world of concrete matter. But almost as a counterbalancing force, centuries of asceticism have suddenly led to a return of the suppressed elements and impulses with a vengeance. It is necessary for India to come to grips with these things. This duality and conflict has unfortunately encouraged the hypocrite in us. We have become experts at the art of posturing, of professing something publicly that our private acts contradict. We speak so casually of high things as if we breathed them but give little more than lip service. We speak of *vasudhaiva kutumba*, the whole world is one family of God but can shout our lungs out over differences of languages and dare not marry outside our caste and religion. Now, when God wants us to make a lasting progress He brings us face to face with that which must be truly conquered and not simply escaped from, bypassed or suppressed. This we see happening today. The quarrel of the castes, the disputes of sects, the dogmas of religion, the hidden attraction to the lower vital impulses, the roots of division and falsehood and unconsciousness buried deep in the subconscious parts are suddenly emerging before the nation's

waking mind and taking the form of one problem or the other. These problems are not unique to India but their intensity is felt most acutely here. For the role of India is to be the spiritual guru of the world and to befit this role as a true spiritual leader it must carry upon its shoulders not only its own but the cross of the world. The unsolved or partially or temporarily solved problems do not vanish in one lifetime. They change forms and appearances, the ghosts of our buried and bygone self raises its head again in the present to pull us back. Old ideas return, the slain past survives, forgotten memories resurface and prolong the drama and adventure of life upon earth. This is as true for an individual as for a nation. And there is no way but to go through it, with patience and perseverance, with courage and faith and hope in our hearts, and if possible to strive and ask for the vision that can pierce through the clouds and see behind appearances.

The Lines of our National Yoga

Indeed the entire line of our national yoga has not only been laid down but is also being conducted from behind the scenes by Sri Aurobindo. He has not only foreseen the destiny of India but has also kept it safe in the subtle atmosphere of the earth. Sri Aurobindo has already laid the foundations of the national yoga. Firstly, he awakened the national soul from its torpor and initiated it into the yoga of the new world. He brought back to its surface consciousness the memory of its past spiritual efforts, recovered the lost Vedas in their full and original glory and splendour, *vedanudharte*, connected them through the unbroken thread of spiritual continuity down the Ages of the *Upanishads*, the *Gita*, *Tantras* and the *Purana*, the lineage of the great *rishis* and *avatars* and finally linked it to our very own modern times! By doing this he was not only delivering the fully formed psychic being of India but also connecting it once again with the life and body of the nation. Secondly, he laid the broad lines for reshaping the inner being of India along the lines of its *swadharma* so that India could find its true place and become a conscious instrument of the divine design in this universe. The inner being of a nation is represented by its culture, its highest and noblest thoughts and feelings and aspirations, its output in terms of art and literature and media. And finally, it has an outer body and this too has been formed and kept safe in the Mother's divine hands as the spiritual map of united India. This outward body is represented in the conduct and polity and administration, art and science, and other forms of activity of the nation. This too has been well laid down for India through the Seer-Vision of Sri Aurobindo. And having inwardly attempted and achieved all for us, Sri Aurobindo is preparing us to be worthy of these boons. And as is characteristic of Sri Aurobindo, he is leading us from within outwards, handling and manipulating the play of forces in such a way that we are compelled to make a choice. There is such a constant subtle pressure upon India that it cannot rest. Perhaps all this would not have been necessary if India had hearkened to the one Voice that

could save it. But years of contamination with various influences have made the inner being of India extraordinarily complex and years of subjugation enslaved the national mind and its vital to *tamas*, inertia. Therefore India slept when the hour of God arrived and the flaws in her armour invited the blow. For what else but the sharp sting of pain can wake up a country that has abandoned all effort at progress and fallen into inertia? And the pressure is going to be relentless if we still heed not that which summons us. For it is decreed that India must rise and show the way to the rest of the world. And if India fails then there is little hope for humanity finding a deeper way out of its present impasse.

Also we must not confuse the national yoga with the revival of old values and traditions and orthodox religious forms and age-old spiritual formulas. These things have been broken or shredded and cast together in the world cauldron where other forces have also been put alongside. A new and more fulfilling scheme is being prepared, a more comprehensive plan of God is being unveiled than any tradition has even imagined or ventured. The unity of matter and spirit, of man and the cosmos, of the individual and the collective, of science and spirituality, of secular and spiritual thought, of the earth and the beyond, is being increasingly sought and brought closer. We cannot, in fact no group can live anymore in a splendid isolation within its own Shangri-La except by mutilating its wholeness and suffering an eventual diminution of its total possibilities. To insist on old forms and old values and old methods is to demand from the Time-Spirit what the gods and demons prayed to Shiva when in a divine moment he cut off the head of Daksha, the progenitor of the old creation. Yielding to their demands the great and compassionate god indeed revived the body but the gods in their hurry perhaps prompted by the Will of the eternal sutured the severed head the wrong way so that each time Daksha Prajapati moved one step forward or so it seemed to him, he actually moved one step backward. Let us leave aside the slain body of the past but preserve its spirit. The body of Sati has been consumed by the fire and cut into pieces by the great preserver himself. But out of her force of fire there would arise Uma-Haimavati, daughter of the great mountain Himalaya and rebuild India along new lines, the lines of the *Shakti* that does not turn away from Shiva the eternal, but unites with him in a perfect creative union of delight. And from that clasp of oneness and Love re-create India and the world with its rejuvenating streams of Truth-Light and Truth-Power.

The Hour of the Unexpected

Above all, one must not hope and expect too much from the Government machinery. It is very doubtful that the nation will change with a change in political parties. What is much more likely is that politics and the parties will be forced to change because of an uprising in the national consciousness. And things are fast reaching a boiling

point when a little ferment at an opportune moment may precipitate a chain reaction of the kind we never expected. Indeed the sense of the unexpected is clearly shaping the world much more than the planned execution of calculated ideas. This is another sign that the divine is behind this play and is forcing the change upon us by the power of crashing circumstances. Politics will perhaps be the last thing to change, more out of compulsion than choice. The major effort of national regeneration should therefore be directed towards this spiritual awakening and for this the most powerful tool is not politics but education. That is where the stress of the nation should be. That is also the instrument through which the Time-Spirit is working most swiftly. Instead of changing old-fashioned politicians and old-fashioned parents, it is changing the children! And they are changing very fast. Can we imagine a child born today or ten years from now carrying such a religious or regional identity as a generation before us did? Even his national identity will be more fluid and plastic, something not sentimental and political but temperamental. Already the first signs are appearing and the new generation is unlikely to carry the vendetta, the unfinished agenda of hatred and revenge beyond the history books, except perhaps in a few pockets of strong resistance. What we need is not the repair of the old lamps but to replace old lamps with new ones.

Everything will change if the children of today change. And change they must and change they will. It is already happening and this is perhaps the most happening thing in the world. Only we are not looking in that direction or perhaps so conditioned are we by our own old and worn-out value systems that we are unable to notice and appreciate the winds of change. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have taken great pains to reveal to us the nature of these new children and the kind of education we need for them. If we still do not take heed then one day these children are going to upset the system and change it. For they come to wrestle with destiny and change it. Much more than we changing them it is they who are changing us! More than we transmitting some old traditional values into them it is they who are infusing some fresh life and a breath of inspiration from a sublimer realm into our narrow and cabined view of life. They are coming with a spiritual hunger and the carefree laughter of the gods and what they despise most is artificiality, hypocrisy, and false authority due to mere age or tradition. They respect none of these things: neither the priests nor the elders; yet they acknowledge genuine accomplishment, idolise true achievement and respect authenticity. The fact that they need so much more psychological space for themselves is itself an unmistakable sign that they have a wider, subtler, freer consciousness; free from the trappings of the past, ready to surge towards the future with the whole wide world as their field of adventure. And they bring along with this a new subjective sense of the nation-unit. They do not look at a nation so much as a geo-political unit (that line is fast blurring with transcontinental travels, the TV and the Internet) but rather as an ideological unit. The nations are being increasingly described by the “temperamental adjectives” and are no more the last but the intermediate rung of our

group life and collective existence. Today we are mulling over how to solve the problem of caste divide, religious divide, ethnic divide, national divide, even ideological divide. In the coming age of synthesis that is fast approaching us (we have already entered into it), the children a few decades later will laugh with surprise and wonder how we their ancestors thought and felt so narrowly, and thought and acted with such smallness and meanness!

Yes, the human race is getting increasingly “psychicised” or “spiritualised” if we may say so. *Homo sapiens erectus* is soon changing into *Homo sapiens psychicus*—and thankfully in spite of us. And one can clearly see that the epicentre of this new change is located in India. The great exodus of Indians is carrying a new Light to the world and a new way of living. The gift of India has already begun to the world. And the children here, in India at least, are distinctly different. They are a lot more confident, a lot more carefree, wide and integrated. They meet life with much more trust and confidence. They easily combine and reconcile in them the spirituality of the East and the materialism of the West; they also know how to separate Christ from the Church and Krishna from his followers. They may not have read the Vedas but the Vedas reveal themselves in their utterances, if we know how to listen. These are the “sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn” whose “tread one day shall change the suffering earth” and not the crooked politician, the pot-bellied priest, or the rule-bound administrator. They are priests of wisdom and they play ball with Time and circumstance. They know the relativity of all rules and do not fear to break the limits and barriers erected by an artificial and limited human standard. The only authority they follow is not external but internal. And these are multiplying by the hundreds and spreading like contagion through the world as if a new consciousness had exploded beyond limits and was looking for bodies fit and ready to inhabit it. It is they who are spreading the Light of ‘*Sanatana Dharma*’ to the world.

Are our schools ready? Perhaps they are soon becoming redundant!

This indeed is the third phase of the national yoga,—the emergence of the true Indian soul, free from traditions and customs, wide and spiritual in its outlook. And each one of us can contribute to it by looking in that direction, inward to the soul rather than outwardly on surface events and circumstances. And upwards and forwards towards the future that is fast entering into us rather than downwards and backwards towards the shadows and ghosts of the various problems that we leave behind us. This is not to say that we must play the ostrich or be blind to the problems. Of course there are a good many of these waiting to eat up our energies and divert our attention from the true thing needed. Corruption, greed, red-tapism, goondaism, political vandalism and legalised loot, crass selfishness, grossness of appetites, smallness of aims, and most of all *tamas*, a laziness to think originally, feel widely and live largely. These are there but there is also the growing psychic impulse, the spiritual hunger, the seeking for truth and the more we concentrate in that direction, in the direction of

Light and facilitate its growth in ourselves and others, the more we shall see the darkness receding. If instead of slogan-raising, pamphleteering, politicking, and wasting our time and energy on superficial analysis of surface events whose true significance escapes us on every side, we can focus our energies on the emergence of our soul-power and through that and by a spiritual contamination the soul-power of the children who gather near us then we would have done our bit. It is in our soul that we must recover the Vedas and their power to save and then cast our life into its mould. It is in our soul that we must first discover the true India and its mighty spirit that still survives with its power to illumine and guide the world grown mightier with defeat and greater by the fall it suffered in the last few centuries. Rather than changing policies and regulations or holding big seminars and conclaves and summit meetings and intellectual discussions, if we could focus on changing our consciousness then the circumstances will change of their own accord. We do not have to worry about them. For we have stepped into the Age of Truth and therefore outer methods that only polish the surface but leave the foundations hollow are foredoomed to failure. All such buildings of false hopes are bound to come crashing down sooner than later. The gods of mind and the vital have failed us and are destined to fail further. Let us stop trusting them and their methods.

Beyond the thinking mind there lies a greater and higher consciousness in which the Truth Eternal shines unbroken as in still waters. It is That which will save us and not traditions and conventions. Neither democracy nor dictatorship; neither capitalism nor communism; nor any -ism: not even religionism or socialism or humanitarianism will save us though humanity is likely to go through experimenting and stumbling through all these fakes and imposters that have usurped the throne of Truth and imitate its gestures. In Truth lies our salvation. For the mantra of *Satyameva Jayate* given to the soul of India is clear:

*“Supreme Lord, Eternal Truth, Let us obey Thee alone and live according to Truth.”*¹

And the message has gone to the nations:

*“Men, countries, continents!
The choice is imperative:
Truth or the abyss.”*²

ALOK PANDEY

1. The Mother's message given for India during the 1971 Indo-Pak war.

2. The Mother's New Year message of 1967.

GLOBAL TECHNO-CAPITALISM AND POST-HUMAN DESTINIES

I

ARTHUR KROKER, contemporary Canadian critical theorist and editor of [ctheory.net](http://www.ctheory.net), has written a provocative reassessment of techno-utopian futurist Marshall McLuhan,¹ in which he ends with the words: “*McLuhan was fated to be trapped in the deterministic world of technology, indeed to become one of the intellectual servo-mechanisms of the machine-world, because his Catholicism failed to provide him with an adequate cultural theory by which to escape the hegemony of the abstract media systems that he had sought to explore. His discourse could provide a brilliant understanding of the inner functioning of the technological media; but no illumination concerning how ‘creative freedom’ might be won through in the ‘age of anxiety, and dread.’*” In the same e-journal, Kroker reproduces a chapter ‘The New Protestant Ethic’ from his book *Born Again Ideology*.² In both these articles, in his analysis of McLuhan/Teilhard de Chardin as also in his demonstration of the close braiding of Puritanism and the Enlightenment³ imperative in the American ethos, Kroker introduces the idea that the Enlightenment is a metaphysically transposed theology, the grand onto-theology,⁴ to which there is certainly more than a grain of truth. The 19th c. German metaphysician G.W.F. Hegel can indeed be read in this vein, as the grandest theorist of this white mythology of the Logos, the Word of God made flesh resurrecting itself into Universal Rationality as the end of History.⁵ Hence, to understand this, the essence of technology and the essence of the human need to be considered in their relation at this, the eschatological cusp of their mutual destinies.

But to complicate matters, there is also capitalism, which neither Hegel, nor Teilhard or McLuhan have given much thought to in its intimate intermixture with Technology and the Enlightenment teleology, though Hegel has been adapted into the Materialism of Marx in trying to make some sense of this and its overcoming. So perhaps we need to turn to Marx as well in our exploration.

1. Arthur Kroker, *Digital Humanism: The Processed World of Marshall McLuhan*, <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=70>, 5/6/1995.

2. Arthur Kroker, *The New Protestant Ethic*, <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=487>, 14/4/2005.

3. 18th c. Euro-American philosophical movement considered to be the founding of the Modern Age. Its foundational belief is the rationality of the universe and the ability and goal of human reason to arrive at a perfect comprehension of this rationality.

4. Ontology of God or theology of being, a term coined by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), but used here more in its adaptation by modern philosophers such as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004).

5. G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) coming in the wake of Enlightenment philosophers such as Immanuel Kant developed a philosophy of History, where Divine Reason is the spiritual Protagonist (*Geist*), immanent in Matter and evolving through time towards its apotheosis in a rationally ordered and governed world.

Technology as the advance of human ability to “grasp” his world and “shape” it for his “use”—survival, utility, comfort, enjoyment, possession in that order of increasing aggression, has of course been with us since language, or the beginning of the human civilisation. But archaic cultures and civilisations have built their social worlds from another essence, not the essence of Technology. This we can see quite clearly when we consider China, which invented paper, printing, the maritime compass and gunpowder, all indispensable foundations of the modern Technological regime. Europe has used these technologies as the foundations of the Enlightenment—universal literacy and universal/targeted advertising/propaganda; the voyages of discovery, the “final frontiers” and colonialism, the harvest of non-white peoples; the taming and mining of the earth and worldwide genocide. It took the “modern” combination of Capitalism and the Enlightenment ideal to achieve this, China could not and did not manage it. Mao Tze Dong wreaked his own version of it on his people after learning of it from the west (and its critique, both at once, second- or third-hand) in a bid to disinfect the capitalism and retain the Enlightenment but produced only a bloodless population hungering to get back with a vengeance onto the desiring machine of Techno-Capitalism. But China of the archaic civilisational eras, those bygone impossible-to-recover times, now the rubbish of history, every day an aeon further in forgetting as our hyper-modern temporality with its flattening insistence on the surface of the present distances itself ever more completely from other temporalities (except to salvage their products as abstract aesthetic capital), China produced its technologies as part of a differently balanced habitus,⁶ where conveniences and extensions came in the stride of a manifesting consciousness to which they were not primary.

To understand the difference which modernity introduces then, let us turn to the Marxist critique of modernity as the techno-capitalistic desiring machine. Recent readings of the later Marx by Moishe Postone⁷ view the root of his insight as a fundamental shift from a society which produced primarily for its own consumption to a society which produced primarily for exchange with a view to negotiating competitive advantage. The self-orientation within a community embeds its products within its habitus and its internal discourse, and makes these products subservient to this social discourse and its interests and thus does not ascribe abstract use values to these products. Accordingly, it does not believe either in the production of surplus (except limited surpluses for emergency storage or barter/exchange with products not available to it but part of its discursive need). The shift occurs however when production of all products is primarily for exchange, detaching products from their

6. A sociological concept introduced by Marcel Mauss and extended by Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). It refers to the totality of learned habits, bodily skills, styles, tastes, and beliefs that might be said to “go without saying” for a specific group.

7. Interpretation of late works of Marx, viz. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, in Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

habitus, ascribing abstract value to them and giving them the desirable potential of unbounded surplus production, corresponding to competitive advantage or accumulation of capital. Postone's sophisticated expansion of this theme is too elaborate for me to present here beyond this nutshell, but I would recommend his *Time, Labor and Social Domination*. The bottom line (for my purpose here) is that this ideological shift, arising out of a divorce between production and habitus, ends up in transforming habitus itself into a progressively abstract and universalising derivative of its own products and their means of production—a habitus that is made to sink into the forgetfulness of all else and tailor its consciousness after the unbounded mechanical drive for the production of surplus and of markets to consume the surplus products. This endemically alienated habitus-production system is the condition we experience as modernity—not a static condition (though certainly static in the sense of its being a structure within which all its tremendous movement is trapped) but an ever-accelerating machine of increased production of products, of the means of production (production of technology), of consumers for the products (production of desire), of skill, knowledge, creativity and labour for the production of products, of the means of production and of the consumers of production (production of knowledge-workers and cultural capital). Like the Brahman in the verse from the Gita, which is said to be the sacrifice, the giver of the sacrifice, the enjoyer of the sacrifice and the goal of the sacrifice,⁸ Technology here is the primary product, the means of production of the product, the means of production of the consumer, and increasingly, the consumer him/herself and the knowledge-worker, reduced to a discursive punctuation mark, or binary fluctuation, Derrida's "repeated violent insertions in the arithmetical machine".⁹

So, is there a way out? Is it going to be the Marxist revolution, the class war, do we need to begin worrying about which class we belong to or our neighbour or relatives? According to Postone, who is looking at the late writings of Marx, Marx himself did not see the solution coming from a division of society into bourgeois and proletariat since he did not see the problem any more in subject/victim terms.¹⁰ The abstract alienated structure gathers a life of its own and makes all of us into its perpetrators and its victims. We internalise it through our habitus into our conscience, we are made into specific kinds of subjects by it. So if there is to be a revolution, Postone says, it must be an immanent revolution of human consciousness¹¹ (yes, human, a post-humanity that needs to recover its humanity before exceeding itself if it is to "save itself" and not turn into a bioplasmic appendage of universal technology) within the episteme of Techno-Capitalism.

What does this mean in practical terms? What do we need to do? And are there

8. Bhagavad Gita, Chapter IV, V. 24.

9. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, University of Chicago Press, 1981.

10. Postone, *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 42, 385-99.

any uses to technology if this happens? What about the universalisation of Logos, Hegelian/Teilhardian/McLuhanian Noosphere/Universal Rationality/Sensory Omniscience? Where does it leave us? As wielders of pure consciousness or of new technologies? These and further questions are left for our continued reflection.

II

Let us dwell for a moment also on the “traditional” understanding of Marx, one which Postone is at pains to distinguish himself from, since this version also meshes in its own way with the goals of the Enlightenment and may debatably show itself to be identical with the techno-utopia of Hegel/Teilhard/McLuhan, and pushing in its own ingenuity, the self-same mythology with the same structural order of frozen time (teleology).

Among Marx’s own internal narratives, this could very well be one of his spectral alternates, since Hegel was more than an influence in his thinking. The “traditional” version then is that products are produced by concrete labour and “originally” for their concrete and (subjectively) specific use-value(s) in the self-consumptions of communities. But the process of marketisation is one of the necessary birth of history, of the journey of capital as abstract use-value of commodity translating labour now also abstracted for the universalisation/globalisation of human exchange. This process of the materialisation and terrestrialisation of human labour is mediated for competitive self-advantage by a “middle” class, the bourgeois, a mediation that accumulates capital privately and fuels the processes of the production and consumption of unbounded increasing surplus—the exploitation of labour and of nature, the production of technology, the production of knowledge and the production of desire. But the internal contradiction in this system between the use and abstract value of the product and the subjective concreteness and objectified abstraction of labour (these two sets of contradictions mapping into one another as necessary translations, since it is labour which translates into the value of product) drives the dialectic of inexorable necessity towards the “justice” of pure unmediated translations, a global order which achieves the end of history in the completed identity of abstract/concrete exchange/use producer/consumer as the self-representation of collective humanity in the form of the international union of labour through the political organ of the World-State.¹²

The traditional view of the Marxist revolution is that of human intervention in accelerating the inherent rationalisation of this process by the overcoming of the mediation of the bourgeois and his competitive privatisation of capital through a collective organisation of the proletariat and its direct ownership of the means of production and the products and control over their consumption, distribution and exchange through nation-states and eventually, the World-State.¹³ The mythology of

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

13. *Ibid.*

this narrative should not be lost on us. This is the Sacrifice of the originary Unified Body of collective Man in the Symbol, pure communities of the Symbolic Age of humanity, Satya Yuga, consuming their own production, but now driven to the reconstitution of the dismembered body through acts of exchange, leading logically (since the hidden Subject of this leading is the Logos, who makes Himself visible only through His adjectival quality, logic) to the terrestrialisation of Universal Value (which is Universal Justice) in the reintegrated Body-Politic of International Labour as the unmediated self-determining producers/consumers of their own labour/produce of use/exchange (each of these opposition-pairs being now realised identities in consciousness). Marxists, of course, will shudder at this mythologisation, since they will say it is exactly the *Geist*, Spirit of Hegel which Marx rejected in materialising his dialectic in the collective human body and its material processes of production and consumption, with the proletariat as its real Subject. But be that as it may, why the process of history should take this logical form, of a loss of “innocence” through private selfishness and the transformation of individual selfishness to universal justice and finally of the revelation in universal justice of Universal Love, were it not for the immanence of the Logos, the Word of God made flesh hidden in the heart of human history, whatever may be its manifest actors and their motivated/material acts, is difficult to comprehend.¹⁴ The subsumption of the Christian mythos in the Hegelian vision of the Enlightenment undergoes a second level of secularisation in the “traditional” narrative of Marx, but cannot divorce itself from the source of its necessity in its Origin.

Where Postone questions this version is in the centrality of its “original sin”, since this will determine also the totality of its apotheosis in the “end of history”. According to Postone, for the later Marx this is not an act of selfishness but one of self-alienation.¹⁵ The decision to produce not for self-consumption but for exchange produces not merely the mediation of economic and more fundamentally, social relations (the transformation of the habitus) by the layer of the “middle class” but by another layer of immanent mediation, which becomes more and more manifest through the historic process as the “true subject” and beneficiary of this history—the layer of alienation itself materialising and universalising itself as Technology—Technology as Logos or Logos as Technology, which no revolution of the proletariat or overcoming of the bourgeois can displace, produced out of the dismembered body of the sacrifice of collective Unity in the Symbolic Age of Innocence, the shining Bio-Robotic Cow of Universal Plenty, its mechanical udders vibrating with the fatal fascination of alterity, cannibalising its producers into its own alienated Substance. Marx’s mature view of the “end of history” then for Postone is not the apotheosis of labour and the

14. The transposed theology of Marx has been genealogically explored by Murray N. Rothbard, “Karl Marx, Communist as Religious Eschatologist” in *The Review of Austrian Economics*, Vol. 4, 1990, pp. 123-79. See also Thomas Molnar, “Marxism and the Utopian Theme”, *Marxist Perspectives*, Winter 1978.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-85.

utopia of Universal Love but the totalitarianism of Technology as the regime of alienation, his revolution not a revolution of the proletariat against the bourgeois but an immanent revolution of human production and consumption against technicity, the technologised consciousness-structures of the alienated social habitus, of commodified social relations. In this version, Marx visioned Hegelian Universal Enlightenment as a mistake and his own narrative is a historical explanation and critique of Hegel. In this view, Hegel mistook a non-human Universal Spirit (*Geist*) as the progressively materialising and rationalising Subject of History because he himself was embedded within the structural temporality of modernity, which was already marked by its endemic alienation. This objectified alienation, rationalising itself materially as Technology is what Hegel mistook as Spirit.

But granted that this is a possibility, can Hegel/Teilhard/McLuhan be dismissed so easily? Can the Enlightenment and the fascination of its mythos be negativised unequivocally? After all, the Aurobindonian narrative sounds surprisingly similar to some ears as the Hegelian one; many there are who read the regime of globalisation as the materialisation of the Brahman, even of that specially mystifying Aurobindonian term, the Supermind. And Postone's Marx and his attribution of self-alienation at the "origin" of modern history—how does this history realise itself universally—I mean how did it even get this far, what processes of chance or necessity or combination of the two took local phenomena of exchange and turned it into the globalising world-market, whose ontology (*hauntology*, as Derrida will tell us in his *Specters of Marx*¹⁶) is technicity? Was it perhaps the Hegelian *Zeitgeist*, Time-Spirit, the Heideggerean disclosure of Being in the horizon of modern Time, the Foucauldian inexplicable epistemic change?¹⁷ And what does it portend for the future destiny of the human at the end of its history? Or can its history be aborted and transformed through immanent revolution, as Postone suggests (but never makes practically concrete) in his text?

What are the dimensions of the Enlightenment narrative and where does Sri Aurobindo fit into it or where does it fit into Sri Aurobindo, if we are to be more audacious or is there a radical misfit between the two? Where is the inadequacy in "Catholicism" which Arthur Kroker invokes to explain McLuhan's failure or is it some other kind of inadequacy, in the heart of the Enlightenment ideal and that of its proponents who see subsumed and hidden in it the track or trace, footsteps of the Holy Spirit of archaic ages?

What indeed, is the Enlightenment ideal and where do we stand in its realisation today? Put simply, the onto-theological ideal of the Enlightenment is the universalisation of Divine Reason, the Rationality or Intelligence of the Universe as the common property of Humanity on earth—not the property of any one person but of Humanity as a whole, for its access and use. Enlightenment brings liberation, this

16. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, translated by Peggy Kamuf, Routledge, 1994.

17. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, Vintage Books, New York, 1970, 1994, p. 57.

was the belief, and a universalised Enlightenment will bring universal liberation through the terrestrialisation of the properties of Divinity (or as Divine Reason equated with Divinity) being accessible to all humans. The prime properties of such a realised Divinity would be the Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence of the Divine Reason within universal access. Today, the virtual universalisation of satellite technology, telecommunications and intercontinental travel have effectively non-localised our experience of the world, we can almost be “present” at any point on the earth at any time. Is this not Omnipresence? The proliferation of electronic archives and incredible information density of storage systems are making all the history of textual and multimedia expression and discursivity of the earth available to the access of all human beings at the push of a button. Is this not Omniscience? And Technology today makes it possible to give life and take life universally—we are on the verge of being able to overcome every natural deterrent to food production and to regenerate human organs and we can blow out the world at the push of a button. Is this not Omnipotence? So where did we go wrong or did we? And is there anything else that Sri Aurobindo can give us here—or is this indeed also the Aurobindonian mythos, the terrestrialisation and universalisation of Supermind as the Vedic Cow of Human Plenty?

These are questions worth reflecting on and bringing into alignment with the Neo-Vedantic teleology (if it can be called that) of Sri Aurobindo.

III

To ask ourselves the question where we are headed in these civilisational end-times, this eschatological hour of the realised hubris of Techno-Capitalism and to pose the question in terms of godhood—Omniscience, Omnipotence, Omnipresence—is to foreground the issue of post-human destinies. Are we to remain what we are or is something else taking shape in us, an alien life-form being born imperceptibly in the spectral interstices of our already blurred humanity? And what is the nature of this life-form—is it Heidegger’s “God (who will) save us”,¹⁸ Derrida’s unnamable *l’avenir*,¹⁹ Nietzsche’s superman²⁰ or Sri Aurobindo’s?²¹ Or is it Kafka’s metamorphosed cockroach²² or William Burroughs’ ventriloquist whose anal speech-trick ran uncontrollably out of hand and took over his body and brain?²³

18. “Only a God can save us”, Martin Heidegger, Interview with Rudolf Augustein and Georg Wolff in *Der Spiegel*, 23 September, 1966.

19. Jacques Derrida’s messianic concept of the “true future” which is not predictable, which is thus marked by alterity and impossibility.

20. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Prologue, Section 3.

21. Sri Aurobindo, “The Type of the Superman”, *Arya*, Vol. I, No. 9, April, 1915.

22. Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 1915, e-text version translated by Ian Johnston, <http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/stories/kafka-E.htm>.

23. William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, Grove Press Inc., New York, 1959, pp. 132-33.

Let us consider the godhood of our contemporary post-Enlightenment hour of global power and control. What kind of Omnipresence, Omniscience, Omnipotence do we have here? Techno-Capitalism is a regime of international globalised flows levelling all differences into universal exchangeable measures—a flow of technology as capital and of capital as technology—the two imperceptibly intertwined like Mercurius' caduceus or the Ida and Pingala occult streams of internal circulation. But that does not mean they are one—their sources of origin are separate and though they work as one within the universal body of the psycho-sphere, it may be possible to unbraid them if we know the why and how.

What then is our present Omniscience and Omnipresence? Our Omniscience and Omnipresence are those of anonymous instrumentation and its master, anonymous Rationality, of the extension and refinement of sense organs turned upon the material world and probing it for its universal secrets, and ultimately for its intrinsic singular rationality, for this is how the Enlightenment has defined “the human” to itself—the secret possessor of the Logos of God who by collective effort of/as history will distill and release this objectified universal Logos, the Immortal Static Infinite Intelligent Word of God which is the hidden operative Rationality of Matter and Life and the conscious instrumental rationality of the human. But whereas individual human beings are finite and mortal, the “human race” is potentially immortal (for such is the rationality of Nature) and its collective historical reach is infinite. This is how its effort can produce an Age of Universal Enlightenment which belongs to no single person but is made available for the use of Humanity as a whole. But this statement has to be understood in its fullness—not merely in the utopic ring of its idealism. For if it cannot belong to any single person, this is not because no single person can come into control and possession of it, but because no single person can be equal to it in consciousness. This is one of the two fundamental dualities of the regime of instrumentation as Technology—that it produces a globalised objectified Rationality as instrumentation, which is far beyond the capacity of any individual to equal, which therefore dwarfs and obliterates that same individuality which it produces as the subject of its own production, splitting the individual from all past and present systems of identity/belonging, producing in him the conscience of prized individuality and anonymising him. This individual anonymous “member of the human race”, producer of the universal Rationality of the Age of Enlightenment objectified as the regime of globalised instrumentation must then perforce become a continuing producer, user and consumer of its Omniscience and Omnipresence through the mediation of technological instrumentation. And this mediation determines through its totalitarian McLuhanesque extra-human far-from-neutral neutrality the conditioned responses of human agents, responses more proper to a silicon-based life-form, which reduces the human to a ticking (pun intended) part of its machinery.

Which leads to the second duality at the heart of this Omniscience/Omni-presence—that between the essence of Technology and the essence of the human.

For Technology as the product of the Enlightenment remains objectified Rationality but Humanity if reduced to the rational, loses its essence as an undefinable life-form in transition, seeking to create in itself its own godhood. This second duality is a realised godhood as human creation which slays the essence of the godhood of human creativity, its own sources of self-transcendence. This then is the Omniscience and Omnipresence beckoning us as the fulfilled end of Technology, an end which is largely unquestioned and avalanches towards its fulfilment, taking “the human race” to its own post-human destiny as cannibalised machinery.

And what of Omnipotence, the secret urge behind every seeking for Omniscience, the human dream of making a better world than that which God has made, a world more suited to its needs and desires? Here is where Technology and Capitalism become separable, for if global Technology anonymises and dwarfs us as individuals and splices us into the nano-genetics of its non-dual world reality as Instrument, this same inequality between the finite mortal individual and the Infinite Immortal objectified Reason as Knowledge spawns a different valence for Power—one of the huge individual hunger to become the possessor of such a Dream Machine—a possessor not in/for consciousness but as property for enjoyment. This is the urge of global Capitalism, which produces the regime of Technology as an increasingly accelerating desiring machine, machine of the production and consumption of human beings as desiring subject/objects and of universal capital as impersonal exchange property of property exchange driving the hunger and thirst of infinite possession known as the World-market.

The operating logic of such a regime is that of the ecology of speed and the mythology of rupture. A mythos of perpetual progress flattens Time towards pure spatiality, where the Here is the Now, distancing itself ever more radically from “the past” through the production of History and projecting itself ever more thoroughly into “the future” through its ceaseless reinvention, a double fetish of willed obsolescence assimilated ever more rapidly into the world museum of ruins and a compulsive turnover of fleeting novelty as its “other”, two specifically modern forms of sensational pleasure. But is this mythos of “rupture” from the past the same as the discontinuity of the messianic Return,²⁴ is this pure spatiality of Time the diaphaneity of the fourth dimension,²⁵ is this eschatological moment the inauguration of a new time-structure of perpetual rebirth, the Aurobindonian condition for the physical immortality of one kind of post-human future?²⁶

Hardly so. This spurious supermanhood at the end of Hegelian/Enlightenment History does not yield the phenomenology of the diaphanous fourth dimension²⁷ but

24. Derrida, *Op. cit.*, p. 65.

25. Jean Gebser, *The Ever-Present Origin*, Authorised translation by Noel Barstad with Algis Mikunas. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1986, p. 6.

26. “To be perpetually reborn is the condition of a material immortality”, Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972, p. 1.

27. Gebser, *Op. cit.*

the commodification of Subjectivity which amounts to the oblivion of memory and the erasure of Being. Its Omnipresence is not an omnitemporality which redeems or fulfills the past but betrays it by tearing from it the historicity of its presence and packaging it as alienated product of consumption or collection. Its Omnipotence does not grasp the plenitude of infinite Being as a non-dual self-possession, but marks its object with the unfulfilment, dis-ease and boredom of its own wanting finitude. Its Omniscience is not a penetration of or identification with the Intelligence of God in all things but a voluntary abdication of creative consciousness in favour of a conditioned instrumentality yielding a piecemeal fragmentary knowledge at best simulating the integral. What it is most useful for is not the global reproduction of democratic godhood but the global surveillance of the Unitary Panopticon,²⁸ invisibly and anonymously mapping every point in space and moment in time for the control of whatever power or principle may manage to lay hold of its machinery. But effective though this may be in subjecting human bodies to its disciplinary regime, human consciousness persists in its incalculable presentation of something beyond instrumentation and discreteness, something which no calculus of limits or nano-resolution of binarity can capture, something which is reality itself as integral Idea, Real-Idea, escaping its hold, though deferred or pre-empted from its own post-humanity. The Godhead we have collectively produced, by forced conscription of all the energisms of the human race over 500 years of labour, toil and blood-sacrifice in the *yajna* of the Enlightenment is simply the hugely magnified and universalised double Ego of Mental-Vital Man, objectified as global machinery and desiring Will, Technology and the World-market.

And today, it is not a matter of choice, not the lure of the god of the Enlightenment which attracts the adherence of our will but the avalanche of its momentum which sweeps inexorably towards the end of its projected temporality, its time-structure as world history. Does Heidegger's alternate god, the "God [that] can save us"²⁹ hide its footsteps behind the mask of this mental-vital fraud? We cannot say. For Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the answer is "yes", though what is uncertain there is if we will have any part of it. The Aurobindonian superman does not need our assistance or midwifery to make its appearance. For Heidegger or Derrida, the answer is unimportant, our propriety as beings at the end of "human history" one of knowing how to awaken the sleep of unsuspecting travellers, how to indicate the margins of human possibility and how to wait.³⁰ Is that all? And what are the margins of human possibility? What post-human forms loom in those margins? And what futures await

28. Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage Books, New York, 1995, pp. 195-228.

29. Martin Heidegger, *Op. cit.*

30. The Messianic waiting for the impossible possibility is a preoccupation with both Heidegger and Derrida. See for example, Martin Heidegger, *Op. cit.* and Jacques Derrida, "Marx & Sons," in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker, Verso, New York, 1999, pp. 248-49.

us at the culmination of Enlightenment history? And is there a history beyond?

I have spoken of two dualities dividing the human individual from the God of the Enlightenment. One of these is the division between the finitude of the individual and the infinity of God. The other is the division between the essence of the human and the essence of Technology. It is both these dualities that Arthur Kroker is invoking when he refers to the lack in McLuhan's (following Chardin's) theological metaphysics to bring into awareness or overcome the irreducible alienation of an Enlightenment godhood. Western metaphysics as western theology (displacements of each other) and the two together as onto-theology are premised on these dualities. The essence of the human individual there is a finitude faced with an infinite God or Universe and a struggling irrationality faced with a rational God or Universe. This is the human structure or onto-theology from which it knows no escape.

The only apotheosis of the human individual here at the end of the cycle of objectified and universalised Rationality is its disappearance into Machinery. This is a post-human future which looms large as a possibility at the nearing margins of the impending end of human history—maybe first the surreptitious disappearance of man in the Machine, an embodied instrument in the world wide web of impersonal Techno-Capitalism, then an increasing nano-bionic mutation of physical substance going hand in hand with an increasing miniaturisation and de-materialisation of machinery and ending with the extinction of the human—the consciousness of universal human history and experience ceding its temporality and mortality to the continuance of a memory bank in astral cyberspace pulsing out its permuted algorithms of post-human desire in cyber-sensory worlds without limit.³¹

Or may we dare to question the lack at the heart of Christian/western onto-theological duality and posit a radical post-structuralism on the one hand as the essence of the human—not a finitude but an ever creative infinity, and on the other, as the essence of God or Universe—not a rationality but a post-rational integrality? May the universalisation and objectification of Rationality and Instrumentation as the end of Enlightenment history be an intermediate invitation to a non-duality where a supra-rational subjective power of consciousness in the individual measures, equates and overpasses itself? The practical phenomenology of Vedanta would seem to indicate such a possibility, not as an astrology, but as a necessarily participative process, a process termed yoga. It is this possibility that Sri Aurobindo holds out as the post-human future of choice which can activate an evolutionary transcendence. Can the objectification of universal Rationality as non-local Instrumentation be mirrored in identical structures of subjective consciousness? May, indeed, such an objectification facilitate such a realised equivalence of subjective consciousness, make it easier for the individual to realise its operational non-locality and universality in consciousness,

31. The concepts of mind-transfer or infomorphism are not uncommon in contemporary science fiction. See for example, Frederik Pohl's *Gateway* series or episodes from the TV series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

so even as to eventually make the objectified machinery unnecessary and obsolete? And if such a possibility may be imagined, under what individual and social conditions could it be realised?

Sri Aurobindo has a provocative statement about the Enlightenment drive for Godhood and the end of Machinery ending the chapter on “The Materialist Denial” in *The Life Divine*. He says:

Science itself begins to dream of the physical conquest of death, expresses an insatiable thirst for knowledge, is working out something like a terrestrial omnipotence for humanity. Space and Time are contracting to the vanishing-point in its works, and it strives in a hundred ways to make man the master of circumstance and so lighten the fetters of causality. The idea of limit, of the impossible begins to grow a little shadowy and it appears instead that whatever man constantly wills, he must in the end be able to do; for the consciousness in the race eventually finds the means. It is not in the individual that this omnipotence expresses itself, but the collective Will of mankind that works out with the individual as a means. And yet when we look more deeply, it is not any conscious Will of the collectivity, but a superconscious Might that uses the individual as a centre and means, the collectivity as a condition and field. What is this but the God in man, the infinite Identity, the multitudinous Unity, the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, who having made man in His own image, with the ego as a centre of working, with the race, the collective Narayana, the *viśvamānava* 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? “That which is immortal in mortals is a God and established inwardly as an energy working out in our divine powers.” It is this vast cosmic impulse which the modern world, without quite knowing its own aim, yet serves in all its activities and labours subconsciously to fulfil.

But there is always a limit and an encumbrance,—the limit of the material field in the Knowledge, the encumbrance of the material machinery in the Power. But here also the latest trend is highly significant of a freer future. As the outposts of scientific Knowledge come more and more to be set on the borders that divide the material from the immaterial, so also the highest achievements of practical Science are those which tend to simplify and reduce to the vanishing-point the machinery by which the greatest effects are produced. Wireless telegraphy is Nature’s exterior sign and pretext for a new orientation. The sensible physical means for the intermediate transmission of the physical force is removed; it is only preserved at the points of impulsion and reception. Eventually even these must disappear; for when the laws and forces of the supraphysical are studied with the right starting-point, the means will infallibly be found for Mind directly to seize on the physical energy and speed it accurately upon its errand. There,

once we bring ourselves to recognise it, lie the gates that open upon the enormous vistas of the future.

Yet even if we had full knowledge and control of the worlds immediately above Matter, there would still be a limitation and still a beyond. The last knot of our bondage is at that point where the external draws into oneness with the internal, the machinery of ego itself becomes subtilised to the vanishing-point and the law of our action is at last unity embracing and possessing multiplicity and no longer, as now, multiplicity struggling towards some figure of unity. There is the central throne of cosmic Knowledge looking out on her widest dominion; there the empire of oneself with the empire of one's world; there the life in the eternally consummate Being and the realisation of His divine nature in our human existence.³²

This Neo-Vedantic appropriation and supercession of the Enlightenment furthers an alternate teleology of the Subjective which travels to a non-dual post-human future prioritising Consciousness. It also indicates an alternate Science of the Subjective, a collective phenomenology of experience and the development of subjective Technologies of consciousness. Are we up to such developments? Are we permitted the time within the hyper-temporality of Techno-Capitalism's ecology of rupture and insistent objectification of commodified space-time? Are we permitted the choice within the totalitarian globalised regime of the ever-tightening ubiquity of the world wide web, the economic barbarism of its tinsel-town neo-liberal techno-optimism, its Panopticon of terrestrial surveillance?

Without the growth of collective awareness in the imperative of this alternative, its teleology, even if admitted, may well bypass the human. But to awaken to a more than personal responsibility does not come easy to humankind. This too is an ironical aspect of the dwarfing of human consciousness in the regime of Techno-Capitalism, where the individual is expected to be global but all this amounts to in terms of responsibility is an uniformitarian adherence to multinational consumption. Apathy is the badge of its regime, aspiration merely its lip service to an ideal for which it seeks deified substitutes for its own insufficiency. And yet, without the growing awareness in humanity of the urgent need for a change in direction, the hope in a "God [that] can save us" will remain an impotent and impractical faith, the prospect of the God who came and went and remained unrecognised, an eventuality far more pathetic than that of the God who earned men's hate and martyrdom. Intentional groups which can make the collective choice to refuse the imperative of global Capitalism and persist in economies and ecologies determined by the alternate imperative of developing the accumulated phenomenologies of the Subjective and technologies of Consciousness in engagement with the regime of post-Enlightenment

32. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972, pp. 14-16.

Modernity may alone have a chance at this transition. Every attempted experiment in this direction is a possible evolutionary bifurcation, a possibility of socio-personal mutation whose success or failure or dimensions are completely unknown at this time, but which urgently demands our participation. What is primary for this initiation is individual awakening to the images of the post-human futures driving the present, the trajectories of Techno-Capitalism and their power, the urgent imperative for alternate post-human futures which lead to non-dual identities of Consciousness in being and power and a heroic aspiration and global responsibility flaming up within as a result of these contemplations. Without these understandings, these contemplations and these aspirations one is not ready for the transition, either as an individual or a collective, and social experiments even based on teachings such as those of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, are blighted from the outset. With these requirements, do we have a better chance? And can the experiments of miniscule collectives, even if lucky enough to survive, mean anything to globalised humanity? Without the attempt we will never know. A post-human future of non-dual consciousness which glorifies and transcends the human is least likely to arrive without human participation. And perhaps if we can overcome the pressure of inertia and apathy endemic to the regime of Techno-Capitalism and wake to the necessary post-human aspiration, the Mother's message may become meaningful in a new and active way: "*Blessed are those who take a leap towards the Future.*"³³

DEBASHISH BANERJI

33. The Mother, New Year Message, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1971.

Indeed, on this day I can watch almost all the world-movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though then they looked like impracticable dreams, arriving at fruition or on their way to achievement. In all these movements free India may well play a large part and take a leading position.

Sri Aurobindo

THE 'DREAMS' AND THE REALITY

AUGUST 15, 2007, is the *ṣaṣṭhī pūrṭi* of independent India and the 60th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo's message issued on his 75th birth anniversary. In this message he made a "personal declaration of the aims and ideals conceived" in his "childhood and youth" which later came to be known as the five 'dreams' of Sri Aurobindo. On that day, on the 15th of August, 1947, he had hoped to see "all the world-movements" fulfilled which, instead of being fulfilled in his life time, had only begun to make "their way to achievement."¹

It is indeed a good time to look back and see if India and the world are progressing in the direction indicated by Sri Aurobindo or whether humanity is moving away from his prophetic dream-vision. Are there any telltale signs of any movements towards the grandiose evolutionary finale envisaged by him for the world? If so, what are they? These are some of the questions we should be asking ourselves, standing at a significant milestone in our nation's history.

Having co-aged with independent India, it may also be the right time for me to make a kind of personal reappraisal of my own awakening to the processes which have helped the realisation of these 'dreams'. When I was in a 'frog in the well' kind of situation during my days of education in the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, I was hardly aware of the world beyond the Ashram. So much cocooned were we in the Mother's atmosphere that I hardly had any need to contact the world outside on any level. Later, when I entered a kind of a 'fish in the lake' situation at Auroville, I did open myself to the world and its happenings but they were also restricted and selective as I did not need to see beyond the ideal of Auroville that was in front of me. The world came to me; I did not go to the world! It is only much later, when I went to Bangkok for a job of teaching in the Assumption University, that I opened myself to the world more and more, though cautiously. Maybe it was only in 1996 when I went out to the United States of America for a conference that I started seeing and participating in the world's happenings for the first time and I began to see consciously the work of the Mother in and for the world and the fulfilment of the dreams of Sri Aurobindo. My travelling across countries and continents for the past 12 years or so, participating in seminars and holding workshops in Integral Yoga and Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo brought me closer to the efforts and aspirations of many people and cultures bringing me insights into the realisation of the 'dreams'.

It was then that I saw that there was a wide awakening to what Sri Aurobindo has mentioned in his fourth dream, calling it "the spiritual gift of India". No doubt, "more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice."² In every country there are countless people turning to Indian yoga, though chiefly to Hatha and Pranayama. It is reported that there are about 21 million practitioners of Hathayoga in the US alone, while in Europe the movement for introducing yoga in the educational

institutions is being pursued on governmental levels. The European Union of Yoga is galvanising support for yoga on several levels of society and it is getting a great response. There are new movements like ‘Sarva Yoga International’ which are even trying to synthesise all the traditional yoga systems in India! Yoga has caught on like a forest fire in most of the Western countries though its absence is as prominent in the far eastern countries! May be the stronghold of Buddhism in these countries bars any other form of practice of yoga, at least for the present. It is, however, reported that even Muslims have taken to some rudimentary Hathayoga and pranayama in India as it promises good health, which is the primary concern of every human being. In any case, I suppose yoga, in whatever form, will be one of the greatest factors that will take humanity beyond the narrow limits of religions and hasten the coming of the spiritual age that India is supposed to herald!

However, it is now a confirmed belief with the growing many in the West that India alone has the answers to their unanswered inner queries and that she alone has the secret to the spiritual and psychic practices—with or without the complex rituals and ceremonies of Hinduism. That is how we see a plethora of Indian gurus who are now touching the hearts of millions in every country!

Of course, there is at the same time a lot of misunderstanding too regarding the spiritual path. Anything mystical or mysterious passes off as ‘spiritual’ and people flock to all kinds of teachings, spurious or genuine. Some upstarts became spiritual masters overnight by learning the vocabulary of spiritual mystification! The simplest way was to display the Hindu rituals, and the gullible western people took these novel practices as Indian spirituality. Anything and everything went out in the name of spirituality. Especially in Integral Yoga, there are a lot of gurus or as they call themselves ‘channels’ of the ‘force’ of the Mother and/or Sri Aurobindo and, better still, of the ‘Supramental force’ itself! Often I found myself in an embarrassing and uncomfortable position when I had to confront such ‘channels’. Whenever the occasion came I had to clarify that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo worked directly without the need to work through ‘channels’! I am sure it disappointed them but I am also sure they have not left their ‘practice’ because it brings them power and position apart from many material gains!

* * *

Sri Aurobindo’s first dream of a free India was of course realised in his own lifetime. But can we say that India has achieved ‘unity’ that Sri Aurobindo had envisioned between India and Pakistan even after 60 years of independence? It is true that both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother did promise the ultimate reunion of the two countries, nay, even of the whole subcontinent! Sri Aurobindo had written in his Message for the 15th of August, 1947, that “by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of

India's future."³ And later in a different context he said, in a personal tone: "India will be reunited. I see it clearly."⁴ Commenting on 'the spiritual map of India'—as drawn out on the southern wall of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Playground—"which includes Pakistan, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Burma and Sri Lanka", the Mother had once said:

The map was made after the partition.

It is the map of the true India in spite of all passing appearances, and it will always remain the map of the true India, whatever people may think about it.⁵

What we see nowadays is that there is an attempt, a sense of unity, between the two countries, India and Pakistan, but it is all based on political interests and party politics. We are not sure as to their seriousness, genuineness and sincerity in this attempt at unification. It could all be a game of the dubious politics! One cannot be sure. Some of the Aurobindonians at present are eager to see this unification realise itself in their own lifetime! But, what has to be kept in mind is that the time-frame of the consciousness of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo is not the same as ours. When the Mother had told in 1915 that she had seen India free, she had also emphasised that "I guessed nothing nor prophesied anything: it was a fact."⁶ What was fact to her was a reality to us after 32 years. Similarly, Sri Aurobindo too had said in 1918, when asked by A. B. Purani regarding the freedom of India: "'Who can give such an assurance?' I could feel the echo of doubt and challenge in my own question. Again he remained silent for three or four minutes. Then he looked at me and added: 'Suppose I give you the assurance?' I paused for a moment, considered the question with myself and said: 'If you give the assurance, I can accept it.' 'Then I give you the assurance that India will be free,' he said in a serious tone."⁷ What he assured realised itself on the material level only after 29 years! So, things shall move, depending on the receptivity of the human beings, towards their destined unification, 'because that is the truth of their being'. In spite of these human delays in reuniting the two estranged countries there will be ultimately the triumph of the divine word: "But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future."⁸ And the means could be either war or steps to peace. So it is now only the question of the method and means of coming together again: will it be by war or by peaceful methods? Perhaps, and hopefully so, the first option of war is erased once for all. It was definitely an option in the past but now it is no more so. During the second war between India and Pakistan the Mother had sent out a message: "It is for the sake and triumph of Truth that India is fighting and must fight until India and Pakistan have once more become *One* because that is the truth of their being."⁹ But unfortunately, in the signing of the truce by the then Prime Minister of India, one more opportunity was lost for uniting India and Pakistan.

Now we have to follow the second inevitable option of a peaceful process of unification between the two countries about which Sri Aurobindo wrote in the same Message: "...that may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action, by the practice of common action and the creation of means for that purpose. In this way unity may finally come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance."¹⁰ The plausible 'form' of such a federation could be that of a federation of the SAARC countries, developed in the line of the European Union or to find out its own suitable method.

Sri Aurobindo had warned that if the division lasts: "...India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: ...India's internal development and prosperity may be impeded, her position among the nations weakened, her destiny impaired or even frustrated."¹¹ But, fortunately, that possibility seems to have been nullified by the will of her awakened soul and India is on the contrary gaining a very respectable place in the comity of nations and her economy is one of the fastest growing ones in the world giving a tremendous boost to her internal development and prosperity. A contemporary author writes: "The economic reforms of 1991 and the explosions of a nuclear device in 1998 gave a little more flesh to the Indian dot on the radar screens of geopolitical strategies and economic analysts, especially in the West. The *Economist* invoked the image of an awakened elephant, finally lumbering to its tryst with the market place.... Moreover, significant changes are sweeping across the subcontinent. With more degree holders than the entire population of France, India is finding new recognition in the field of information technology. Software exports are estimated to cross US \$50 billion in a few years. The Indian diaspora is, after China's, the second largest in the world. Indians have emerged as the richest ethnic community in the USA, and are a growing and increasingly affluent presence in many other countries, including the UK and the Gulf. Whether the world wants to or not, it will be difficult not to interact in many more ways with Indians in the new millennium."¹² This economic thrust and the renascent developments that we experience in a kind of 'India on the March' finds an echo and a reassurance in Sri Aurobindo's writings too: "Now that the salvation, the reawakening has come, India will certainly keep her essential spirit, will keep her characteristic soul, but there is likely to be a great change of the body. The shaping for itself of a new body, of new philosophical, artistic, literary, cultural, political, social forms by the same soul rejuvenescent will, I should think, be the type of the Indian renaissance,—forms not contradictory of the truths of life which the old expressed, but rather expressive of those truths restated, cured of defect, completed."¹³

This support from Sri Aurobindo, about India's 'soul rejuvenescent' is extremely comforting to many Indians who are deeply concerned with the eroding of Indian values in the present times. They are worried about the overwhelming Americanisation of our culture, especially seeing the exodus of Indians who aim at finding their green

pastures in the green Dollar notes of the US! Secondly, with the imports and exports of technology there are some threatening inroads into the Indian cultural psyche influencing or even overthrowing her deeper values of life and living. But, I suppose I would tend to agree with Pavan K. Varma who writes: "The new supranational Indian culture is influenced by élite aspirations but no longer controlled by them. It cuts across class barriers and is nonchalantly lowbrow. It does not aspire to be classical, and has evolved in response to needs, not structured concepts. To the despair of purists it has had no qualms in borrowing from the West, or for that matter from anywhere else. It has displayed an extraordinary ability to be hybrid, often at the lowest common denominator of conventional cultural aesthetics, while continuing to be unmistakably Indian. Its evolution has been haphazard but spontaneous, showing an exhilarating lack of inhibition and an enviable capacity for improvisation. It has given common symbols and icons to Indians even in the remotest parts of the country. Riding on a media and communications revolution, it has spread faster than any cultural development before."¹⁴ Varma has only provided substance to what Sri Aurobindo had emphasised way back in 1926: "I am sure that India is not destined to be destroyed."¹⁵ Also, he had assured K. M. Munshi: "Rest assured that our culture cannot be undermined. This is only a passing phase."¹⁶

All this economic boom and the cultural dynamism that is bursting on all the levels of Indian life is the sure indication of the reawakening of India's soul and this in itself is the assurance that the reunification of the two countries too will be worked out rather by her inner being than by any political party or selfish and narrow-minded political or social leaders. While politicians and diplomats speak and talk at the round-table conferences, the soul of India will work itself out in the voice of the people, in the hearts of men and women, in the imaginations of the youth who can be beyond the barriers of religion and caste and nations. It is when the idea touches the interests of the people and the life of common man that things can be worked out and not by endless rendezvousing in some hill-stations. The goal is clear but it has to work itself through the mind-set-obstacles. As we move forward, the road to the unity will become clearer and more confirmed though gradually and by little steps. To envisage it otherwise would be a contradiction in terms because of the deep-seated division in the minds of the political leaders and interested parties.

* * *

The other dream of Sri Aurobindo which seems to be fulfilling itself, though not very rapidly, is his third dream of a world unity. It had had its root-beginnings in France and Germany. France with her ideal of liberty, equality and fraternity had found in Victor Hugo her spirit's voice. He had once inspired the nation in the nineteenth century with his profound vision of a United States of Europe:

All of us here, we say to France, to England, to Prussia, to Austria, to Spain, to Italy, to Russia, we say to them, “A day will come when your weapons will fall from your hands, a day when war will seem absurd and be as impossible between Paris and London, St. Petersburg and Berlin, Vienna and Turin, as today it would seem impossible between Rouen and Amiens, Boston and Philadelphia.

A day will come when there will be no battlefields, but markets opening to commerce and minds opening to ideas. A day will come when the bullets and bombs are replaced by votes, by universal suffrage, by the venerable arbitration of a great supreme senate which will be to Europe what Parliament is to England, the Diet to Germany, and the Legislative Assembly to France.

A day will come when a cannon will be a museum-piece, as instruments of torture are today. And we will be amazed to think that these things once existed!”¹⁷

Indeed Victor Hugo had a great foresight when in 1871, just when France was reeling under the shock of a humiliating defeat at the hands of Prussia, he dared to declare:

My revenge is my fraternity! No more frontiers! The Rhine for everyone! Let us be the same Republic, let us be the United States of Europe, let us be the continental federation, let us be European liberty, let us be universal peace!...¹⁸

Later, France found in Jean Monnet (1888–1975) a staunch believer and a pragmatic visionary dedicated to the union of Europe. He stood by his belief: “The union of Europe is not an end in itself. It is a contribution to the organisation of peace in the world. The focus of our efforts should be the development of man—not the affirmation of a motherland, whether big or small. Why is the union of men restricted to national barriers?”¹⁹ Being a thorough pragmatist, he had worked out in the middle of World War II a revolutionary formula to bring “a total fusion between England and France—one flag, one parliament, one people.” He had brought about “a breach in the ramparts of national sovereignty” and was “able to wriggle the neck of History by creating institutionally irreversible situations.”²⁰

In fact Sri Aurobindo himself had appreciated this idea as is seen in his conversation on the 17th or 18th of June, 1940, reported in the *Evening Talks* by A. B. Purani: “Sri Aurobindo liked Churchill’s proposal and said: ‘English people do not like an idea for the sake of the idea. But they have a feeling for what is possible, what is necessary. They have a great flexibility in politics and they have shown it by declaring in England State-Socialism... and this Anglo-French Union is another move. ...The Belgian and Dutch Governments have not given up, so why should the French? And even if the Anglo-French Union does not become permanent they can have a

very powerful federation with Holland, Belgium, Norway, Poland, Czechoslovakia and they can request India to join it voluntarily as an equal partner....No nation can be great on the principle of maintaining its existence, unless it stands for some great cause or idealism or something great.'²¹

The Mother too had commented on this event, namely that of the Anglo-French Union: "Only some months ago, the same Grace presented itself at the door of France, immediately after the fall of Dunkirk, in the form of Churchill's offer to her to have joint nationality with England and fight the enemy. Sri Aurobindo said that it was the right idea, and it would also have helped His work immensely. But France could not raise herself above the ordinary mind, and rejected it. So the Grace withdrew and the Soul of France has gone down. One doesn't know when the real France will be up again."²²

Personally, I experienced the growth and the imperative need of European union during my visit to Berlin in 2001. I felt among the intellectuals and some very sensitive souls a great psychological fulfilment in the idea and efforts of the European Union. The birth of the European Union was very welcome, especially in Berlin, for it served for many as a surrogate mother-land. Because of World War II, in which the Germans were held responsible for the colossal massacre of the Jews, many of the present-day Germans feel very guilty and suffer from a guilt-consciousness. So, they do not feel comfortable identifying themselves with Germany. And yet, as there is the psychological need in all human beings to identify oneself with some larger body of collectivity, many of the young Germans are turning to the idea of a European Union, for it is in that idea that they get the larger group consciousness, a larger group soul with which to identify themselves.

This led me to probe deeper into this idea of the European Union for it seems to be the first step towards fulfilling Sri Aurobindo's third dream:

...a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind. That unification of the human world is under way; there is an imperfect initiation organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties.... For unification is a necessity of Nature, an inevitable movement. Its necessity for the nations is also clear, for without it the freedom of the small nations may be at any moment in peril and the life even of the large and powerful nations insecure. The unification is therefore to the interests of all, and only human imbecility and stupid selfishness can prevent it; but these cannot stand forever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will.²³

It is against the background of such a hope, a dream, a will, that Sri Aurobindo had discussed around 1918, in *The Ideal of Human Unity*, the possibility of the United States of Europe which would be a great step towards a world-union. Others like

Victor Hugo had talked about it, while people like Jean Monnet had laid concrete steps towards it, but it was Sri Aurobindo who had written in detail about the pros and cons of such a historical and evolutionary possibility.

Sri Aurobindo indicates that the idea of fraternity, liberty and equality had been taken up wholeheartedly by France herself in the beginning of the nineteenth century, although it suffered considerably in Napoleonic times. Later, America and Europe adopted fully this idea of a free democratic nation whatever the inherent imperfections of such an idea. But it was in Germany that the idea flourished in some strange manner. As writes Sri Aurobindo:

As France was in the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century the great propagandist and the experimental workshop of political liberty and equality, so Germany has been in the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century the chief propagandist and the experimental workshop of the idea of the organised State. There the theory of Socialism has taken rise and there its propaganda has been most effective, so that a large proportion of the nation committed itself to the new gospel; there also the great socialistic measures and those which have developed the control of the individual by the State for the common good and efficiency of the nation have been most thoroughly and admirably conceived and executed.²⁴

The basic tenet of Socialism is to take out the competitive force, which is the fundamental principle in democracy and to introduce the important principle of cooperation. This principle of cooperation is the first necessary principle towards a European union and even towards a world union. This principle was, however, developed through historic upheavals and wars embarked upon by Otto von Bismark (1815–98), known as the ‘Iron Chancellor’ and then by Kaiser Wilhelm II who brought in the idea of imperialism a principle which was executed to its fullest by Hitler. These rulers in themselves were not in themselves of much interest to Sri Aurobindo. What caught his attention was the idea and the evolutionary principle that was spread through them. That seems to be the mystery of history—through kings and queens, wars, victories, defeats and revolutions it is always Nature’s idea that is manifesting itself, in spite of ourselves or through us. Nature seems to use human beings as her tools and instruments to further her own evolutionary plans! So, he says, “The defeat of Germany...no more spelt the defeat of her ideals than the defeat of revolutionary and Napoleonic France by the European coalition...”²⁵ In spite of Kaiser Wilhelm’s utter defeat, the ideal of Socialism went across, just as in the case of Napoleon who went out against the principle of democracy and conquered other countries but his conquests were used effectively by Nature to spread the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. Just as Sri Aurobindo looks at the positive side and does not give importance to the negative aspect of Napoleon’s rule, even so he does appreciate the

attempt that Germany made and sees a deeper meaning even in her subsequent downfall!

In fact, historically speaking, it was the end of World War I that had brought in the consciousness of a cooperation amongst nations. About the League of Nations, Jean Monnet, the Deputy to the League of Nations Secretary General Sir Eric Drummond, had commented: "Certainly, the organisation which was set up, and which without major changes went on working in Geneva until 1939, did not always have the strength of its intentions.... To me it represented considerable progress, because through it we were beginning to change the relations between peoples..."²⁶ Unfortunately, the League of Nations did not succeed for it was still being governed by nation-ego, the pride of domination and the desire of expansion. It was for economic and political reasons, and not for a federation of free nations, that some of the powerful nations had come together. Obviously, with this greed of consumerism in the human consciousness, a true form of world unity cannot be worked out and the League of Nations was bound to be a failure. "It is idle to hope for a federation of free nations until either the present inequalities between nation and nation are removed or else the whole world rises to a common culture based upon a higher moral and spiritual status than is now actual or possible"²⁷ wrote Sri Aurobindo.

Paradoxically Hitler too in his defeat offered to humanity something much more positive than in his success. It is true that when World War I was over nobody wanted a war again, but what was the guarantee? To ensure such a no-war situation the idea was to establish an International Law and an International Court of Justice. But if these institutions made any decisions they would have to be carried out by a group of nations. If there is no group of nations any "...solution is chimerical.... For the law given by the Court must be enforced either by an alliance of some of the stronger Powers as, for instance, the coalition of the victorious allies dominating the rest of Europe, or by a concert of all the European Powers or else by a United States of Europe or some other form of European federation."²⁸

This is how Sri Aurobindo looks at history: it is not so important to go into the individual achievements of kings and queens or the presidents and prime ministers of any country, however important they may have been in themselves. It is the evolution of the Divine consciousness or the devolution of the Divine force that needs to be focused upon. It is of utmost importance to see the Divine nirus in evolution; all else is of secondary importance for him.

Seen from a different angle, we note that every country has been given a destined role by Providence and this destined role is for a specific period of time in history; it does not last for all times to come. What is happening today in the USA can be taken as one such example: this country is bringing forth rank commercialism and utilitarianism which are also a part of human consciousness that have to be worked out in the manifestation to its fullness. Similarly, England was given another kind of role—namely, to spread in all the countries, wherever it was needed, the ideal of

individualism through materialism. It was a necessary step when Nature wanted to usher in the Individualistic age by breaking down the ramparts of conventionalism which were there for millennia in the Far East. England, amongst other countries, was used by Nature to break the slumber of India and many other eastern countries.

Similarly, it was perhaps Germany's role to offer to the world through altered circumstances and war something new to the world. As writes Sri Aurobindo: "The appearance of Hitler and the colossal attempt at German world-domination have paradoxically helped by his defeat, and the reaction against him entirely altered the world circumstances: the United States of Europe is now a practical possibility and has begun to feel towards self-accomplishment."²⁹

What he had foreseen in 1916–1918 has now become a practical reality in the form of the European Union which took all this time to be formed because it had to go through several stages of formation. In 1957 there was the Treaty of Rome bearing witness to the European Economic Community; in 1972 there was the creation of the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice; and ultimately in 1991, the members of the European Community met at Maastricht (The Netherlands) and finalised the Treaty of European Union. The step is in the right direction and "through this and other steps some form of political unity for mankind may at a more or less distant date be realisable."³⁰

We have now arrived at the creation of the United States of Europe or the European Union and that gives us the right to hope and to believe that ultimately the third dream of Sri Aurobindo will be realised. However, what remains to be seen in the coming decades is if what Sri Aurobindo has foreseen as the dangers of such unions based on continents,—be it in Europe or in Asia,—will they become true or will they be subverted by higher will of mankind and Providence. He had warned that,

...continental groupings replacing the present smaller national unities might well be an advance towards the final union of all mankind, yet their realisation would mean cataclysms of a kind and scope which would dwarf the present catastrophe and in which the hopes of mankind might founder and fatally collapse rather than progress nearer to fulfilment.³¹

It is very rare that we find such warnings in Sri Aurobindo but here he seems to suggest that these types of continental groupings might end up in a greater cataclysm than what we have had even in World War II! On one side he sees that these groupings are a natural movement of evolution towards world unity but on the other side he sees the dangers of such continental groupings, because if they become hardened realities, they would then be standing in the way of a world unity. He writes:

But the chief objection to the idea of a United States of Europe is that the general

sense of humanity is already seeking to travel beyond its continental distinctions and make them subordinate to a larger human idea. A division on the continental basis might therefore be from this point of view a reactionary step of the gravest kind and might be attended with the most serious consequences to human progress.³²

In the light of this warning we have to pay attention to a similar situation in Auroville's development of the International Zone. To form clusters of pavilions based on continental groups may be completely detrimental to the vision of Auroville and it may not serve the purpose of bringing in a sense and experience of human unity, which is, as understood by all, the central aim and objective of Auroville. Maybe a right grouping of nations based on the psychological proximity of the nation-souls in the International Zone would itself correct the tendencies in the world at large and it could contribute to avoiding the 'cataclysms' that Sri Aurobindo hints at in his warning.

Sri Aurobindo sees a great threat in such movements as the continental unions based more on commonness of culture and economic interests because when the nation-egos had hardened and had become an obstacle to the next step in evolution, namely, the sense of human unity, Nature had to bring in the World Wars to break their resistance. But in future if there are the continental groupings with their gargantuan egos we can very well imagine the nature of catastrophes needed to break the colossal continental egos! That would be cataclysmic and mankind may fatally collapse and man may never achieve what Nature wanted to achieve through mankind!

The only way out of this disastrous situation is that mankind in general turns to a psychological fraternity or a oneness based on spirituality. Therefore, there is an urgency to work towards a brotherhood that exists by the soul and for the soul. "Could such a realisation develop rapidly in mankind, we might then solve the problem of unification in a deeper and truer way.... Until then, the attempt to bring it about by mechanical means must proceed. But the higher hope of humanity lies in the growing number of men who will realise this truth and seek to develop it in themselves, so that when the mind of man is ready to escape from its mechanical bent,—perhaps when it finds that its mechanical solutions are all temporary and disappointing,—the truth of the Spirit may step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible happiness and perfection."³³

To expect such a change in the world in the near future would, I suppose, be naive. It may take a very long time to see this change in the life of humanity. Seeing the present consciousness of man, which is passing through tiers of disruption, a kind of *pralaya*, it seems centuries of work needs to be done in the elevation of human consciousness. However, there is the saving grace of the supramental consciousness which I believe will hasten the work.

In any case, the third and the fourth dreams of Sri Aurobindo are much

interrelated. That is what we understand going by what the Mother said:

India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of modern mankind.

India will be the land of its resurrection—the resurrection to a higher and truer life.³⁴

And further:

India is the Guru of the world. The future structure of the world depends on India.³⁵

And again:

India must be saved for the good of the world since India alone can lead the world to peace and a new world order.³⁶

And also linked with the fourth is his fifth dream which speaks of

...a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness.... Here too, if this evolution is to take place... the initiative can come from India and, although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.³⁷

With such a mission and such an evolutionary responsibility on herself, how much is India fulfilling her role in the present times? Apparently we seem to have gone beyond any rectification and yet, in spite of the depressing situation in our country, somewhere she seems to be coming out of her age-old inertia, her sterility in mind, on a deeper level, her benumbed original thinking power. She seems to have reached a different level of consciousness in spite of her selfish leaders and we begin to see what the Mother had declared in her prophetic vision:

The future of India is luminous in spite of its present gloom.³⁸

This message of the Mother gives us all a hope of India's future and hence the glorious future of the world and the assurance that Sri Aurobindo's dreams shall be fulfilled, not in 'God's transfiguring hour', but much more by what the twin incarnations and harbingers of the supramental consciousness and force, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, have done through their own *tapasya*! Did not Sri Aurobindo himself tell us: "When an Avatar comes, he comes to fulfil a certain purpose"?³⁹ And did he not affirm: "I have never had a strong and persistent will for anything to happen in the world—I

am not speaking of personal things—which did not eventually happen even after delay, defeat or even disaster.”⁴⁰

“My faith and will are for the now.”⁴¹

ANANDA REDDY

Notes and References

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 406.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 405.
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5. The Mother, *Collected Works of the Mother (CWM)*, Volume 13, Birth Centenary Edition, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1980, p. 368.
6. *CWM*, Vol. 8, p. 31.
7. A. B. Purani, *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Third Edition, Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry, 1982, p. 18.
8. *SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 405.
9. *CWM*, Vol. 13, p. 373.
10. *SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 405. A message from Sri Aurobindo sent to *Mother India* in March 1949: “I don’t want Pakistan to endure, made perfectly clear. Division must go—does not mean that division must be allowed to last in some form or other. Continued partition of India into two Federations one Hindu and one Muslim even if somehow connected together is no part of my idea of the Union of India.”—(*Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2006, p. 514)
11. *Ibid.*, p. 404.
12. Pavan K. Varma, *Being Indian: The Truth About Why the Twenty-First Century Will be India’s*, Penguin Books India, Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 3, 1.
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15. *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, no. 33, p. 8, quoted by Georges Van Vrekhem, *Beyond Man*, Harper Collins Publishers, India, p. 249.
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18. Christine Devin, *Uniting Men: Jean Monnet*, Auroville Press Publishers, Auroville, 2006, pp. 45–46.
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24. *SABCL*, Vol. 15, p. 327.
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27. *SABCL*, Vol. 15, p. 329.
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29. *Ibid.*, p. 329 (Footnote).
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31. *Ibid.*, p. 331.
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34. *CWM*, Vol. 13, p. 376.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 361.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 406.
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39. *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, no. 35, p. 19.
40. *SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 169.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

The first of these dreams was a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India. India today is free but she has not achieved unity. At one moment it almost seemed as if in the very act of liberation she would fall back into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. But fortunately it now seems probable that this danger will be averted and a large and powerful, though not yet a complete union will be established. Also, the wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly has made it probable that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure.

Sri Aurobindo

THE UNIFICATION OF MANKIND: SELF-DETERMINATION HOLDS THE KEY

I

In his 1947 Independence Day message to the Indian nation, Sri Aurobindo had spoken of his five dreams, one of which dealt with the question of the unification of mankind.¹ In this essay, I wish to reflect on the importance of this vision of Sri Aurobindo in the context of the present international order. I shall suggest that while there is an overwhelming consensus today regarding the relevance of a world vision, there is lack of clarity in the international institutions, including the United Nations, as to how best this ideal could be realised in practical terms.

Thus while the Pax Americana sees the clash of civilisations² as inevitable and attempts to impose its own version of democracy in different parts of the world, others suggest a more peaceful approach to international relations. While cultural and economic globalisation have managed to bring the world together, it has also brought, in its wake, many dissonances in politics and culture.³ Using Sri Aurobindo's insights, I shall indicate that nationalities and cultures of the world can come together and be united on a permanent basis only if they were founded on deeper psychological and spiritual principles. It is not the imposition of a common ideal but diversity in approach based on the principle of *self-determination* that could be the answer to the problem of international order today.

II

The Nation-State seems to represent the highest collective experiment of the political kind. It is based on territorial imagination and sovereignty. It seeks legitimacy by the invocation of common linguistic and cultural history.⁴ And yet, the clash between the modern Nation-State and its constituents seems to be a disturbing aspect of international life today. While the nation demands its own collective self-image based on commonality in terms of self-image, paradoxically enough, many nations currently face the problem of secessionism based on group aspiration for a greater diversity. Identity politics in the modern democracies tends to divide groups of people on the basis of race, caste, gender and ethnicity. It is here that some of the insights of Sri Aurobindo could help us formulate a better answer to the vexing problem of relating the parts to the whole.

Sri Aurobindo's book *War and Self Determination*,⁵ first published in 1920, originally appeared in the philosophical journal *Arya* between 1916-1920. The 1920 edition had the following chapters: "The Passing of War", "The Unseen Power" and "Self-Determination" along with a foreword.

Of all the chapters in this important but somewhat neglected volume, it is the

chapter “Self-Determination” that should draw our attention. Written at the end of World War I, it refers to the sanguine experience that the world had recently gone through. The conflagration led to the birth of the League of Nations. But Sri Aurobindo was clear that the principle the League was based upon was a flawed one. This limitation and the racial bias were evident in the objections raised in many Asiatic countries, especially Japan after World War I. Paul Richard, then on a tour of Japan in the company of the Mother, had focused on this aspect in his book *The Dawn over Asia*⁶ which was translated into English by Sri Aurobindo. A petition was also sent by a Japan based association to the American President Woodrow Wilson.⁷ But it was of no avail. It is in this context that the “Self-Determination” chapter gains significance.

Sri Aurobindo in this chapter begins by saying that the right of self-determination is unfortunately made “into a jargon, so that men may fight in a cloud of words without any clear sense of the thing they are battling for,—it is the luminous description of liberty as the just power, the freely exercised right of self-determination.” (p. 834) Next, while liberty is at the heart of self-determination, freedom and democracy are also victims of a plutocratic system or a rule of an organised bourgeoisie.

What then is self-determination? Sri Aurobindo’s definition is masterly and insightful:

The principle of self-determination really means this that within every living human creature, man, woman and child, and equally within every distinct human collectivity growing or grown, half developed or adult 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. This is the first principle which must contain and overtop all others; the rest is a question of conditions, means, expedients, accommodations, opportunities, capacities, limitations, none of which must be allowed to abrogate the sovereignty of the first essential principle. But it can only prevail if it is understood with a right idea of this Self and its needs and claims. (838-39)

Sri Aurobindo offers here a caveat of caution. His warning is clear and forthright:

The first danger to the principle of self-determination, as to all others, is that it may be interpreted, like most of the ideals of our human existence in the past, in the light of the ego, its interests and its will towards self-satisfaction. So interpreted it will carry us no farther than before; we shall arrive at a point where our principle is brought up short, fails us, turns into a false or a half-true assertion of the mind and a convention of form which covers realities that are quite the opposite of itself. (839)

Self-determination, viewed from this angle, takes us to a concept of man not as a physical, mental and emotional being, but primarily as a spiritual one, that at the deepest core of the human self, there is a soul or psychic being. Therefore it is at the more subtle psychological or spiritual plane that true affiliation with our fellow beings can be established. The discovery of the soul factor can be the only true basis for lasting union among men.

Just as among men, so also among nations and collectivities, self-determination can play the role for unification among men. Today, nation-states, internally and externally, are divided by language, politics, economics, race and ethnicity. International relations are the arena of conflict among nations rather than a field to bring nations and people together. That is because, as Sri Aurobindo argues, nations tend to base their identities as collective egoisms rather than seeking mutual alliances in consonance with more harmonious principles. The various regional or continental formations such as the Organisation of American States (OAS), Organisation of African Union (OAU), the European Union (EU), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) or South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) are important developments in the direction of greater harmony and cooperation in political, economic and cultural terms. That is clearly the direction in which the world must move in order to avoid the scourge of poverty, war and pestilence. Such alliances can be long lasting only if they are based on equality and reciprocity.

As Sri Aurobindo concludes prophetically:

The recognition and fulfilment of the divine being in oneself and in man, the kingdom of God within and in the race is the basis on which man must come in the end to the possession of himself as a free self-determining being and of mankind too in a mutually possessing self-expansion as a harmoniously self-determining united existence. (847)

Today mankind is moving in the direction of a greater unification, despite many contrary trends. It is by recognising the principle of diversity and self-determination, built on spiritual foundations, that we can help realise the Independence Day message of Sri Aurobindo.

SACHIDANANDA MOHANTY

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3. The annual Davos meet of developed nations also leads to the holding of the World Social Forum as a counter to economic globalisation.

4. This has been largely the European experience in nation building. In the East, however, nations and nation-states have been far more heterogeneous.

5. See *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity and War and Self-Determination* by Sri Aurobindo, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1962. All references to *War and Self-Determination* pertain to this edition and are parenthetically given in the text.

6. See *The Dawn over Asia* by Paul Richard, translated from the French by Aurobindo Ghose, Madras: Ganesh and Co., Publishers, 1920.

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But the old communal division into Hindus and Muslims seems now to have hardened into a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that this settled fact will not be accepted as settled for ever or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. India's internal development and prosperity may be impeded, her position among the nations weakened, her destiny impaired or even frustrated. This must not be; the partition must go. Let us hope that that may come about naturally, by an increasing recognition of the necessity not only of peace and concord but of common action, by the practice of common action and the creation of means for that purpose. In this way unity may finally come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, in whatever way, the division must go; unity must and will be achieved, for it is necessary for the greatness of India's future.

Sri Aurobindo

THE STATESMANSHIP REQUIRED OF INDIA

WE are entering a time of rapid and unusual external change. This conclusion is evident regardless of the window we peer through. Consider the retail segment in India. From a reality of unorganised vendor activity, plans to add millions of square feet of organised retail outlets are now underway. Protagonists include Indian and global players. Let us consider some of the repercussions of this.

Organised retail will drive up consumer demand. This is inevitable in the short-term. Organised retail also implies the need for organised, predictable business models. A constant source of a diverse array of raw materials will hence need to be readily available. This implies that farms, forests, fisheries, mines, factories, public and technology infrastructure, water-bodies, energy sources, will need to be in a continual state of high output. If accepted financial, economic, and business wisdom is to prevail, such a development will be looked on as wonderful, as India's Gross National Product and growth rate continue to soar, in turn pushing positive growth of the global economy.

The timing of this development—of the pressure on India to become a non-trivial cog in the wheel of global economic activity—is significant.

As several independent environmental studies have indicated, the world is currently in a reality of overshoot. That is, the demand being placed on the earth's resources is exceeding the level of sustainable supply. In other words, nature's capacity to create sustainable crops, fish, livestock, clean water, clean air, is being exceeded. A recent study has indicated that if consumption patterns in India and China equal that of the Western world, two Earths will be required to sustain the supply of needed raw materials.

In and of itself such a development, where increase in demand fuelled by increasing population and far better organised business activity, will likely lead to a reality of heightened competition for fewer fundamental resources such as clean water. When fundamental needs are unavailable, pressure for survival can cause regions to act irrationally, seeking quickest and most aggressive solutions, even beyond the realm of pure commercial plays, as a palliative. Likelihood of regional instability will therefore increase.

As several studies on availability of energy have indicated, as a global economy we have likely already or are close to peaking in production of oil. Some estimates indicate that within 10 years the availability of oil will be drastically reduced. Given that our economy is primarily oil-based, this is significant. Energy infrastructure for cities, transport, and industry will need to be redesigned and redeployed. Yet, today we hardly act as though oil depletion is imminent. The shock from shortage of oil by itself will alter the rules of our game. The way of life that we have become used to will be severely challenged, and again, the likelihood that this will engender irrational regional reaction will be increased.

Ethanol and bio-diesel is being seen by the US and EU as a viable alternative to oil. If this route is seriously pursued pressure on the land and agriculture for crops as input into ethanol production will become overwhelming. This will trigger massive increases in price of food, which again, in and of itself, will become the grounds for increasing regional instability.

All this presupposes that global business and economic activity proceeds in the same manner as it has for the last few decades. The timing of India's entry into the global economic game is hence very significant, since being an important player at the margin, with the addition of 300 to 400 million people to the global economic game, its policies and its way of being will make a big difference in how future business and economic activity is pursued. If India proceeds along a paradigm of business-as-usual, the conclusions are foregone and regional and international instability will likely be severely heightened. If, on the other hand, India changes the rules of the game, a very different and likely far more sustainable shorter-term reality for humanity will result.

Severe resource shortage and competition, radical change in energy infrastructure, increases in global food prices are very possible outcomes over the 10-15 year horizon. But here and now, the effects of the excessive burning of fossil-fuels are already increasingly being felt in the tangible phenomenon of climate change. Rising temperatures due to the increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere result in changing weather patterns and the shifting of living ecosystems to cooler climates. In turn this decreases the earth's bio-capability—its ability to create natural capital.

Rising temperatures also result in the melting of polar icecaps, the rising of sea-levels, and the creation of powerful storm-systems. Melting of the icecaps will release a large amount of fresh water into the oceans, which will presumably affect the salinity and hence the flow of major global water-currents such as the Gulf Stream on which the temperatures of Europe are dependent. This in turn could cause a major drop in the temperature of Northern Europe resulting in the altering of entire ecosystems and hence economies at the local level. The rise of sea-levels threatens coastal regions, and can result in the submergence of ports critical to the functioning of the global economy. The wrath of Katrina has already been experienced. Multiply this force and occurrence by an unknown factor and the reality of unpredictable, uncontrollable coastal and in-land devastation, forced migration adding or accelerating to the social instability in increasingly populated areas, increased disease due to debilitated and overburdened sanitation systems, can become overwhelming.

Increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere also results in an increase in carbon dioxide in the oceans, which in turn become more acidic. This will alter the existing chemical balance of the waters affecting the formation of plankton. Lying at the bottom of the food-chain, any threat to the existence of this organism will severely threaten aquatic life and all else that is dependent on aquatic life.

Other immediate effects due to the business-as-usual paradigm are being felt in

the increasing toxicity of earth's natural systems due also to our habit of polluting the air, water, and land with non-biodegradable and often poisonous materials. The very basis of the matter from which we are made is being attacked by actions emanating from our own shortsightedness. That matter streams into us in the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, and the foods that we eat. Unable to process the poisons, our cells become overloaded and acidic. Our immunity falls, and diseases more easily appear in us. Thus the toxicity of the world incarnates as the toxicity in our bodies.

This toxicity is twofold—physical and psychological. The bite of chocolate from Ghana seems to do a lot more than fulfil some centres of taste in our tongues. The karma of our way of life is released in it. The often inhuman demands placed on adults and even children laboring to fulfil quotas of supply, the inefficient use of energy and the burning of the earth in transporting that raw material to where it can be further manufactured into slabs of chocolate wrapped in the allurements of advertisement and exorbitant profit margins, to finally fulfil the desire which is in itself so insignificant, releases in the human body and likely further confuses those incredible servers, the cells, with burdened messages that overwhelm.

Resource shortage, energy insecurity, instability of food supply, climate change, possible disruption of an eons-old food chain, accelerating toxicity of earth's natural and human systems requires a whole different approach to being solved. It is not enough that isolated local action takes place. One has to think globally, and act globally, through concerted local action. This requires a higher degree of impersonality than has ever been demanded of the human race. To act in a locality with the expectation that local conditions will change as a result is no longer necessarily true. Water, wind, weather have a way of quickly transcending boundaries to act at distances far removed from local sites of action. Hence, coordinated action on several scales will need to occur simultaneously. Local action will need to be part of a coordinated regional programme. This in turn will need to be part of a coordinated national programme, which in turn will need to be part of a coordinated international programme.

Perhaps disasters like the Tsunami have somewhat prepared the mind of humanity to act in such a manner. Avoidance of the problems of resource shortage, energy insecurity, instability of food supply, possible disruption of an eons-old food chain, accelerating toxicity, and climate change will require a much wider scale of similar coordinated action. We have begun to confront the results born of the limits of our way of being, and it is only in moving beyond these limits that we will be able to successfully alter the existing and increasingly threatening conditions that affront us. Failure to step up to the different way of operating, on the other hand, will likely create conditions of pervasive instability that in a manner of speaking will be earth's way of both protecting itself, and assuring that the offending protagonists' ability to continue to do harm is limited.

If we are utterly unable to step up to the challenge before us, it is those areas of the world which are most dependent on the current global business model—oil-based infrastructure, consumption of excessive resources, highly concentrated urban dwelling—that will be most affected. The places where comparative simplicity and reliance on sustainable sources of energy and materials is already existent will be relatively less affected. If, on the other hand, we are able to step up to the challenge of global thinking and global action through concerted local action, the question as to the motive behind our action still remains. If the motive is that of continued business development and the creation of profits in new ways, as a species we will still not have stepped out of the paradigm of desire, albeit we will have been able to change something of our thought, and the question as to how much longer forward-moving nature will allow us to continue in such a stance remains. For action born of personal desire will continue to yield a karma that will knock at and destroy the systems and structures we create for ourselves.

Before deciding on a course of action, the Indian Statesman must also consider the quickly changing global political realities.

Consider the US. On the one hand there is the development of a progressive, liberal, earth-loving kind. On the other hand, the rise of the white, Christian neo-conservative who would have all the nations of the world become democracies *à-la*-USA today—even with some forceful help from it. Who will hold the reigns of power over the next ten years, when the environmental and climate change window of action seems to be most critical? And for how much longer will the US use its vitality to wage a war in the Middle East? Even if its action there is fully warranted, and this is questionable, there is still a real trade-off taking place. While it depletes its men, good-will, and continues to focus on the mentality of yesteryear, other nations arise in new incarnations. China is grasping more economic control in the East, and in Africa fortifying its field of resources, to continue to feed the fires that keep its economic engine in overdrive, while Russia taps into local oil-fields to perhaps increasingly transfer control of the global energy industry to a new set of aligned players. In what way are these incarnations going to be nobler than the USA? There is no guarantee that under the pressure of economic development and the temptation of increasing power that they will be. And if not, then have we entered into a situation where international instability and perhaps even conflict will increase rather than decrease?

Consider more deeply the development of the large red dragon—China. For centuries it tempered instincts of national diversity to continue to reinforce its conception as a large unified, autocratic empire. Today though, fundamental forces that challenge it at its base are being thrown into the mix. Rapid economic development is beginning to distribute wealth across social segments. The use of the Internet is allowing an unusual taste of freedom, association, and organisation to be experienced amongst many in China. China has emerged as a global power to be reckoned with

on the economic front. At the same time global human rights watch groups and developed nations reprimand China on the social abuses that continue to take place under its aegis. Will that pressure have any effect on China's national and international policy given that it wants to be considered as a serious global leader in the 21st century? How will the mix of all these developments play out? Will these give birth to centrifugal forces that split the dragon into smaller pieces? Will a fundamentally communist nation separate out from selective populations seeking a more liberal thrust? And if so, how will control of the now \$1 trillion and growing foreign reserves be distributed? How will such funds be used? And if it is a rich and fundamentalist power that emerges as a result, then what is the effect of that on neighbouring nations and the world?

Not that any of this will certainly happen. It is not, however, out of the realm of possibility. And therefore, the demand that it places on any self-respecting nation, especially in the Asian region, is non-trivial.

So what is the Indian Statesman to do? There is an intricate balance to be worked out. On the one hand, there is the practical pressure to increase GNP along commonly accepted lines of business-as-usual. Not to increase national economic activity and hence national coffers is to compromise national security, especially at a time when regional instabilities could be ignited in one of many different ways. On the other hand, the hurtling forward along existing lines of business-as-usual will expedite the environmental and climate challenges discussed and create a more apparent urgency around the need for another equation with earth's systems of natural capital. It is inevitable that there will be directional change in the earth's global economy such that reliance and the augmenting of rather than the depletion of earth's natural capital must become the *modus operandi*. And given the potential shift in global power, India will be wise to proactively innovate along lines that allow the development of a symbiotic relationship between manufacturing process, product, business action, community development with earth's systems of natural capital to come into existence, to thereby fortify its own power. A shift in the rules of business-as-usual such that there is a thrust to develop in balance with earth's systems of natural capital is the demand of the hour. The nations that are able to lead in this shift will likely become the living centres of global developmental activity correspondingly gaining access to a vaster source of more sustainable wealth.

At the same time the Statesman must never forget the apparent wisdom in the criticality of the hour, as has manifested or will manifest in the challenges of resource shortage, energy insecurity, instability in food supply, possible disruption of an eons-old food chain, increasing global toxicity, and last but not least climate change. In the solving of these global problems is a sign that humanity must become one. For practical thought that promotes the reality of global interconnectedness, and multi-levelled international coordination are the master strokes required to address these challenges. It is perhaps these devices, as opposed to that of the conquering and aggressive army, which might herald the dawn of greater human solidarity. For the

first time perhaps, a vital need for international unity is being thrust upon the human race. And as with any need that is vital in nature, the effect it will have on the creation of a corresponding psychological reality, in this case to do with that of human unity, gets expedited.

The Indian Statesman hence stands at a unique window in time. Change in the economic direction, power, and way of being of the subcontinent, by virtue of its position at a critical margin, will unlock positive pathways by which future global development takes place. Grasping the high road will stabilise development of the world, strengthen the dynamics by which human unity might be more successfully worked out, and ensure that humanity maintains its place in the march of life, thereby also fortifying India's position as a just regional and global power.

PRAVIR MALIK

Another dream was for the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilisation. Asia has arisen; large parts are now quite free or are at this moment being liberated: its other still subject or partly subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done and that will be done today or tomorrow. There India has her part to play and has begun to play it with an energy and ability which already indicate the measure of her possibilities and the place she can take in the council of the nations.

Sri Aurobindo

THE FUTURE OF INDIA

“The sun of India’s destiny would rise and fill all India with its light and overflow India and overflow Asia and overflow the world. Every hour, every moment could only bring them nearer to the brightness of the day that God had decreed.”¹

FEW would have felt the truth and the inevitability behind this utterance at the time when, almost a hundred years ago, it was uttered by Sri Aurobindo during a Swadeshi meeting held at Beadon Square, Calcutta, on 13-06-1909. Even today when we are on the threshold of an era which will witness an increasing fulfilment of this divine decree in the coming decades, few may be able to see the inevitability or understand the deeper import of Sri Aurobindo’s vision of India’s future. Although an increasing number of people, both in India and outside, are beginning to realise the inevitability of India’s forthcoming resurgence, their vision is mostly limited to economic resurgence. They are eager to see India join the league of the developed industrialised countries of the world and be like them except for some cultural differences—a thing of minor significance for an economic creature. Although most such people are conscious of (and even troubled by) the present degenerate moral state and the resulting condition of our government and society, they have no perception of the deeper causes underlying it and do not seem to realise that it is impossible to found any sound economic state on such a base. In fact, an economic resurgence, such as the one envisioned by our present intellectual, political, business and professional leaders—the so-called “Macaulay’s Children”^{*} who have undergone such a thoroughly Western system of education that they are Indians only in blood and colour^{**} and have become in their surface nature—but not in their inner being and nature (the real basis of India’s forthcoming resurgence)—entirely Western in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect—will lead us to a state even worse than the present state. The whole scenario on this front is very dismal. But even so, encouraging signs are not missing. An increasing number of discerning people, around the world, are beginning to realise that the present hedonistic material culture which is increasingly leading humanity towards a widespread moral and ecological disaster can no longer be sustained by the present human capacity without an inner change. The root cause of our problems are the inner constraints on our vision and values and yet we contemplate changing almost anything on this earth except ourselves. A change in ourselves—an inner change—can be brought about only by the development of that

* On 10-12-1836 Lord Macaulay wrote to his father claiming that if the course of education in India continued on the lines designed by him, there will not be a single Hindu left in Bengal after 30 years, all would either become Christians or would remain Hindu only in name. They would not have any faith in the Veda or in their religion. Macaulay’s system of education continued even after Independence and has been growing stronger and more pervasive ever since.

** François Gautier, *India’s Self-Denial*, p. 43.

... which society has most neglected, the spiritual element, the soul in man which is his true being. Even to have a healthy body, a strong vitality and an active and clarified mind and a field for their action and enjoyment, carries man no more than a certain distance; afterwards he flags and tires for want of a real self-finding, a satisfying aim for his action and progress. These three things do not make the sum of a complete manhood; they are means to an ulterior end and cannot be made for ever an aim in themselves. Add a rich emotional life governed by a well-ordered ethical standard, and still there is the savour of something left out, some supreme good which these things mean, but do not in themselves arrive at, do not discover till they go beyond themselves. Add a religious system and a wide-spread spirit of belief and piety, and still you have not found the means of social salvation. All these things human society has developed, but none of them has saved it from disillusionment, weariness and decay.²

We firmly believe that now, under the crushing pressure of a looming moral and ecological disaster, the conditions are going to be increasingly ripe to lead humanity—specially India—to undertake a fundamental re-evaluation of the value of Science and the modern gospel of Economic Growth for its true fulfilment. The lead in the direction of this inner change is going to be provided by India because, as the Mother declared,

India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of modern mankind.

India will be the land of its resurrection—the resurrection to a higher and truer life.³

India has always laid the utmost stress on the soul or the spiritual element in men but this stress has never been exclusive but only the most important element in the integral fulfilment of the being.

The ancient Indian culture attached quite as much value to the soundness, growth and strength of the mind, life and body as the old Hellenic or the modern scientific thought, although for a different end and a greater motive. Therefore to everything that serves and belongs to the healthy fullness of these things, it gave free play, to the activity of the reason, to science and philosophy, to the satisfaction of the aesthetic being and to all the many arts great or small, to the health and strength of the body, to the physical and economical well-being, ease, opulence of the race,—there was never a national ideal of poverty in India as some would have us believe, nor was bareness or squalor the essential setting of her spirituality,—and to its general military, political and social strength and efficiency. Their aim was high, but firm and wide too was the base they sought to establish and

great the care bestowed on these first instruments.⁴

Even after undergoing a yoke of more than six hundred years of foreign rule* India was even materially the most developed country until the mid 1800's. Samuel Huntington of Harvard University writes that in 1750, India had 25 per cent of the world's manufacturing output while Europe and America combined had less than 18 percent. But by 1900, after a hundred years of British rule, India's manufacturing output had collapsed to less than 2 percent whereas America and the West combined had 84 percent of the world's share. He writes:

The Industrial revolution of the West was done at the expense of deindustrialisation of the colonies.⁵

During the first 82 years of British rule more than 30 million Indians (more than 10 percent of the total population) died of starvation. During the same period the export of wheat and rice from India to Great Britain increased by about 25 times. Still we did not perish because,

India cannot perish, our race cannot become extinct, because among all the divisions of mankind it is to India that is reserved the highest and the most splendid destiny, the most essential to the future of the human race. It is she who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal Religion which is to harmonise all religion, science and philosophies and make mankind one soul.⁶

Even in the face of such cruel physical subjugation, the achievement of the Indian culture on the planes of mind and spirit has been so colossal that in spite of the highly motivated attempts of the Western intellectuals, educationists and missionaries who have been trying very hard to undermine Indian religion and culture, it has not only survived but even thrived and has been increasingly penetrating and winning hearts and minds in the West. The same thing is beginning to happen among the modern educated elite in India as was foreseen by Sri Aurobindo at the beginning of the last century when he wrote:

A revival of Hindu intellectual faith in the totality of the spiritual aspects of our religion, whether Vedic, Vedantic, Tantric or Puranic, I believe to be an inevitable movement of the near future.⁷

* How destructive this period was can be guessed from the fact that even before the coming of the Mughals (in the 16th century)—who had their own stock of horrors and killings—more than 800 million Hindus—according to some estimates—had been killed by foreign invaders and rulers.

Although India's strong economic resurgence has practically become apparent only since the beginning of this century, the spiritual gift of India to the world—the fourth dream of Sri Aurobindo*—had begun even before India's freedom in 1947 and has been growing ever since. Indian religious and spiritual literature has been translated in almost all the important languages of the world and is having its profound impact in moulding the psychology of the modern man. For as Sri Aurobindo declared,

India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples. And that which must seek now to awake is not an anglicised oriental people, docile pupil of the West and doomed to repeat the cycle of the Occident's success and failure, but still the ancient immemorable Shakti recovering her deepest self, lifting her head higher towards the supreme source of light and strength and turning to discover the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma.⁸

The Secret of the Great Tenacity and Invincibility of Indian Culture

The Hindu has been always decried as a dreamer & mystic. There is truth in the charge but also a singular inaccuracy. The Hindu mind is in one sense the most concrete in the world; it seeks after abstractions, but is not satisfied with them so long as they remain abstractions. But to make the objects of this world concrete, to realise the things that are visited by sun & rain or are, at their most ethereal, sublimated figures of fine matter, that is comparatively easy, but the Hindu is not contented till he has seized things *behind* the sunlight also as concrete realities. He is passionate for the infinite, the unseen, the spiritual, but he will not rest satisfied with conceiving them, he insists on mapping the infinite, on seeing the unseen, on visualising the spiritual. The Celt throws his imagination into the infinite and is rewarded with beautiful phantoms out of which he evolves a pale, mystic and intangible poetry; the Hindu sends his heart & his intellect & eventually his whole being after his imagination and for his reward he has seen God and interpreted existence. It is this double aspect of Hindu temperament, extreme spirituality successfully attempting to work in harmony with extreme materialism, which is the secret of our religion, our life & our literature, our civilisation. On the one side we spiritualise the material out of all but a phenomenal & illusory existence, on the other we materialise the spiritual in the most definite & realistic forms; this is the secret of the high philosophic idealism which to the less capable European mind seems so impossible an intellectual atmosphere and of the prolific idolatry which to the dogmatic & formalising Christian reason seems so gross. In any other race-temperament this mental

* *SABCL*, Vol. 26, p. 406.

division would have split into two broadly disparate & opposing types whose action, reaction & attempts at compromise would have comprised the history of thought. In the myriad minded & undogmatic Hindu it worked not towards mental division but as the first discord which prepares for a consistent harmony; the best & most characteristic Hindu thought regards either tendency as essential to the perfect & subtle comprehension of existence; they are considered the positive & negative sides of one truth, & must both be grasped if we are not to rest in a half light. Hence the entire tolerance of the Hindu religion to all intellectual attitudes except sheer libertinism; hence also the marvellous perfection of graded thought-attitudes in which the Hindu mind travels between the sheer negative & the sheer positive and yet sees in them only a ladder of progressive & closely related steps rising through relative conceptions to one final & absolute knowledge.⁹

* * *

Let us suppose that all historical documents, archives, records were destroyed or disappeared in the process of Time and the catastrophes of civilisation, and only the pure literature survived. Of how many nations should we have the very life, heart and mind, the whole picture of its life and civilisation and the history of its development adequately revealed in its best writing? Three European nations would survive immortally before the eyes of posterity, the ancient Greeks, the modern English and French, and two Asiatic nations, the Chinese and the Hindus,—no others.

Of all these the Hindus have revealed themselves the most perfectly, continuously and on the most colossal scale, precisely because they have been the most indomitably original in the form and matter of their literature. The Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas are unique in their kind; the great Epics in their form and type of art stand apart in the epic literature of the world, the old Sanskrit drama has its affinities with a dramatic species which developed itself in Europe more than a thousand years later, and the literary epic follows laws of form and canons of art which are purely indigenous. And this immense body of first-rate work has left us so intimate and complete a revelation of national life and history, that the absence of pure historical writings becomes a subject of merely conventional regret. The same intense originality and depth of self-expression are continued after the decline of the classical language in the national literatures of Maharashtra, Bengal and the Hindi-speaking North.¹⁰

* * *

Everything that has phenomenal existence, takes its stand on the Eternal and

has reality only as a reflection in the pure mirror of His infinite existence. This is no less true of the affections of mind and heart and the formations of thought than of the affections of matter and the formations of the physical ether-stuff out of which this material Universe is made. Every ethical ideal and every religious ideal must therefore depend for its truth and permanence on its philosophical foundation; in other words, on the closeness of its fundamental idea to the ultimate truth of the Eternal. If the ideal implies a reading of the Eternal which is only distantly true and confuses Him with His physical or psychical manifestations in this world, then it is a relatively false and impermanent ideal. Of all the ancient nations the Hindus, for this reason only, attained to the highest idea and noblest practice of morality. The Greeks confused the Eternal with His physical manifestations and realised Him in them on the side of Beauty; beauty therefore was their only law of morality which governed their civilisation.... The Romans also confused the Eternal with His manifestations in physical nature, but they read Him on the side not of beauty but of force governed by law; the stern and orderly restraint which governs the Universe, was the feature in Nature's economy which ruled their thought.... The Chinese seem to have envisaged the Eternal in a higher aspect than these Mediterranean races; they found Him not in the manifested physical Universe itself, but in its origination and arrangement out of the primal materials from which it arose. Heaven, Akasha or the Eternal in the element of Ether, creates in the womb of Earth or formal Matter which is the final element developed out of Ether, this arranged and orderly Universe;— He is therefore the Father, Originator, Disposer and Arranger. Veneration for parents and those who stand in the place of parents became the governing idea of their ethics; orderly disposition, the nice care of ceremony, manners, duties, the law of their daily life; origination and organisation the main characteristics of their intellectual activity. The permanence and unconquerable vitality of their civilisation is due to their having seized on an interpretation of the Eternal which, though not His ultimate truth to humanity, is at least close to that truth and a large aspect of it. It is really Himself in his relation to the Universe but not the whole of Himself. But the ancient Aryans of India raised the veil completely and saw Him as the universal Transcendent Self of all things who is at the same time the particular present Self in each. They reached His singleness aloof from phenomena, they saw Him in every one of His million manifestations in phenomena, God in Himself, God in man, God in Nature were the "ideas" which their life expressed. Their civilisation was therefore more many-sided and complete and their ethical and intellectual ideals more perfect and permanent than those of any other nation. They had in full measure the sense of filial duty, the careful regulation of ceremony, manners and duties, the characteristics of origination and organisation which distinguished the Chinese. They had in full measure the Roman discipline, courage, purity, faithfulness to duty, careful

conservatism; but these elements of character and culture which in the Roman were hard, cold, narrow and without any touch of the spirit in man or the sense of his divine individuality, the Hindus warmed and softened with emotional and spiritual meaning and made broad and elastic by accepting the supreme importance of the soul's individual life as overriding and governing the firm organisation of morals and society. They were not purely devoted to the worship and culture of beauty like the Greeks and their art was not perfect, yet they had the sense of beauty and art in a greater degree than any other ancient people; unlike the Greeks they had a perfect sense of spiritual beauty and were therefore able to realise the delight and glory of Nature hundreds of years before the sense of it developed in Europe. On the ethical side they had a finer justice than the Greeks, a more noble public decorum, a keener sense of ethical and social balance, but they would not limit the infinite capacities of the soul; they gave play therefore to personal individuality but restrained and ordered its merely lawless ebullitions by the law of the type (caste). In addition to these various elements which they shared with one civilisation or another, they possessed a higher spiritual ideal, which governed and overrode the mere ethics (*mores* or customary morality) which the other nations had developed. Humanity, pity, chivalry, unselfishness, philanthropy, love of and self-sacrifice for all living things, the sense of the divinity in man, the Christian virtues, the modern virtues were fully developed in India at a time when in all the rest of the world they were either non-existent or existent only in the most feeble beginnings. And they were developed because the Aryan Rishis had been able to discover the truth of the Eternal and give to the nation the vision of the Eternal in all things and the feeling of His presence in themselves and in all around them.¹¹

In the light of all this and given the past record of its greatness and glory a seemingly unanswerable question that must inevitably arise in the mind of all thinking Indians is: "why have we suffered so much?"

Why We Suffered So Much

In October 7, 1907 issue of the *Bande Mataram* Sri Aurobindo wrote:

This great and ancient nation was once the fountain of human light, the apex of human civilisation, the exemplar of courage and humanity, the perfection of good Government and settled society, the mother of all religions, the teacher of all wisdom and philosophy. It has suffered much at the hands of inferior civilisations and more savage peoples; it has gone down into the shadow of night and tasted often of the bitterness of death. Its pride has been trampled into the dust and its glory has departed. Hunger and misery and despair have become

the masters of this fair soil, these noble hills, these ancient rivers, these cities whose life story goes back into prehistoric night. But do you think that therefore God has utterly abandoned us and given us up for ever to be a mere convenience for the West, the helots of its commerce, and the feeders of its luxury and pride? We are still God's chosen people and all our calamities have been but a discipline of suffering, because for the great mission before us prosperity was not sufficient, adversity had also its training; to taste the glory of power and beneficence and joy was not sufficient, the knowledge of weakness and torture and humiliation was also needed; it was not enough that we should be able to fill the role of the merciful sage and the beneficent king, we had also to experience in our own persons the feelings of the outcaste and the slave. But now that lesson is learned, and the time for our resurgence is come. And no power shall stay that uprising and no opposing interest shall deny us the right to live, to be ourselves, to set our seal once more upon the world.¹²

Now we are at an hour when this prophetic declaration, which must have seemed like a daydream at the time it was expressed, is on its way to fulfilment.

The Flowering of the True Spirit of Nationalism in India

During the forthcoming resurgence of India, after a millenium of cruel subjugation to a foreign yoke, Indians will witness a growing spirit of nationalism fed by the increasingly glowing achievements of their country and their countrymen around the world in all fields of endeavour. For the first time, after a very difficult millenium, Indians will have something to take pride in and this true pride and, based on it, the growing spirit of nationalism will tend to dissolve all the problems of our collective life which have become so very acute due to a blind and mechanical following of the Western spirit and forms in this field. We all know that the problem has become so critical in the political field that it is threatening the integrity and even the very existence of the country. Love of power, money and progeny has become the common denominator of all the participants in the political arena. The following of the spirit of true—true, because consecrated to the divine as India has always been—nationalism will increasingly transmute all these lower loves into an all-consuming love for the Motherland.

Love has a place in politics, but it is the love for one's country, for one's countrymen, for the glory, greatness and happiness of the race, the divine *ananda* of self-immolation for one's fellows, the ecstasy of relieving their sufferings, the joy of seeing one's blood flow for country and freedom, the bliss of union in death with the fathers of the race. The feeling of almost physical delight in the touch of the mother soil, of the winds that blow from Indian seas, of the rivers

that stream from Indian hills, in the sight of Indian surroundings, Indian men, Indian women, Indian children, in the hearing of Indian speech, music, poetry, in the familiar sights, sounds, habits, dress, manners of our Indian life, this is the physical root of that love. The pride in our past, the pain of our present, the passion for the future are its trunk and branches. Self-sacrifice, self-forgetfulness, great service and high endurance for the country are its fruit. And the sap which keeps it alive is the realisation of the Motherhood of God in the country, the vision of the Mother, the knowledge of the Mother, the perpetual contemplation, adoration and service of the Mother.¹³

And this awakened and strong India will pose no threat to any people within or outside its physical boundaries—for India has never done this anytime in its history. Whenever the divine providence has brought the country into prominence it has used it to serve its purpose in humanity.

The Future

The future of India is very clear. India is the Guru of the world. The future structure of the world depends on India. India is the living soul. India is incarnating the spiritual knowledge in the world.¹⁴

As was willed by Sri Aurobindo, the spiritually awakened India will fulfil his final dream* and enable the terrestrial nature to take

...a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness and begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed him since he first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society. This is still a personal hope and an idea, an ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this evolution is to take place, since it must proceed through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and, although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.¹⁵

ANJANA DHARNIDHARKA
CHANDRA PRAKASH KHETAN

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The third dream was a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind. That unification of the human world is under way; there is an imperfect initiation organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and it must inevitably increase and conquer. Here too India has begun to play a prominent part and, if she can develop that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift development. A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure.

Sri Aurobindo

INDIA AND CHINA—GIANTS OF THE FUTURE

WE are repeatedly told by economic pundits that India and China are likely to be the future economic superpowers of the world, and recently, these two Asiatic giants and neighbours, putting behind their past animosities and conflicts, have been trying to build a close and more friendly relationship. If these positive trends continue, the growing economic might of India and China, coming together, may well herald the Asiatic Millenium. But what next? Is economic prosperity the highest aim of these two great Asiatic nations? They have to do something, much more, for the world than creating wealth. But to understand this higher potential of India and China we have to examine their history and culture in a broader perspective.

The Wisdom-Nations

Nations are living entities of various types with differences in their dominant temperament and genius. There are nations of wealth with a genius for creating economic and material abundance. There are nations of power with a genius for political and military action, organisation and expansion. There are also nations of wisdom with a genius for harvesting and growing light and knowledge, truth and goodness in the soil of the mind and soul of man. China and India belong to the third category of nations. They are the wisdom-nations.

The Indian and Chinese civilisations were well known for their deep, subtle and profound philosophic, ethical and spiritual wisdom which was expressed not only in their thought, literature and religion but also in their art and social organisation. The thinking and creative mind of ancient India and China sought always for a timeless wisdom which transcends the transient needs, interest and desires of the world. As a result, the cultural heritage of India and China contains a treasure house of higher knowledge, which can lead humanity to its highest and lasting well-being and fulfilment.

Now the question is, should the lands of Buddha and Krishna, Lao-tse and Confucius and their immortal wisdom which can redeem the world remain satisfied with a few billion dollars?

This does not mean we are underrating the present economic achievements of India and China or endorsing an ascetic rejection of economic goals. The vexing economic and developmental problems like poverty, unemployment, inequality, malnutrition, growth, illiteracy and population remain still unsolved in India and to a lesser extent in China. They have to learn and master the science, technology and ethics of creating, distributing and using wealth for sustaining the material well-being of their huge and growing population. They are at present engaged in this task and doing it well, especially in creating wealth, though less successfully in distributing wealth. Hopefully, in a not-too-distant future India and China may be able to

find a satisfactory solution to their economic problems and become two of the most prosperous, healthy and literate nations of the world. This is a difficult achievement for large and populous nations like India and China—but not impossible.

However, Asiatic nations, especially China and India which represent the twin powers of the Asiatic genius, should not remain content with economic success only. For the real wealth of India and China is not the wealth of dollars but the wealth of wisdom lying untapped in their ancient cultures. The true genius and mission of India and China lies not in creating hard, material wealth but in manifesting the soft intangible wisdom which can steer the moral, cultural and spiritual progress of humanity.

The Sattwic Civilisations

This brings us to the question: what precisely are the common and distinctive features of the cultural and spiritual genius of India and China?

Among the great civilisations of the world, only India and China cultivated to the highest measure the higher nature in man and made a conscious attempt to build a civilisation based on or governed by this higher self in man. The nature of this higher self is called Jen in Confucian philosophy of China and Sattwa in Indian thought. The Jen in Chinese philosophy is the inner source of all mental, moral and spiritual virtues in man; it is the deeper and inner state of goodness from which flows all higher virtues like light from the Sun.

The Indian concept of Sattwa has a more or less similar connotation. Human nature, according to ancient Indian psychology, is made of three qualities: Tamas, Rajas and Sattwa which can be roughly translated as Inertia, Dynamism and Luminescence. Tamas is the quality of physical nature in man. Inertia, sloth, ignorance and an uncreative, mechanical and tradition-bound routine are the manifestations of Tamas. Rajas is the quality of the vital, emotional, sensational and dynamic nature in man. Energy and enthusiasm, desire, ambition and passion, quest for power, wealth, enjoyment, achievement and expansion are the manifestations of Rajas. Sattwa is the quality of the higher nature in man made of his ideal, ethical and aesthetic intelligence. Peace and tranquillity, harmony and balance, clarity of knowledge, sensitivity to higher values like truth, beauty and goodness and openness to the eternal and universal truths of the Spirit are the manifestations of Sattwa. In the human being it is the quality of Sattwa which brings man closer to his spiritual self; it is the transparent channel through which the light of the Spirit can enter and irradiate human nature and life.

Sattwa is part of human nature and therefore present in all individuals and communities. But in some individuals or communities, Sattwa may predominate over the other two qualities. So those nations or civilisations which consciously cultivate Sattwa and make it the governing factor of life, to the extent to which they are able to

do it, share in the immortal nature of the Spirit which is the source of everlasting stability, continuity and endurance. Among world-civilisations, India and China cherished Sattwa and made the attempt to create a society governed by Sattwa, which is the secret of their stability and endurance.

This is reflected in the social hierarchy of ancient India and China, with the Sattwic man, the scholar, thinker, sage, saint and the artist occupying the highest position. The Indian or Chinese civilisations might not have succeeded entirely in their attempt in governing life by Sattwa. But the very fact that they made the attempt sets them apart from other nations. So as Sri Aurobindo sums up “Sattwa is present indeed in all communities... but as a conscious governing strength, it exists only in India and China.”¹

Twin Powers of the Spiritual Genius of Asia

Spiritual aspiration grows spontaneously in a soil cultivated with Sattwa. India is recognised all over the world for her spiritual genius though the exact nature of Indian spirituality is not well understood in the West. But most of the Sinologists consider the Chinese civilisation as “irreligious” and secular. We have to understand clearly the distinctive features of the Indian and Chinese spirituality.

There are two aspects or dimensions to the eternal Spirit. First is the transcendent dimension which originates and supports Earth and Heaven, Men and Gods, World and Nature, Space and Time, by standing above them in a timeless freedom, repose and stability.

The second is the immanent dimension which dwells within Man and Nature and Space and Time, as a subtle Presence, flows with their energy and constitutes the dynamic unity, harmony and law that holds together the cosmic whole. The type of religion or spirituality, which pursues the Transcendent tends to be distinctly mystical, contemplative and otherworldly and sometimes world-denying. On the other hand, those religions or traditions which pursue the Immanent tend to be thisworldly or world-embracing, earthly and active. And when this spiritual intuition of the Immanent is expressed in a language which is non-religious, philosophical and impersonal, then it may appear to a superficial view that there is nothing spiritual in it. Here comes the difference between the Indian and Chinese spirituality. The Indian spirituality tends towards the Transcendent and that of the Chinese towards the Immanent, not exclusively but predominantly.

The Indian spiritual mind had perhaps a more comprehensive and synthetic intuition of the transcendent as well as the immanent aspect of the Divine Reality. But still the predominant emphasis of Indian spirituality is on the Transcendent. And the highest aim of the traditional Indian spiritual discipline is Moksha or Nirvana which means supreme Freedom or Liberation in a world-exceeding and timeless Infinity and Eternity. On the other hand, the aim of Chinese spirituality is not transcen-

dence of the World but a harmonious integration of individual and collective life with the ever changing and eternal energy, rhythm, harmony or law, the Tao, of cosmic nature. In other words, to attune the earthly life with the heavenly rhythms of Universal Nature seems to be the goal of Chinese spirituality. This ideal is not something unique to Chinese civilisation but common to most of the ancient religious and spiritual traditions of the world; it is one of the persistent intuitions or aspiration of the higher mind in man. But the Chinese mind laid a special emphasis on this ideal. As a French scholar writes in his perceptive book on the cultural history of China:

The desire or even compulsion to be in tune with the cosmic rhythm is one of the most profound and unquenchable cravings of human nature, but the Chinese were probably the persistent seekers of this rhythm.²

Stars of the Future

A modern “progressive” mind may ask: All this belongs to the past. How is it relevant to the present or the future? Our answer is that the future evolution of humanity, the so-called “post-modern” world, needs precisely the knowledge contained in the ancient Indian and Chinese culture and a creative synthesis in thought and practice of the spiritual vision of India and China. The modern humanity has almost exhausted all the potentialities of its rajasic nature in its passionate quest for an outward material progress, but without solving any of the problems it has inherited from the past or created by itself in the present. All these problems can be solved only by awakening the sattvic and spiritual element in man which means an inner progress in the moral, psychological and spiritual dimensions. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

...in the next great stage of human progress, it is not a material but a spiritual, moral and psychical advance that has to be made.³

India and China as the twin powers of the Asiatic spiritual genius, have to spearhead this spiritual advance of humanity.

The ancient Indian and Chinese philosophy and spirituality can immensely deepen and broaden the horizons of the modern mind in every field of its thought and life especially in religion, psychology, health, art and education. This is already happening. Many of the influential movements of the modern age like Transcendentalism in America, Theosophy, New-Age cults, new schools of psychology, body-mind medicine, alternative therapies, philosophical speculations that grew around the New Physics are inspired either directly or indirectly by Indian and Chinese thought like Vedanta, Buddhism, Yoga, Taoism. But all this has happened without the active support of the intellectual and political establishment of modern India and China which remained mostly hostile or indifferent or neutral to the spiritual paradigm. It

will be a golden day for the future of humanity, when there is a positive change in the intellectual and political climate of modern India and more and more of the young, creative and thinking minds of these two giants of Asia take interest in their cultural and spiritual treasures. This will herald the second phase of the Asiatic Millenium,—after the economic resurgence, the spiritual renaissance of Asia.

M. S. SRINIVASAN

References

1. Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL*, Vol. 27, p. 282.
2. Amour De Reincourt, *Soul of China*, p. 89.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL*, Vol. 1, p. 465.

For unification is a necessity of Nature, an inevitable movement. Its necessity for the nations is also clear, for without it the freedom of the small nations may be at any moment in peril and the life even of the large and powerful nations insecure. The unification is therefore to the interests of all, and only human imbecility and stupid selfishness can prevent it; but these cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will. But an outward basis is not enough; there must grow up an international spirit and outlook, international forms and institutions must appear, perhaps such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship, willed interchange or voluntary fusion of cultures. Nationalism will have fulfilled itself and lost its militancy and would no longer find these things incompatible with self-preservation and the integrality of its outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

Sri Aurobindo

THE MESSAGE OF 15TH AUGUST 1947

ON the occasion of India's Independence on 15th August, 1947, Sri Aurobindo was requested by All India Radio for a message, which would be broadcast to the nation from Trichinopoly, as it was then known (modern-day "Tiruchirapalli"). This message is reproduced elsewhere in this issue of *Mother India*.

In the message Sri Aurobindo mentions the following aims and ideals which he had conceived even in childhood and youth.

1. India's independence—the termination of British rule in India.
2. The resurgence and liberation of Asia.
3. The international unification of nations.
4. India's gift of spiritual knowledge to the world.
5. The transformation and divinisation of life and the appearance of a new race on earth.

This message was written in 1947. Today we are in 2007—a passage of 60 long years.

He said then:

India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom.... But the old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country.... The partition of the country must go... by whatever means, the division must and will go.

After 60 years, are we anywhere near the achievement of that unity, asserted with such categorical and dramatic emphasis? The prediction has not yet become a fact. But can there be any doubt that it will indeed become a living fact on the physical plane?

It is well known that all events in the physical world originate in higher and subtler planes of existence. *Sthūla*, *sukṣma* and *kāraṇa* are the sequential gradation of these planes—gross, subtle and causal. Whatever happens in the physical world is initially planned and conceived in the causal world and its manifestation is precipitated into the plane of gross physical matter. The time factor for this process may be variable, depending on many factors. Sri Aurobindo had in fact foreseen the freedom of India way back in 1910 and he had even allowed the publication of his prediction in a newspaper. Would he have risked that if there were any doubt about its certainty? The Mother also had foreseen the liberation of India from British rule long years ago. In fact, she went as far as to say that India was not 'going to be free' but that she had already 'become free'. The *trikāladṛṣṭi* of sages and seers can hardly be erroneous, particularly when they are so categorically and affirmatively proclaimed.

What about the other aims and ideals he has mentioned?

The liberation and rise of Asian nations is so conspicuous that none can miss it. At first, beginning with the Asian Tigers, Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan and Taiwan, the furious pace of economic development spread like a wild fire to China and somewhat belatedly to India. We need not mention the Arab States in the Middle East, where material prosperity came even earlier due to the wealth generated by the abundant oil.

Even this was foreseen and announced in the *Bande Mataram*, when he wrote of Arabia throbbing with life in the desert and the rise of the mongoloid races. Why then did India become a laggard in this field, with its even vaster potentialities? Could it be a reflection or shadow-hint of what she should be in the world? Has Sri Aurobindo not said:

I have always held and said that India was arising, not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion, greatness, power and prosperity—though these too she must not neglect—and certainly not like others to acquire domination of other peoples, but to live also for God and world as a helper and leader of the whole human race.

Clearly, economic prosperity to achieve power, position and influence among nations should never be a first priority for India. And perhaps this ideal is not as far-fetched as one might imagine. After all, even the leading industrialist, J. N. Tata had once said that he did not want India to become a rich nation. He wanted India to be a happy nation! This great nation had in the past colonised the world with its culture and religion, not with military power. There is no reason to part with that great tradition now. India will achieve greatness, power and prosperity, but these will come to her in the natural course of events even as she fulfills her own *swadharma*.

It may be worth mentioning here that the espousal of poverty and bare living as a national ideal never found favour with Sri Aurobindo. Bareness of life and asceticism can be useful and even necessary at an individual level, but never can it be elevated to the status of a national ideal, which would risk justifying and prolonging the demeaning of life for the general populace. Therefore “greatness, power and prosperity” cannot be neglected. They are needed for a complete revival and a vigorous national life.

The third ideal Sri Aurobindo cherished in childhood and youth was the international unification of nations. This ideal too has materialised through the formation of the League of Nations initially and subsequently the United Nations. This organisation has many defects but this need not discourage us as these are more than likely to be set right sooner or later, as he has clearly pointed out in *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

It is also worth noting here how the liberation of India from the colonial shackles

had a snow-balling effect on the rest of the colonised world. Within a relatively short period, the number of free nations grew immensely and almost doubled due to the dismantling of the degrading slavery of colonialism. Later, even in the undoing of apartheid in South Africa, India had a large part to play.

The gift of India's spirituality to the world is progressively being recognised and it is merely a matter of time before Mother's assertion that India will become the Guru of the world will become self-evident.

The last aim and ideal of the Supramental Descent upon earth has already been fulfilled. The appearance of the new race is only a matter of time and development. The spiritual fact of the Supramental Descent on earth on the 29th February, 1956, will create, out of its own momentum, the new race of the future.

All of Sri Aurobindo's aims and ideals have therefore been fulfilled, or are nearing consummation except the annulment of India's tragic and cataclysmic partition. But already the signs are indicative of future prospects. Pakistan's present people seems to have recognised the fact that the only way open to them is that of peace, rapprochement and harmonious living with its gigantic neighbour. Sri Aurobindo's hope that a "progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord by the necessity of common and concerted action" seems to be coming true.

Sri Aurobindo has said that the exact form of the union has only a secondary importance. It could take any form—a loose union without borders or a federation of states with centralisation of defence, foreign policy and perhaps some other subjects. The problems are many and there are many obstacles. The most complicated issue now is the nuclearisation of both countries.

Several opportunities came and were missed. Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's suggestions were not considered seriously and we are now faced with the dilemma of terrorism, mindless and cruel killing of innocent civilians on a very large scale.

Perhaps the quickening of the SAARC process could provide a reasonable platform for the union to come about. The political map of *Akhanda Bharat* as we envisage it here in our institution could then become a reality.

R. RANGANATH

THE INTEGRATION OF THE PRINCELY STATES OF INDIA

(This article is based primarily on two sources: *Integration of the Indian States* by V. P. Menon, published by Orient Longman in 1956 and reprinted in 1997, and *The Last Days of the British Raj* by Leonard Mosley, published by Harcourt, Brace & World in 1961. Material from these books has been freely woven into the writing. I am grateful to Matriprasad for starting me on this article, and for his valuable inputs.)

NEVER has India, in her long, chequered history been politically one. Geographically, the Indian subcontinent, noble and majestic in form, stands out from the humungous land mass of Asia. Culturally, from time immemorial, the *sanātana dharma*, working patiently, unobtrusively, and absorbing numerous influences and cultures, has, slowly but surely, created the paradoxically well-formed and yet indefinable notion,—that conceptual holy grail of the modern sociologist which he forever fails to grasp, for he sees not wisely and deeply enough—the Indian cultural identity. Yet, political unity has seemed almost impossible to establish. “Nowhere else,” writes Sri Aurobindo about India in *The Ideal of Human Unity*, “have the centrifugal forces been so strong, numerous, complex, obstinate. The mere time taken by the evolution has been prodigious; the disastrous vicissitudes through which it has had to work itself out have been appalling.”¹

When Sri Aurobindo wrote the above in 1916, India was still part of the British Raj. Since their coming in the 17th century, the British had worked tirelessly—and admirably [from their point of view]—in their mission of unifying India administratively (initially, even against the wishes of the East India Company officials back home). Leonard Mosley, in his book, *The Last Days of the British Raj*, writes, “By much sweat, blood, and brainwork the British in India had worked to achieve unity; to the enormous benefit of coffers at home, it is true.² They had taken warring tribes, diverse regions, disputatious people and arrogant princes and welded them into a viable nation...”³

A careful observer of the Indian political scene in the 1920s could have foreseen that a free India was bound to come, sooner or later. The moral, social and economic justifications for colonialism had already begun to sound feeble, even though the

1. *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, p. 307.

2. As far as the British themselves were concerned. There was another Purpose at work though—Sri Aurobindo notes that in the case of India, “...Nature tried an experiment of unparalleled complexity and potential richness, accumulating all possible difficulties in order to arrive at the most opulent result. But in the end the problem proved insoluble or, at least, was not solved and Nature had to resort to her usual *deus ex machina* denouement, the instrumentality of a foreign rule.” *Op. cit.*, p. 286.

3. Leonard Mosley: *The Last Days of the British Raj*, p. 17.

final nail in the proverbial coffin of imperialism—the Second World War—was still another decade or two away. However, the exact form that the freedom of India would take would have been unclear. The ideal would be to have one free India, united in every sense of the word. But that was not to be.

On the 15th of August, 1947, India achieved Independence no doubt, but it was a fissured freedom; the blunder of Pakistan continues to haunt the Indian subcontinent 60 years after it was committed. This could, perhaps surely, have been avoided. But Pakistan is not the issue of this article.

The partition of the nation was unfortunate; and yet, events could have turned out far worse for India. Even before 1947, there were two Indias, and not one. The Viceroy at Delhi lorded over one—aided by British Governors in all the 11 provinces, and an interim Government composed of elected Indians. This was British India, the India where “Congress and the Muslim League wrangled, and where Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah moved freely, spoke freely, worked freely—though not yet as freely as they wished.”⁴

And then, there was the India of the Princely States. Covering two-fifths of the land mass, and with a quarter of India’s population, the Princely States numbered 601, ranged in size from the vast Kingdom of Hyderabad with 14 million people and a territory the size of Britain minus Scotland, to lowly States in Kathiawar with 900 people and 10 square miles in area. Their Rulers were rich and poor; some bought dancing girls at £50,000 apiece; other lived on less than £80 a year. Their Rulers were good and bad; the subjects of Mysore enjoyed a standard of living higher than that by people in British India; the Nawab of Junagadh spent more money on his kennel of dogs than on hospitals. Most spent more time in Monte Carlo and Paris than they did in their palaces.

Not much is remembered about the erstwhile Princely States of India. What was their relationship with the British? What role, if any, did they play in the fight for Independence? What was the constitutional relationship they enjoyed with the Paramount Power? What happened to them as Independence approached? Few remember, and perhaps know, how narrowly India escaped sinking into a quagmire of disintegration after the British left. Indeed, it seems almost miraculous, given the disparate nature of the States and their Rulers, that the integration of the Princely States was completed in a matter of months. Even as late as June 1947, the danger of an India divided into hundreds of independent and hostile territories was very real. In his message of 15th August 1947, Sri Aurobindo writes:

At one moment it almost seemed as if in the very act of liberation she [India] would fall back into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. But fortunately it now seems probable that this danger will be averted

4. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

and a large and powerful, though not yet a complete union will be established.

How was this danger averted?

This article attempts to answer the above questions, and takes a closer look at the people and the process behind the integration of the Princely States of India. To begin with, we must turn back the clock by a few centuries.

The Foundations of the Raj

On the 31st of December, 1600, Queen Elizabeth I of England granted a royal charter to the British East India Company to carry out trade with the East. The first ships arrived in India in 1608, docking at Surat, in modern-day Gujarat. In 1615, a commercial treaty was concluded with Jahangir in which the Mughals allowed the Company to build trading posts in India in return for goods from Europe. The Company traded in such commodities as cotton, silk, indigo, and tea.

By the mid-1600s, the Company had established trading posts or “factories” in major Indian cities, such as Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. In 1670 King Charles II granted the Company the right to acquire territory, raise an army, mint its own money, and exercise legal jurisdiction in areas under its control. By the last decade of the 17th century, the Company was arguably its own “nation” on the Indian subcontinent, possessing considerable military might and ruling three presidencies.

The first territorial acquisition was, however, effected later in 1757, when Company-funded soldiers commanded by Robert Clive defeated the Bengali Nawab Siraj-Ud-Daulah at the Battle of Plassey. Bengal thus became a British protectorate directly under the rule of the East India Company.

Three individuals played special roles in this, the beginning of our story. The Marquess of Wellesley, the Marquess of Hastings, and Lord Dalhousie, were probably the most instrumental in building the foundations of the Raj. Wellesley came to India as Governor-General in 1797. He was given strict instructions not to meddle with the Indian Rulers, and pay more attention to the steadily depleting resources of the Company. He paid little heed to the injunction, and focussed his energies towards installing the British as the one paramount power in India. Apart from his military achievements however, his greatest contribution towards the consolidation of the British in India was his role in creating the Subsidiary Alliances.

Under the Subsidiary Alliances scheme, entered into between the Princely States and the East India Company, no Princely State was to make war with another, nor carry on negotiations without the Company’s knowledge and consent. Moreover, the bigger States were to maintain armies *commanded by British officers* ostensibly for ‘the preservation of the public peace’; the rulers were also required to cede territory to maintain the armies and finance them. The smaller States were to pay a tribute to the Company in return for which the Company would ensure them against external

aggression and internal rebellion. A British Resident was also installed in every State that signed the Subsidiary Alliance. The Subsidiary Alliance was a Trojan-horse stroke of genius.⁵

The Indian Rulers would soon become absolute monarchs in their respective States, and were assured of British protection in any crisis, internal or external. And the British were thus ensured of fidelity and a certain measure of jurisdiction from a distance. Thus Wellesley strengthened the foundations of the empire, and arranged for the Indian Rulers to fund the same with their own land and resources.

Wellesley's policies were continued by the Marquess of Hastings. By the time he left the country in 1823, the map of the British Empire in India had been drawn in its essentials. The Company's domination had been extended over almost all the Indian States.

By this time, the Indian Rulers were hardly any more the 'absolute monarchs' they believed they would become; the British Residents soon became the *de facto* overlords. They gradually transformed from diplomatic agents representing a foreign power into executive and controlling officers of a superior and more powerful (and cunning) Government. The story goes that a certain Resident Col. Macaulay wrote to the Rajah of Cochin: "The Resident will be glad to learn that on his arrival near Cochin, the Rajah will find it convenient to wait on him."⁶ The pathetic plight of the Rulers under the Subsidiary Alliances system is further depicted in the following report by a journalist of the time: "The sovereigns of what are called independent States live in a state of abject dependence upon the will of the British agency... The whole functions of government are in most cases exercised by the Resident... To know the character of his rule and seeming tendencies of his disposition, it is sufficient to have a knowledge of the capacity and likings of the British Representative. Thus General Cullen is a savant, and the Rajah of Travancore builds an observatory and maintains men of science; the Resident of Indore is a person of elegant tastes and the Maharajah surrounds himself with articles of vertu... at the Mysore Court, [the government agent] is passionately fond of the sports of the turf and the Rajah keeps a large stud of horses, gives gold cups and heavy purses at races, wears topboots and has pictures of the 'great events' of past and present days."⁷ As expected, this concentration of power without responsibility encouraged corruption. All incentive for good government was removed, and revenues of the court were frequently gobbled up by the Residency and the Court.

Then, in the years to come, Lord Dalhousie, following a vigorous annexationist policy, acquired vast territories. Eventually, through his efforts and that of his predecessors, the States of Sindh, Coorg, Mysore, Punjab, Burma, Jhansi, Nagpur, and Oudh, among others, were annexed. Some of these acquisitions required war;

5. V. P. Menon: *Integration of the Indian States*, p. 5.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

7. Henry Mead. Quoted in Menon, p. 7.

others were effected through Dalhousie's infamous 'doctrine of lapse', which permitted the Company to annex any Princely State whose Ruler had died without a male heir.

This, along with many other reasons, led to the Indian Mutiny in 1857, popularly also known as the First War of Indian Independence. The rebellion was a major turning point in the history of modern India. In May 1858, the British exiled Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar II to Rangoon, Burma thus formally liquidating the Mughal Empire. The war brought about the end of the British East India Company's rule in India, and led to direct rule by the British Government for the next 90 years.

The Mutiny meant many changes for the States as well. (It should be noted that a number of Princely States actively supported the British in quelling the Uprising.)⁸ The most far-reaching of these was that the policy of annexation gave way to the perpetuation of the States as separate entities. The new policy was to punish, or depose if necessary, the Ruler for extreme misgovernment but not to annex his State. Eventually, a Political Department was formed exclusively for the purpose of controlling the Princely States. The Political Department had a police force, appointed Residents and Political Agents, and oversaw the affairs of the States.

As we shall see, the Political Department was to play an important, if disruptive, role in 1947.

The Princely States

As mentioned before, the States were of many kinds—big and small, rich and poor, progressive and obscurantist. Yet they all had one thing in common: they were, in theory, independent of Delhi, and of all laws passed by the Government in British India. The sole authority they recognised was that of the Crown, whose policies they agreed to follow. All dealings with the Viceroy were in his position as the Representative of the Crown, and not as the Governor-General of British India. This little, but important, technicality will play an important part in our story later.

The princely preserves were spread out all over India. The largest continuous area was that of Rajasthan, consisting notably of the States of Alwar, Bikaner, Jaipur, Kotah, Jodhpur, and Udaipur. A little to the east was Gwalior. The Central Indian Agency consisted of Bhopal, Indore, Orcha, Rewa, and others. The district of Kathiawar was a jigsaw puzzle of some 200 States, including Bhavanagar, Cutch, Junagadh, and Navanagar, which made up the Western Agency. In the north were Kashmir, the Simla States Agency, and the Phulkian States of Patiala, Kapurthala,

8. The Butler Committee, appointed by the British Government to examine the question of the States, submitted in its report the following observation: "...the Indian princes have played an important role in the Imperial history. Their loyalty at the time of the mutiny, their noble services in the great war, their splendid devotion to the crown and the person of the King Emperor and the royal family are one of the proud things of our annals, and the glory of the empire." Jarmani Dass: *Maharaja*, p. 337.

and others. In the east were the States of Khasi, and Assam, along with the Orissa Agency. The great State of Baroda was in the south-west region, and further down south, the magnificent kingdoms of Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, Cochin, and Kolhapur, among other smaller kingdoms. Indeed, so many and spread out were the States, that one could not travel between Bombay and Delhi without crossing at least 30 boundaries.

Though the British, through the Political Department, retained their right to intervene in the affairs of the States, and through the Residents closely monitored and watched over the States, in fact, they rarely meddled with the internal affairs of the State. The Ruler could spend his money on meaningless extravagances, as long as he did so on his tours abroad; he could get away with murder, as long as it was not too openly committed; he decided what form of justice, if any at all, should be enforced in his State through his police, what taxes people should pay, what schools they should attend, what duties they should perform. Within his boundaries, he was the first and last word on his people's destinies.⁹

The States usually raised money from Customs duties, profits from post-offices where the Ruler had his own stamps printed, rents from the railways which passed through the State, and taxes imposed on subjects. Often taxes were arbitrary: when a Ruler wanted a new car, he simply added a 'motor tax' to be borne by his people until his new fancy could be paid for.

Indian States counted their prestige and importance based on a British system designed to pamper and play to the delicate egos of the Rulers—the number of gun-salutes received by the King on ceremonial occasions. The King and Queen of England received 101-gun salutes when they were present in person; 31 guns were fired on special occasions related to the birth, accession, coronation and so on of the British Sovereign. There were five 21-gun States—Hyderabad, Mysore, Baroda, Kashmir, and Gwalior. Bhopal and Indore were 19-gun States, which put them ahead of the 17-gun States of Jodhpur, Bharatpur, Bikaner, Kotah, Tonk, Bundi, Karauli, and Patiala. Besides, there were numerous 15, 13, 11, and 9-gun States. There were hundreds of no-gun-salute States as well.

Salutes were fired when a Ruler visited the Viceroy, or when the Ruler was celebrating a special occasion, like his birthday, in his own State. The number of gun-salutes were indicative of the power and prestige the Ruler commanded within the British establishment. The Ruler of a 21-gun-salute State would receive the Viceroy at the door of the drawing room of his palace; the Ruler of 11-gun-salute States received the Viceroy on his porch as soon as he dismounted from his car or carriage; 9-gun-salute States had to welcome the Viceroy several miles from the palace; finally, Rulers of lesser States waited at the border of their kingdoms to accompany the Viceroy upto their palace. Further, the salutes also made a difference as to the seating

9. Leonard Mosley: *The Last Days of the British Raj*, p. 61.

arrangements of the Rulers at official Darbars and State banquets. Many were the intrigues among the Princes in order to secure a higher number of gun salutes, along with the many titles—such as the Order of the Star of India—that the Crown bestowed on cooperative Rulers.

The lot of the common man, except in progressive States like Mysore, Travancore, or Baroda, was pitiable and uncertain. Arrogance, a lack of genuine concern for their subjects, superficial living, wasteful expenditure—and often scandal—characterised most of the Rulers of the Princely States of India. Indian political leaders were not particularly charitable in their views on the Indian States. Anti-British movements were discouraged and quickly quelled. In his autobiography Nehru remarks, “A sense of oppression comes, it is stifling and difficult to breathe, and below the still or slow moving waters there is stagnation and putrefaction. One feels hedged, circumscribed, bowed down in body and mind. And one sees the utter backwardness and misery of the people, contrasting vividly with the glaring ostentation of the princes’ Palace. How much of the wealth of the state flows into the Palace for the personal needs, and luxuries of the prince, how little goes back to the people in the form of any service... A veil of mystery surrounds these States. Newspapers are not encouraged there... Literacy is very low... Special laws protect the princes from criticism, even in British India, and within the States the mildest criticism is rigorously suppressed. Public meetings are almost unknown...”¹⁰

Apart from their separate position in British India, the States had another thing in common—“fear that when freedom came to British India, the States would be absorbed against their will, their titles abolished, their personal power and privileges lopped away, their vast private fortunes suddenly made subject to taxes. In the circumstances, few of them wished for freedom to come to India at all...”¹¹

Thus, the British Empire had good reason to look after the needs—real or otherwise—of the Princely States, at least until the end of the Second World War when a free India was imminent. They were a dependable force in the unpredictable theatre of Indian politics, and oases of stability in the tinderbox of the Indian freedom struggle. Lord Hardinge called them, “Helpers and Colleagues in the great task of Imperial rule.”¹² And in 1906, at the time when Sri Aurobindo burst onto the political scene and rallied the Indian masses with the cry of *purna swaraj*, Lord Minto wrote to the Secretary of State, Lord Morley (two names we come across often in the *Bande Mataram*), “I have been thinking a good deal lately of a possible counterpoise to Congress aims. I think we can find a solution in the Council of Princes.”¹³

10. Jarmani Dass: *Maharaja*, p. 340.

11. Leonard Mosley: *The Last Days of the British Raj*, p. 61.

12. Jarmani Dass: *Maharaja*, p. 336.

13. *Ibid.*

The Chamber of Princes

The First World War broke out in 1914, and in Britain's hour of peril, the Rulers rallied behind the British and did all they could, offering both their personal services, as well as the resources of their State. They helped Britain with men, material, money, and a few even served as officers in different theatres of war.¹⁴

The war effort meant that closer cooperation was needed, and periodical conferences were held between the States and the British Paramount Power. A few leading Princes stressed the essential identity of common interests and hoped that the war conferences would develop into a permanent association after the War.

This was granted, and on the 8th of February 1921, the Duke of Connaught inaugurated the Chamber of the Princes. The Viceroy was declared the ex-officio Chairman, and the Maharaja of Bikaner was the first Chancellor. It had 108 self-represented members—these were States which enjoyed 11-gun salutes and above. In addition, there were 12 members, chosen by a system of group voting, representing amongst themselves, a total of 127 non-salute States.

The Indian Legislature, in the meanwhile, began to press for a greater say in the matters of the States, who in turn, naturally opposed such a move. As various demands for Dominion Status, Home Rule, and complete freedom engulfed the subcontinent, the British Government reiterated that nothing would be done without the consent of the Princes. The Princes too were emphatic in their stand that their views and 'independence' would have to be taken into account in any discussion concerning the future of the yet unborn Indian nation. Moreover, the theory of direct relationship with the Paramount Power was seriously advocated.

A closer look at this theory is in place. The Rulers argued that the Princely States possessed all sovereign powers except those which had been transferred by consent over to the British Crown; Paramountcy existed indeed, but it gave to the Crown only certain definite rights with regards to certain matters only—foreign affairs, internal, and external security—and not any authority outside the sphere of interference as defined by mutual treaties. In other words, the States' contention was that they were independent sovereign powers who had entered into treaties with the Paramount Power, the British Crown, only in the fields mentioned above. As such, they were Kings and Queens in their own right, and therefore the States could not be compelled to transfer their loyalty to, or to maintain treaties with, a future third party. Sir Leslie Scott, an eminent constitutional lawyer engaged by the Rulers argued that, "...the paramount power is the British Crown and no one else; and it is to it that the States have entrusted their foreign relations and external and internal security."¹⁵

This was vehemently contested by the Indian leaders who maintained that the relationship of the States was not with the Crown, as such, but with the Government

14. V. P. Menon: *Integration of the Indian States*, p. 12.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

of (British) India, and as such, with any Government succeeding the present one.¹⁶ Indeed, the position of the Rulers was not historically correct. When the States came into contact with the British Power, they were hardly 'independent, sovereign States'. None of them had international relations; most were subordinate or dependent on the Mughal Empire, Mahratta Confederacy, or the Sikh Kingdom. Some were created by the British; others were rescued by the British; and all were maintained by the British. The Rulers put forth an impressive contention, but an illusory one.

The British, however, were quick to accept some of the Rulers' propositions. The Butler Committee of 1928, studying the relationship between the States and the Crown, maintained that, "If any government in the nature of a Dominion Government should be constituted in British India, such a government would clearly be a new government resting on a new and written constitution...[the Princes] should not be transferred without their agreement to a relationship with a new government in British India responsible to an Indian legislature."¹⁷ This policy was to prove dangerous for India in the years to come.

As an aside, many wonder why the British, who would have surely clearly seen the dangers of a divided India, chose to pursue this legal path right up to the end. The reasons are numerous and complex. Some historians believe that the British contended that a divided India would be a weak India, and thus a proper legacy of the 'divide and rule' policy of the British. Others believe that the British genuinely felt that India would not be able to govern herself as a united country. But, it is also true that some British officers had a genuine goodwill for India, were proud of the traditions of their 'Service', and conscious of their role in putting together over 200 years, a politically unified India for the first time in her history. The prospect of partition, let alone an India broken into 600 and more States was not gratifying to all British leaders. Indeed, as we shall see later in our story, the last Viceroy played an important role in the integration of the Indian States. At the same time, many British officials *had* a soft spot for the Rulers and were against Independence and a united India. After all, the Rulers had a tradition of supporting the British—for their selfish interests it is true, but nonetheless; starting from the Mutiny to the World Wars and always in between, the British could count on their trusted allies. Also, a few officers, such as Conrad Corfield, the last head of the notorious Political Department—another man we shall soon acquaint ourselves with—looked back with nostalgia at the dying institution of Monarchy. It pained him, no doubt, to see the world, and especially India, heading rapidly towards a less aristocratic and less apparently glorious, democratic destiny. And thus, individuals in the administration like Corfield did everything in their power to prevent the dissolution of the Princely States as Independence approached.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 336.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

The Government of India Act of 1935

Without getting into the constitutional and legal nitty-gritty of the 1930s, it will suffice for our purpose to note that after protracted discussions lasting many years and involving numerous parties—Indian leaders, British leaders, British Opposition leaders, the major Princes,—the Government of India Act of 1935 was passed in the British Parliament in August, and came into effect on the 1st of April, 1937.

The Act provided a constitutional relationship between British India and the Princely States on a federal basis. An important consequence of the Act was the declaration that whereas in the case of the Provinces (of British India) accession to the Federation was to be automatic, in the case of the Princely States accession was to be voluntary, ostensibly because “the Indian States, unlike the British Indian Provinces, possess sovereignty”;¹⁸ the Rulers also confirmed that while the States may choose to federate with British India, this accession would not necessarily carry over to any future Government.

The States, however, were still not keen to join the Federation. They feared that accession would mean an interference, both with their sovereignty and their finances. In the meanwhile, the provincial part of the Act was put in place, and elections were held in the provincial legislatures; Congress swept the polls and formed the first ministries. The overwhelming victory of the Congress prompted people in the Princely States to agitate for civil liberties and responsible government. There was unrest and outbreaks of lawlessness in all the major States of Mysore, Travancore, Kashmir and Hyderabad, among many others.¹⁹ At first, Gandhi was against any change in the Congress’ policy of non-interference in the matters of the States; but in a characteristic Gandhian volte-face, he threatened to make maladministration in Jaipur an all-India issue when his close associate Jamnalal Bajaj was arrested by the King. Soon thereafter the Congress publicly shifted to the view that it considered the Princely States an integral part of India. Gandhi advised the Rulers to cultivate friendly relations with the Congress, “an organisation,” he said, “which bids fair in the future, not very distant, to replace the paramount power.”²⁰ The States were predictably flustered and worried at the course of recent events. Slowly and surely, circumstances were leading towards a showdown between the Princely States and the coming free India.

The British administration on its part was divided in their views on how to help the States. While Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy and Crown Representative,²¹ believed

18. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

21. As a consequence of the Government of India Act, the position of a Crown Representative was created to safeguard the interests of the States. In matters relating to the Indian Federation, the States were to deal with the Governor-General, but in their relations with the Paramount Power, they were to deal with the Crown Representative; in fact, the same person held both offices, under the title of Viceroy, though the Viceroy did have separate offices for his dual function.

that active pressure should be brought upon the States to carry out administrative, social, and financial reforms in their kingdoms so that they did not succumb to Congress agitation, the Political Department—the staunch supporter of the Princes—was of the view that the Rulers should not be pushed to carry out these changes, and especially not forced to carry out constitutional progress.

It was at this stage that the Second World War broke out. The British did not push for reforms in the States because it was a time when Britain needed their men, money, and resources, and could not afford to rub them the wrong way. Perhaps, if reforms had indeed gone through, the story of the Princely States would have turned out differently—in all likelihood in a manner averse to a unified India. In the end, the federal scheme was put on hold, bringing to an end a crucial chapter in India's history, a chapter marked by a colossal waste of time, money, and energy. As Menon writes, "...as in a Greek tragedy, events were inexorably shaping the climax."²² The Rulers of the Princely States of India moved unwillingly and indubitably towards their impending unhappy kismet.

Beginning of the End

There was a lull in matters relating to the States after the outbreak of the War. In January 1940 Jinnah declared that Muslims and Hindus should share the governance of their common motherland. Three months later, he declared that the Muslims must have a separate Independent State of Pakistan. The demands of the Muslim League and the counterclaims of Congress dominated the political scene of India thereafter.

At the end of 1944, the Nawab of Bhopal was elected Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes. He "realised the inevitability of independence, regrettable though that might be."²³ As the Ruler of an important 19-gun State, he infused new life into the Chamber, and with Congress and the Muslim League pitted against each other, he worked hard towards developing a 'Third Force'.

The summer of 1945 brought in its wake the end of the Second World War. The British Government by now was determined to work with Indian leaders to realise full self-government for India. Lord Wavell, the penultimate Viceroy of India declared that it was intended to create a body to draft the future constitution of India.

In the February of 1946, Prime Minister Attlee announced the decision to form a Cabinet Mission consisting of three British cabinet ministers. Lord Pethic-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps, and A.V. Alexander arrived in New Delhi a month later in the hope of forming a constitutional structure for India. As discussions for a new constitution got under way, the position taken up by the States generally was that Paramountcy should lapse, rather than be transferred to a successor Government;

22. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

23. Leonard Mosley: *The Last Days of the British Raj*, p. 62.

that they should not be forced to join any future Union; that the States should be allowed to form a confederation if they so desired; and that there should be no interference in their internal affairs by British India.

The Cabinet Mission published a 'Memorandum on States' Treaties and Paramountcy', which affirmed that "when a new fully self-governing or independent government or governments came into being in British India, His Majesty's Government's influence would not be such as to enable them to carry out the obligations of paramountcy; nor did they contemplate the retention of British troops in India for that purpose. Thus...His Majesty's Government would cease to exercise the powers of paramountcy."²⁴ This meant that all treaties between the States and the Crown would cease to exist; no obligations would remain for either party. All political arrangements would be brought to an end, and it would be up to the States to forge new relationships between themselves and the successor Government or Governments to British India.²⁵

The Nawab of Bhopal, the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes, entered into a vigorous correspondence with Lord Wavell, seeking clarifications and assurances on various points; he wished to ensure that the States would be able to maintain their own armies, and an essential freedom in major issues such as finance, taxation, and communications. Lord Wavell's replies were non-committal and his stand effectively was that the settlement of the matters raised by the Nawab was a matter to be negotiated between the States and the successor Government(s). The Princes were, by now, worried. The Nawab wanted that the issue of the States be given as much importance as that being given to the communal problem. He believed that the British could not wish to leave the States as 'a sort of no man's child', without any effort on their part to protect the sovereignty of the States. An important Ruler declared, "We fought and sacrificed our blood to win power and we mean to hold it. If the Congress wants to rob us, if the British should let us down, we will fight."²⁶

Among the Princes, a particularly contentious issue was whether or not to join the Constituent Assembly, the interim body charged with drafting the constitution of India.²⁷ The Princes were worried that their 'rights' would be compromised in such a body. The question also arose as to who should represent the States. The Congress insisted that only representatives who had been elected by a popular vote should represent the States, rather than representatives nominated by the Rulers. Given the general feeling of discontent among the subjects of the States with regard to their Rulers, this was obviously not acceptable to the Princes; the States felt that their representatives could only be nominated by the Rulers themselves.

24. V. P. Menon: *Integration of the Indian States*, p. 66.

25. It is to be noted that even as late as 1946, no one knew for sure what free India would look like.

26. V. P. Menon: *Integration of the Indian States*, p. 59.

27. 93 members out of a total of 389 (before partition) represented the Princely States. The Constituent Assembly later became the first Parliament of free India on Independence Day (then reduced to 299 members after the formation of Pakistan). – <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/facts.htm> (accessed on 21/05/07).

In 1946, Sir Conrad Corfield was the head of the Political Department in Delhi, which looked after the affairs of the Princely States. His responsibilities were many—he appointed the British Resident to each State to advise them, he was the liaison between the Chamber of Princes and the Viceroy, and he was authorised to intervene in the affairs of the States when he felt it was necessary to do so.²⁸ His relationship with the Congress wasn't particularly warm, and he was hardly more sympathetic towards the Muslim League either. As independence approached, he took it upon himself to impress upon the Princes the importance of introducing a measure of modernity and democracy in their States. He rightly surmised that in the uncertain days to come, the Rulers had everything to gain if their subjects supported them and were on their side. His efforts were futile, perhaps fortunately so.

In June 1946, Corfield addressed a very disturbed and worried Chamber of Princes, and said the lapse of Paramountcy placed the States in the best bargaining position for fitting into the future constitutional structure. He advised the States to form a Negotiating Committee so as to participate in the discussions of the Constituent Assembly in one voice, and to garner support from their subjects in preparation for the turmoil to come. He also assured them that the Political Department on its part would assist the States in the interim period, and continue to support the States to the best of its ability. In the coming momentous summer of 1947, when the destinies of three hundred million people would be chalked out by a handful of tired and restive men, the royalist Corfield kept his word and remained the one faithful—albeit failing—ally of the Princes.

On the 20th of February, 1947, Prime Minister Attlee declared in the House of Commons that Britain would transfer power to Indian hands no later than June 1948.

The commitment of a definite date was a matter of jubilation for the Congress. Nehru declared, "The clear and definite declaration that the final transference of power will take place by a date not later than June 1948 not only removes all misconceptions and suspicions, but also brings reality and a certain dynamic quality to the present situation in India... It is a challenge to all of us, and we shall try to meet it bravely in the spirit of that challenge."²⁹ Jinnah's reply was characteristically more apprehensive and one-pointed, "For the moment I refuse to comment, except to say that the Muslim League will not yield an inch in its demand for Pakistan."³⁰ By now, dissension between the Congress and the Muslim League had come to a head. Pakistan seemed imminent, though arguably even as late as February 1947, few people, including Indian leaders, believed or contemplated the possibility of partition seriously.

Prime Minister Attlee also announced that Admiral Viscount Mountbatten would take over as Viceroy of India from Lord Wavell. This decision was to have important consequences in the days to come. Lord Mountbatten remains a fascinating, though

28. As late as 1946, he had a Ruler replaced for maladministration.

29. Leonard Mosley: *The Last Days of the British Raj*, p. 53.

30. *Ibid.*

controversial, personality. On one hand, for hurrying through the motions of independence historians discredit him partly for allowing the formation of Pakistan, and for the carnage that followed. On the other hand, it was his lively, charming, and captivating personality that changed the mind of many an Indian Prince to accede to India, rather than to Pakistan, or stay independent.

He was also a practical man, who when given a job, went about in all earnest to finish it. Mosley writes about Mountbatten: "He approached the problem of Indian independence by June 1948, rather in the manner of a time-and-motion-study expert who has been called into a factory to knock off the wasteful minutes and get out the product before the target date."³¹

Corfield at first hoped that Mountbatten—a cousin of the King—would back him to keep the trusted allies of the British Empire, the Indian Princes, out of harm's reach from Indian politicians. He could not have been more wrong. Mountbatten had little regard for the Indian Princes. For him they were, "semi-enlightened autocrats at their best and squalid degenerates at their worst. He called them 'a bunch of nitwits' for not democratising their administrations..."³² when they could.

For the States, Attlee's declaration of a specific date introduced an element of urgency in deciding their future course of action. They had much to lose—vast incomes from taxes, minerals, and customs, godlike privileges, and almost absolute power within their dominions. The Nawab of Bhopal stressed on a 'wait and see' attitude, and strongly advocated against joining the Constituent Assembly. This was indeed the general feeling among the Rulers. The Maharajah of Bikaner, however, begged to differ, and in a lucidly worded statement declared that, "...it is beyond question, in the interests of the States...that...a strong central government should be created which can take over power...The united front that is required to be put up by the States is, therefore, not by adopting a policy of 'wait-and-see' but by fully co-operating with the Constituent Assembly... It is, therefore, most strongly felt that a decisive step taken with a broad vision and in the larger interests of India is not only in the interests of the States themselves but becomes imperative."³³ A few other forward-looking and realistic Rulers soon joined the Bikaner camp, and Baroda, Bikaner, Jaipur, Cochin, Jodhpur, Patiala, and Rewa took their seats in the Constituent Assembly on 28th April, 1947. This was the end of the united front put up by the Chamber of Princes. The Nawab of Bhopal's potential 'Third Force' had failed to materialise.

On the Brink of Disintegration

We have already been briefly introduced to Lord Mountbatten and Sir Conrad Corfield. Before we proceed to the climax of our story, we must acquaint ourselves with V. P.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

32. *Ibid.*, p.158.

33. V. P. Menon: *Integration of the Indian States*, p. 75.

Menon, the relatively unsung hero of this episode. V. P. Menon was Reforms Commissioner and Constitutional Advisor—the highest position in the Indian Government Service ever to be held by an Indian—to Viceroys Linlithgow, Wavell, and Mountbatten. This is all the more remarkable considering his humble background. Unlike the other important personalities in the political theatre of his time, he played an all-important role in the drama of independence without going to school in England, going to University anywhere, or being a lawyer!³⁴ He entered the service in 1916, and by the 1940s there were few in the whole of India who could equal him in the breadth of his knowledge on Indian law, civil administration, and relations with Princely States. He went on to play a most crucial role in the integration of the Princely States of India. In many ways, he is, along with Sardar Vallabhai Patel, the protagonist of our story. In 1946, he met Sardar for the first time, and the two became close associates. As Mosley asserts, “It was an association which had much more to do with shaping of India’s future than has hitherto been realised.”³⁵ In his classic book *Integration of the Indian States*, Menon comes across as an extraordinarily intelligent individual, astute in his thinking, perseverant and determined in his ways, and very matter-of-fact in his approach towards his work.

By April 1947, the Political Department knew its days were ending and it began working towards its own dissolution.³⁶ On the 3rd of June 1947, after acrimonious happenings behind the scenes, Lord Mountbatten announced that His Majesty’s Government was ready to relinquish power to two governments, India and Pakistan, on the basis of Dominion Status; this would happen much sooner than June 1948. The next day, Mountbatten elucidated the plan and gave the first public indication that the ‘transfer of power could be about 15th August 1947’.³⁷ As regards the States, he maintained that the proposals mentioned in the Cabinet Mission Plan remained unchanged. The States had a number of questions, though, and rightly so, for the Cabinet Mission Plan elucidated all the consequences of the lapse of Paramountcy—that treaties would no longer be applicable, that the States would no longer have any obligations towards any successive government, and so on; however, it had nothing to say about the future of the States. What would happen to commercial agreements once Paramountcy lapsed? Was the entry of the States into either Dominion Constituent Assembly a matter of choice? Would Britain maintain relationships with States that chose to remain independent? Would such States get Dominion Status? None of these could be answered decisively at the time; such was the prevailing state of confusion and uncertainty even as late as June 1947.

34. Leonard Mosley: *The Last Days of the British Raj*, p. 86.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

36. An insight into the Political Department’s way of thinking is given to us when we consider that one of the steps proposed at a Political Department conference was that the Crown Representative’s armed forces should be distributed among the States, rather than be handed over to the successor governments! (Menon: pp. 79-80)

37. V. P. Menon: *Integration of the Indian States*, p. 84.

After Mountbatten's announcement, the Nawab of Bhopal resigned from the post of Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes. Very soon, the Chamber of Princes ceased to exist, and no other body took its place. The States were in a political black hole.

The Congress in the meanwhile, had not foreseen what the lapse of Paramountcy really meant and what a potentially terrible state of turmoil and anarchy the country was heading for. When the transfer of power would take place on August 15th, Paramountcy would lapse, and the States would be independent—all of them, the largest as well as the smallest. They would have the right to expel troops of the Indian Army stationed in their territories due to earlier treaties with the British; Indian railways, which had run through their States under agreements with the Crown, could now be stopped; Indian post and telegraph offices would be closed; right of passage from one part of India to another could be withheld. And all this, not in some remote corner of India, not in one or two places, but potentially, in close to 600 States, some big, such as Hyderabad, others not bigger than 10 square miles. Worse, over a 100 million people would have little say in their destinies, and would continue to be deprived of independence and democracy.

Reports soon started to flow in that the Political Department was furiously destroying records, winding up the Residencies, and handing over armed forces and military cantonment areas to the States. Corfield ordered his staff in the Political Department to start cancelling all working arrangements—including the railways, customs, and post offices—which had been made between the States and British India. In destroying confidential files and reports, he wished to ensure that no paper depicting the excesses and squalid incidents of erring Rulers would ever fall into the hands of Indian leaders; if they did, it would make it easier for the Indian leaders to press for the dissolution of the States. Altogether four tons of paper was destroyed, and some files were shipped off to London.

Corfield's one grave, and probably not entirely inadvertent mistake, was not keeping Mountbatten abreast of his plans. In May 1947, Corfield had left for Britain, telling Mountbatten that he was going home to 'arrange about the lapse of Paramountcy'. It is likely that Mountbatten, like the Indian leaders, had not quite realised the implications of the lapse of Paramountcy. He was then too involved trying to ease the tensions between the Muslim League and Congress, and trying to deal with the demand of a separate country by the former. Corfield said later, "I don't think he understood, and I did not explain... My job was to look after the interests of the Princely States. It was no part of my job to make things easier for India."³⁸

Indeed, but when the news of the Political Department's activities reached Mountbatten (and the Indian leaders), he was annoyed that Corfield had not kept him in the loop, and that Corfield had gone about his self-imposed duty of saving

38. Leonard Mosley: *The Last Days of the British Raj*, p. 162.

the States with such excessive zeal.

On June 13, an important meeting between Mountbatten, Nehru, Jinnah, Corfield, and others was held. It was at this meeting that Nehru announced that a States Department would be formed to deal with the Indian Princes; Jinnah said the Muslim League would do the same. Corfield objected, saying that it would not be proper if these Ministries were formed before the date of transfer of power. His protests were in vain. Nehru, boiling with rage, also lashed out at Corfield on the issue of the destruction of records; Jinnah too expressed his displeasure. It was decided that experts from the interim Governments would assist in the destruction of records.³⁹ In all these matters, the Viceroy, who should have normally supported his subordinate, maintained an icy silence.

Corfield's consolation, however, was that he had already made sure that when the transfer of power came, the Princes would have three, and not two choices—they could choose either to join India, or Pakistan, or to stay independent. This of course was his (and the general) interpretation of the Indian Independence Bill. Nehru opposed this view in the meeting. He said that he fully recognised the decision of any State to join Pakistan, but that there was no provision for a State to claim independence. After protracted arguments between Nehru, Jinnah, and Corfield, on the precise meaning behind the wording of the Bill—the kind of arguments only lawyers can indulge in—no consensus was reached. Jinnah felt that there was no way of forcing the States to join either of the Dominions. Nonetheless, both Nehru and Jinnah felt some sort of agreements would have to be reached before the transfer of power, and thus the need for a States Department to replace the British Political Department.

In the meanwhile, the process of disintegration had already started. On 11th June, Travancore (in modern-day Kerala) announced that it had decided to set itself up as an independent State after 15th August, and that it was soon going to appoint a Trade Agent in Pakistan. On 12th June, the Nizam of Hyderabad also declared his intention to be an independent power. On 14th June, Congress strongly condemned the “Balkanisation of the country” and reiterated its position that no State had the right to declare independence and live in political isolation from the rest of India. Jinnah promptly issued a statement 4 days later saying that the States were free to remain independent if they wished, and no power had the right to compel them to do anything against their will. And so confusion prevailed.

The possibility that two-fifths of the land would return to an ambiguous political isolation was dreadfully dangerous to the integrity of India. The unification of India seemed doomed to failure just at the time when it was most likely to take place. “...the prophets of gloom predicted that the ship of Indian freedom would founder on the rock of the States.”⁴⁰

39. The more confidential records were already safely destroyed.

40. V. P. Menon: *Integration of the Indian States*, p. 91.

Winds of Change

Just when things seemed to be going along splendidly for Corfield, the about-turn began. Once the Congress decided to form a States Department, they picked Sardar Patel as their obvious choice. They trusted in the strong man of the party and expected him to sort out the tricky situation using a strong and firm hand. This he did, but far more subtly than the Princes, or even the Congress leaders expected. He knew and admired his opponent, Sir Conrad Corfield, and realised this was a time for rapid, quiet action, rather than loud battle cries and rash moves. He picked V. P. Menon for the job of Secretary of the States Department. Menon had intended to retire on the 15th of August, his dream of a free India having been realised. Sardar persuaded him to leave aside his plans for retirement and serve his country when it most needed him. Menon accepted. The combination of Menon's shrewd intelligence, and Patel's forceful personality was to prove a formidable combination.

Having got the necessary approval from Mountbatten, Menon started working at once. By having Paramountcy lapse the moment the British left, Corfield had made things difficult for the new Dominions. India would have to negotiate with each and every State over every little arrangement—army, railways, post, customs, currency, and others. But with only eight weeks to go, Menon proposed that the Princes could be approached and asked to accede on only three headings: Defence, External Affairs, and Communications. Menon realised that so far it was the British who were protecting the States from civil revolt, and with the British gone, in case popular agitations began, except for a few larger States which had their own well-established armies, the other States could only turn to India or Pakistan for help. Sardar Patel realised what Menon was hinting at—Sardar Patel was the head of the underground Congress movements in the Princely States.

Menon also brought in a measure of optimism in the otherwise dismal scenario. His view was that the lapse of Paramountcy was actually a blessing in disguise, for it gave India a completely clean slate to start with. If Paramountcy had passed on to the successor Governments, all the treaties between the States and British India would have passed on too—and some of these treaties included clauses of non-interference. To attempt integration with many hundred different treaties in place with many hundred different States would have turned out to be a nightmare. His view was correct indeed, as later events proved.

Menon had another brilliant idea—he enlisted the support of Lord Mountbatten, whom he felt would be very influential with the Princes, especially because of his personality and royal connections. Nehru also agreed to entrust Mountbatten with the task of negotiating with the Rulers on the issue of accession and also with dealing with Hyderabad. It was a stroke of genius—the Viceroy was on the side of the Indian Dominion, and against Corfield and the scheming of his Political Department.

Menon also issued a moving statement shortly before he assumed charge of the

States Department, in order to reassure the Rulers of the positive intentions of his office. He wrote: "This country with its institutions is the proud heritage of the people who inhabit it. It is an accident that some live in the States and some in British India, but all alike partake of its culture and character. We are knit together by bonds of blood and feeling no less than of self-interest. None can segregate us into segments; no impassable barriers can be set up between us. I suggest that it is therefore better for us to make laws sitting together as friends than to make treaties as aliens. I invite my friends the rulers of States and their people to the councils of the Constituent Assembly in this spirit of friendliness and co-operation in a joint endeavour, inspired by common allegiance to our motherland for the common good of us all... By common endeavour we can raise the country to a new greatness while lack of unity will expose us to fresh calamities. I hope the Indian States will bear in mind that the alternative to co-operation is anarchy and chaos which will overwhelm great and small in a common ruin if we [are] unable to act together in the minimum of common tasks."

In a strange sort of way, the very shortness of time, proved an advantage for Sardar Patel and Menon. On the 25th of July, just 3 weeks away from Independence, a momentous meeting was held with the Princes. Menon had prepared the Instrument of Accession—the treaty which would pledge the Princes to the Indian Dominion on the three subjects of Defence, External Affairs, and Communications.⁴¹ Mountbatten was at his charming, spectacular best. He was by now fully convinced that the States had to choose either India or Pakistan; independence for them was not an option.⁴² Despite the heat of July, the Viceroy arrived in full Viceregal uniform, "his chest flashing with a breastplate of orders, decorations and medals. He looked every inch a cousin of the King, symbol of their hopes, protector of their privileges."⁴³ He used all his persuasive skills, in turn bullying them and then playing to their little self-interests. He warned them that after 15th August he would no longer be in a position to mediate on their behalf as Crown Representative, and that Congress may not repeat their offer; but he also promised them that he would persuade Congress to continue giving them honours and titles. Mosley writes, "As the Princes sweated in the heat of the Delhi summer, ... he picked them out like schoolchildren and asked them whether they would sign. The expression on the face of even the richest of them was the sad, lost look of men in defeat."⁴⁴

There were no angry outbursts; Mountbatten had that remarkable skill of making

41. There was nothing to prevent India from extending its influence after Independence. The limitations and safeguards could, and were eventually made, valueless.

42. He particularly resented the lapse of Paramountcy after a visit by a distinguished Indian who pointed out that there existed over 327 petty States, with an average area of 20 square miles, an average population of 3000, and an average revenue of £1000 per annum. While previously these 'Rulers' had limited powers, with the lapse of Paramountcy, they would have powers of life and death over their subjects. (Leonard Mosley: *The Last Days of the British Raj*, p. 171)

43. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

44. *Ibid.*

the most unpleasant of moments palatable, even humorous. Every now and then, the hall would break into spurts of laughter. Mosley recounts that when Mountbatten questioned the Dewan of one large State whether his Maharajah would sign the Instrument of Accession, the Dewan said he had received no instructions from his master. When the Dewan reiterated he did not know his master's mind, Mountbatten promptly stared into a glass paperweight and said, "I will look into my crystal ball, and give the answer." Pause and heavy silence. "His Highness," continued the Viceroy dramatically, "asks you to sign the Instrument of Accession." The Princes broke into laughter; there was a round of applause.⁴⁵ Indeed, the Princes were signing their doom, but Mountbatten made it easier and more bearable.

One by one, the Princes of India lined up to sign the Instrument. The Maharajah of Baroda was the first kingdom to accede to the Indian Dominion; he signed, clasped his hands around Menon's neck, and wept like a child. The Maharajah of Bikaner followed suit; one of the Rajahs had a heart attack immediately after signing.

However, the problems were far from over; this was the easy part. A number of States were still to sign the Instrument of Accession. These were the important States of Hyderabad, Travancore, Kashmir, Mysore, Bhopal, and Jodhpur. A few small States—like Junagadh on the Kathiawar coast, in modern-day Gujarat—also held out.

The Last Mile

Travancore

The Dewan of Travancore had gone back to his State a little discomfited. He had been informed by Menon that in the case of a Communist uprising in his State, the Indian Dominion would refuse to help his State if he remained independent. The Dewan informed the Maharajah of Menon's and the Viceroy's advice that he sign the Instrument. In the meanwhile, the underground Congress organisation in Travancore started demonstrations against the Ruler. There were clashes in the streets, and the Dewan was seriously injured when he was stabbed by an unknown assailant. The Maharajah wired to the Viceroy his decision to sign the Instrument; Sardar Patel promptly called off the demonstrations. It was a clear demonstration of the power of Congress to express dissent forcefully in the Princely States; the message was not lost on the others, and more States signed the Instrument of Accession.

Corfield, it seems, was involved in making a last-ditch effort to persuade Bhopal to attempt a Third Front once again. Menon protested, and complained to the Viceroy that this was an unwanted interference. Corfield was asked to leave for England soon after. The Muslim League was not idle either. Tempting offers were being offered to

45. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

the States to join Pakistan, especially to the States on the borders.

Jodhpur

The Ruler of Jodhpur was a young, happy-go-lucky Hindu Ruler who liked polo, flying planes, and women. He was reckless and extravagant, and definitely not looking forward to life as part of the Indian Dominion. His State flanked both India and Pakistan, and he was within his right to accede to Pakistan, even if the majority of his subjects were Hindus. The Maharajah of Jodhpur took along with him the Maharajah of Jaisalmer, another State which flanked both Dominions, to meet Jinnah in the hope of a good deal. Jinnah was overjoyed to see them—perhaps other Rajput States would accede to Pakistan too if these two did so. He slid across a blank paper to the Maharajah of Jodhpur and said, “Write your terms on that, your Highness—and I will sign them.”

Jodhpur turned to Jaisalmer and asked him whether he would join him. Jaisalmer’s contention was that in the event of communal troubles, his State should be allowed to remain neutral. Jinnah assured him that there would be no such troubles anyway, and that he should not worry himself unnecessarily. That was it. Jodhpur realised, probably for the first time, what he might be getting into. He returned to Delhi to think things over.

Our man V. P. Menon was abreast of these developments. He knew he had to act fast to prevent disaster. He rushed to the hotel where the Maharajah of Jodhpur was put up, and asked to see him. His request was declined. When Menon said he had a message from the Viceroy, he was shown in. Once inside, Menon declared that the Viceroy would like to see him at once. They proceeded to the Viceroy’s residence.

Mountbatten was, in fact, completely unaware of what was happening. Menon left Jodhpur in the waiting room and rushed to the Viceroy’s bedroom, where he was shown in. He briefed the Viceroy and asked him to talk Jodhpur out of his plan to accede to Pakistan. The two went down to meet the Maharajah, who was by now beginning to get suspicious that something was amiss. It was the kind of intractable situation Mountbatten loved.

Mosley recounts, “He was immediately his most charming and yet his steeliest self, a patient schoolmaster about to read a lesson to a promising but unruly pupil.”⁴⁶ Mountbatten told Jodhpur that while he could accede to Pakistan if he wished, did he realise what the consequences would be? His decision to join Pakistan might also cause communal unrests within Jodhpur State. The Maharajah promptly replied that Jinnah had given him a blank sheet of paper to write his own terms. What would they give him? Menon replied, “I’ll give you a blank sheet of paper too, if you like. But it

46. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

will bring you nothing but false hopes, like the other.”⁴⁷ Eventually it was agreed that Menon would make minor concessions to Jodhpur and set out the terms for the Ruler in a few days’ time. Mountbatten was delighted at this outcome; called out, he left the room for a while.

The young Maharajah suddenly flicked out a revolver and pointed it straight at Menon’s head. “You tricked me. You got me here on false pretences. I’m going to kill you. I refuse to accept dictation from you.” Menon faced the angry, agitated Prince with as much dignity as he could muster and replied, “If you think by killing me you will get more concessions, you are mistaken. Stop these juvenile theatricals.” At this point Jodhpur burst into laughter and put away his pistol. Three days later, Menon went to the Jodhpur Palace, and the Maharajah signed the Instrument of Accession; the Rajput States were saved from Pakistan.⁴⁸

Bhopal and Indore

A few days later the Nawab of Bhopal signed too, his attempts at a Third Force having failed. In spite of his active efforts against accession, his surrender was dignified and he wrote to Sardar Patel that though he had fought hard to preserve the independence of his State, having conceded defeat, he would be as staunch a friend, as he was an opponent. “I harbour no ill feelings towards anyone,” he wrote, “...for throughout [I] have received understanding and courtesy from your side. I now wish to tell you that so long as you maintain your firm stand against disruptive forces in the country and continue to be a friend of the States as you have shown you are, you will find in me a loyal and faithful ally.” Sardar rose to the occasion and replied, “...I do not look upon the accession of your State to the Indian Dominion as either a victory for us or a defeat for you. It is only right and propriety which have triumphed in the end, and, in that triumph, you and I have played our respective roles... During the last few months it had been a matter of great disappointment and regret to me that your undoubted talents and abilities were not at the country’s disposal in the critical times through which we were passing, and I therefore particularly value this assurance of co-operation and friendship.”⁴⁹

Indore was another recalcitrant State. It had stayed away from the meeting of July 25th and desisted from making contact with any one, not even the Mahrattia Princes who were delegated to meet him and persuade him to sign. Subsequently, the Maharajah met with Lord Mountbatten; in the course of the meeting he did not commit

47. *Ibid.*

48. Not before Jodhpur had forced the abstemious Menon to drink with him, and then took him to his royal plane, wherein the drunken Maharajah flew from Jodhpur to Delhi, doing every acrobatic trick in the book. A sick, but successful, Menon finally landed in Delhi. The Maharajah, incidentally, later died in a plane crash. (*Ibid.*, p. 180)

49. V. P. Menon: *Integration of the Indian States*, p. 119.

himself either way. One morning, however, the States Department received in an ordinary postal envelope, the Instrument of Accession and the Standstill Agreement⁵⁰ signed by the Maharajah.

Thus, one by one, the States geographically contiguous to the Indian Dominion signed. Dholpur, Bharatpur, Bilaspur, Nabha—one after the other, they fell in line.

Three States, however, continued to hold out even beyond the 15th of August. Impending chaos had been averted, but the position of Hyderabad, Kashmir, and Junagadh was still uncertain.

Junagadh

Junagadh was a rich and small principedom in Kathiawar. It was ruled by the only Muslim king among the Kathiawar States, and its Ruler was somewhat special. As Mosley writes, he had a taste for the “exotic, bizarre, and the brutal”. Junagadh is a beautiful place, known for Gir lions, and the exquisite marble Jain temples upon its steep mountain slopes. It is ironic that close to a centre of non-violence the Maharajahs of Junagadh had developed a distinct liking for more sanguinary pursuits. One of the erstwhile Rulers habitually disposed of his political opponents and courtiers by ‘walking them off’ a castle orifice to the rather sharp rocks below. The Nawab was passionate about breeding dogs and hunting. He had over a hundred and fifty dogs in his palace—each with its own room, attendant, serving table, bed, and telephone.⁵¹

In the meeting of the July 25th, the Nawab had indicated he would accede to India. This was thought natural—nine-tenths of his subjects were Hindu, he was surrounded on all sides by Rulers who had opted for India. Its nearest link to Pakistan was by sea, 385 kilometres away. However, he was secretly in touch with Pakistan. It is doubtful Jinnah really wanted Junagadh—it would have turned out to be an administrative nightmare. But Junagadh was a pawn in the games Congress and the Muslim League were playing at the time.

All eyes were trained to a more important State up north, the prosperous and beautiful mountain kingdom of Kashmir. Sri Hari Singh, the Ruler of Kashmir, had not yet decided in whose favour he would accede. The situation in his State was the exact opposite of that of Junagadh—he was a Hindu Maharajah ruling over an overwhelmingly Muslim population. For Jinnah, Junagadh was the testing ground for Congress.

The Maharajah of Junagadh was convinced that if he acceded to India, it would mean the end of his dogs, hunting, and concubines. Abdul Kadir, a Muslim League politician convinced him on the other hand that acceding to Pakistan would mean he could continue to do what he liked even as Pakistani armed forces would move in to

50. An interim arrangement to maintain status quo in a number of treaties, before new agreements with the Dominions could be worked out.

51. Leonard Mosley: *The Last Days of the British Raj*, pp. 182-83.

curb any uprising against the Nawab. Persuaded thus, he decided to accede to Pakistan. A press statement from the Nawab went on to say that after much consideration about the welfare of the State and its people, he had decided to accede to Pakistan!

When the Indian States Department read about the accession in the papers, they were thunderstruck. Even Jinnah knew the impossibility of the situation. Junagadh was not one tract of territory; several of its enclaves were inside other States which had already acceded to India. In the middle of Junagadh itself were a number of Mangrol enclaves, all acceded to India. This was an out and out political fiasco, and the Muslim League leaders were laughing away in glee. When the Congress telegraphed Liaquat Ali Khan to ask him whether or not Pakistan had accepted the accession of Junagadh, they got no reply. They were enjoying the chaos of the situation and the fury of Congress, and had no intention of helping out. Finally on the 13th of September, Pakistan replied that it had indeed accepted Junagadh. They had no intention of doing anything immediately, though.

Hindu refugees soon started pouring out of Junagadh. At the same time, Junagadh forces moved into the Mangrol enclaves located at the heart of Junagadh territory. This was the chance for India to act. By moving into Mangrol, Junagadh had committed an act of aggression and breached into Indian territory. The Indian Army laid a blockade on Junagadh, and a few weeks later, it marched into Junagadh, laden with supplies; the forces were given a rapturous welcome by the population. The Nawab had already fled to Pakistan on his private plane with as many dogs as he could take. He had also taken with him the family jewels.⁵²

It is likely that Pakistan was overjoyed, even though it issued public statements saying that it was outraged at the events. When a Muslim Prince of a Hindu State wished to accede to Pakistan, the Congress had refused. Here was a lesson for the future of Kashmir. The Muslim League hoped the world was watching—they would now be within their right, or so they thought, to oppose Sri Hari Singh, if he chose to accede to India.

Kashmir

As Independence approached, the Maharajah of Kashmir desisted from saying anything. He did not wish to accede to Pakistan personally, but did not particularly like the Congress—and Nehru especially—either. But Kashmir was a crucial State. It shared borders with both India and Pakistan; it also shared borders with Tibet, China, Russia, and Afghanistan.

Even then, it was clear that if the destiny of Kashmir wasn't settled, there would be open dissent between the two new Dominions. Taking this into account, it is surprising that Mountbatten did not push for the Maharajah to make up his mind

52. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

quickly. When the two met in the June of 1947, Hari Singh avoided talking about the issue; Mountbatten advised him that an independent Kashmir was not feasible, and would not be recognised as a Dominion by the British Government. However, Mountbatten encouraged him to take his time and decide to accede to either Pakistan or India. The Maharajah had indeed a tough choice to make. On one hand, if he acceded to Pakistan, the non-Muslims of Jammu and Ladakh, as well as a number of Muslims supportive of the Congress, would resent such action. If he acceded to India, there would be revolts in Gilgit as well as in the border areas contiguous to Pakistan. The Maharajah could have called a conference of the representatives of the people and ascertained their views, but he was in no mood to do so, and continued toying with the idea of an independent Kashmir. Finally, on the last day of Mountbatten's visit, Hari Singh declared he was ill, and avoided meeting him.⁵³

The Government of Jammu and Kashmir then announced that it would like negotiate Standstill Agreements with both Pakistan and India. Pakistan signed one, but India desisted for the time being, wanting to study the implications of doing so.⁵⁴

Relations between Pakistan and Kashmir, however, steadily deteriorated, even after the Standstill Agreement. Pakistan, Kashmir claimed, had cut off crucial supplies—petrol, food, and other essential commodities—in a blatant violation of the Standstill Agreement, and in order to coerce the Ruler. Border raids were also being carried out.

The Maharajah, however, continued to procrastinate long after 15th August. On 22nd October, 1947, the all-out invasion of Kashmir began. Pathan tribesmen, backed by the Pakistani Army, invaded the State. They advanced rapidly towards Srinagar. The Maharajah appealed for help the next day. It was decided that Menon should fly immediately to Srinagar to ascertain the situation before any precipitative action was taken. Menon found the Maharajah in a state of lone helplessness. There was practically no State Forces left; most of the Muslims in the army and police had deserted. An atmosphere of calamity hung over Srinagar. Menon advised the Maharajah to leave Srinagar along with his family and possessions. Menon himself left early the next morning, and went straight to a meeting in Delhi. Mountbatten believed it would be improper to move troops into a State which was at the moment an independent country. He further expressed his view that accession should be “conditional on the will of the people being ascertained by a plebiscite after the raiders had been driven out of the State and law and order had been restored. This was readily agreed to by Nehru and other ministers.”⁵⁵

Menon flew to Jammu, where the King had arrived by car after a whole night's

53. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

54. Even though Independence was just a few weeks ago, Menon admits, “...our hands were already full and, if truth be told, I for one had simply no time to think of Kashmir.” (V. P. Menon: *Integration of the Indian States*, p. 395)

55. *Ibid.*, p. 399.

driving, and got the Instrument of Accession signed by him. He returned straight away to Delhi, and went into another prolonged meeting. We have an interesting account of this meeting and of the events thereafter from Sam Manekshaw, the first Field-Marshal of the Indian Army:

“The cabinet meeting was presided by Mountbatten. There was Jawaharlal Nehru, there was Sardar Patel, there was Sardar Baldev Singh. There were other ministers whom I did not know and did not want to know, because I had nothing to do with them. Sardar Baldev Singh I knew because he was the minister for defence, and I knew Sardar Patel, because Patel would insist that V P Menon take me with him to the various states.

“Almost every morning the Sardar would sent for V P, H M Patel and myself. While Maniben (*Patel's daughter and de facto secretary*) would sit cross-legged with a Parker fountain pen taking notes, Patel would say, ‘V P, I want Baroda. Take him with you.’ I was the bogeyman. So I got to know the Sardar very well.

“At the morning meeting he handed over the (*Accession*) thing. Mountbatten turned around and said, ‘Come on Manekji (*He called me Manekji instead of Manekshaw*), what is the military situation?’ I gave him the military situation, and told him that unless we flew in troops immediately, we would have lost Srinagar, because going by road would take days, and once the tribesmen got to the airport and Srinagar, we couldn’t fly troops in. Everything was ready at the airport.

“As usual Nehru talked about the United Nations, Russia, Africa, God almighty, everybody, until Sardar Patel lost his temper. He said, ‘Jawaharlal, do you want Kashmir, or do you want to give it away?’ He (*Nehru*) said, ‘Of course, I *want* Kashmir.’ Then he (*Patel*) said, ‘Please give your orders.’ And before he could say anything Sardar Patel turned to me and said, ‘You have got your orders.’

“I walked out, and we started flying in troops at about 11 o’clock or 12 o’clock. I think it was the Sikh regiment under Ranjit Rai that was the first lot to be flown in. And then we continued flying troops in. That is all I know about what happened. Then all the fighting took place.”⁵⁶

Indeed, many an Indian soldier proved his mettle in the months to come. Jinnah considered officially sending Pakistani troops, but then decided not to when it was told to him that as Kashmir had legally acceded to India, British officers serving in the Pakistani Army during the interim period would not participate in such an effort.

On October 30, Pakistan issued a statement that the Kashmir accession was “based on fraud, violence, and as such cannot be recognised”. It was the beginning of a conflict which remains unresolved to this day.

56. <http://www.rediff.com/freedom/0710jha.htm> (accessed on 22/05/2007); Excerpted from *Kashmir 1947, Rival Versions of History*, by Prem Shankar Jha, Oxford University Press, 1996.

Hyderabad

Hyderabad was a State whose coffers were full, whose Nizam was strongly anti-Congress, and which had a well-trained and equipped army. It was determined to remain independent at any cost. 15th August came, and went. Elaborate negotiations involving Hyderabad, the Indian Government, and Mountbatten dragged on. The days turned into weeks, the weeks into months. By June 1948, Mountbatten, who had until then been confident of resolving the problem of Hyderabad in India's favour, left India. By now, the minority community was holding all the important offices of the State, and the Razakars—the Nizam's fanatic army—was in control of the cabinet. Hyderabad also believed that India would not be in a position to do anything forceful because her hands were full dealing with Kashmir. The situation in Hyderabad rapidly deteriorated after Mountbatten's departure. As a hostile State right in the middle of India, the danger was real.

On September 9, 1948, after much deliberation and procrastination, the Indian Army was ordered to enter Hyderabad State and restore stability both in and around the State. A week later, the Nizam surrendered.⁵⁷ The integration of the Princely States was finally complete.

In Retrospect

Not many realised the serious threat of the Balkanisation of the country when the British Government decided to adopt the policy of 'lapse of Paramountcy' upon Independence. Not many, even today, recognise the almost miraculous series of events that prevented that threat from realising itself.

On the 15th of August the impossible, it seemed, had been accomplished. The proud Princes had signed on the dotted line. Within a span of three weeks, most of the 600 odd States had acceded to India. The whole country was under one political umbrella.⁵⁸ By the policy of accession, the fundamental unity of the country was assured. India was now a single federation, its provinces and States integral parts of it. In his address to the Constituent Assembly on the morning of the 15th of August, Lord Mountbatten remarked, "It is a great triumph for the realism and sense of responsibility of the Rulers and the Governments of the States, as well as for the Government of India, that it was possible to produce an Instrument of Accession which was equally acceptable to both sides; and one, moreover, so simple and so

57. V. P. Menon: *Integration of the Indian States*, p. 376.

58. Independence, however, came and brought in its wake the most painful holocaust in our political history. In the nine months between August 1947 and the spring of 1948, between fourteen to sixteen million people were displaced from their homes, one lakh women were kidnapped, and over six lakh were murdered—men, women, children, the young, the aged, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh. It was a costly price for freedom. (Mosley: *The Last Days of the British Raj*, p. 243)

straightforward that within less than three weeks practically all the States concerned had signed the Instrument of Accession and the Standstill Agreement. There is thus established a unified political structure covering over 300 million people and the major part of this great subcontinent.”⁵⁹

The Princely States were merged into the Indian Union in a few short weeks after centuries of arrogant independence from the rest of the subcontinent. As Mosley writes, this was a “remarkable achievement on the part of India’s strategists— perhaps the most remarkable of all the events leading up to independence.”⁶⁰

For the carving out of Pakistan, India ceded 364, 737 square miles and over 81 million people. By the integration of the States, India added 500,000 square miles and a population of over 86 million (excluding Kashmir).⁶¹ In the words of Sardar Patel, “the great ideal of geographical, political, and economic unification of India, an ideal which for centuries remained a distant dream and which appeared as remote and as difficult of attainment as ever even after the advent of Indian Independence [was consummated by the policy of integration].”⁶²

Menon writes that his feeling was one of profound thankfulness to God. A breathing space had been obtained during which the relationship between the new Government and the States could evolve. In the months to come after Independence, the States were gradually incorporated into India. By October 1948, with the fall of Hyderabad, the last of the Princely States ceased to exist. By Republic Day in 1950, all the States had the same constitutional relation with the Centre as the provinces had.

Menon further expresses his admiration for Sardar for his masterly handling of the Rulers. The Rulers soon came to respect Sardar and his advice to them. Menon also writes that the charm and tact of Lord Mountbatten was also crucial in winning over the Rulers. “It was because of his abundant love for India, and not merely because he was obliged to do so, that he had taken upon himself the task of negotiating with the rulers on the question of accession. And once he undertook any task he invariably put the whole weight of his personality into what he was doing and spared himself no effort... India can never forget the magnificent service he rendered at a critical juncture in her history.”⁶³ Indeed, V. P. Menon, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and Lord Mountbatten—whatever their other political legacies—deserve our praise for their crucial work in India’s hour of need. In the dark days following the partition of the country, the success of integration provided consolation, hope, and a political stability without which India’s future would have been severely endangered.

The rapid sequence of events pertaining to the integration of the States in the

59. <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol5p2.htm> (accessed on 22/05/07).

60. Leonard Mosley: *The Last Days of the British Raj*, p. 192.

61. V. P. Menon: *Integration of the Indian States*, p. 490.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

few weeks before Independence, and the few months after it, has a feel of the miraculous to it. It is only appropriate here to refer once again to Sri Aurobindo's 15th August Message:

At one moment it almost seemed as if in the very act of liberation she [India] would fall back into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. But fortunately it now seems probable that this danger will be averted and a large and powerful, though not yet a complete union will be established.

Sri Aurobindo's clear reference to the integration in his Message is significant; I would like to take it as an indication that something Else worked unfelt through the protagonists of our story, that a greater Power prepared the circumstances and issues that led to the formation of an India essentially unified.

DEVDIP GANGULI

Another dream, the spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.

Sri Aurobindo

THE POLITICAL UNITY OF INDIA

THE integration of the Princely States in the period of Independence was an event of great importance and it saved India from further divisions and political problems. A few points need to be kept in mind which will help us in the future, when the need of forming a confederation of South Asian States becomes more urgent.

Firstly, although India never achieved complete political unity in her past history, she did come to some approximations in certain periods. The concept of political unity was always there in the minds of the Vedic Rishis and a few attempts were made several times in the past with some success, but these, however, did not last long enough.

Secondly, although the British did create a strong administrative unity, they did not really create a strong political unity; the policy of 'divide and rule' that they consistently followed had for its aim not a creation of political unity but a weakening of this unity. The consequences are visible in India even today.

Another point that needs to be noted is that in the formation of nations, foreign rule has played an important role. Like most other nations which were united as a consequence of foreign occupation, India too got the necessary fillip to unite under foreign British rule. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

It will be useful to dwell a little upon this aid lent by foreign rule to the process of nation-making and see how it works. History abounds with illustrations. But in some cases the phenomenon of foreign domination is momentary and imperfect, in others long-enduring and complete, in others often repeated in various forms. In some instances the foreign element is rejected, its use once over, in others it is absorbed, in others accepted with more or less assimilation for a longer or briefer period as a ruling caste. The principle is the same, but it is worked variously by Nature according to the needs of the particular case. There is none of the modern nations in Europe which has not had to pass through a phase more or less prolonged, more or less complete, of foreign domination in order to realise its nationality. In Russia and England it was the domination of a foreign conquering race which rapidly became a ruling caste and was in the end assimilated and absorbed, in Spain the succession of the Roman, Goth and Moor, in Italy the overlordship of the Austrian, in the Balkans the long suzerainty of the Turk, in Germany the transient yoke of Napoleon. But in all cases the essential has been a shock or a pressure which would either waken a loose psychological unity to the necessity of organising itself from within or would crush out, dispirit or deprive of power, vitality and reality the more obstinate factors of disunion.

(CWSA, Vol. 25, pp. 308-09)

Fourthly, a study of Indian history will show us that the Indian people had developed a sound political system, which ensured the participation of the whole community in all its activities. It was based on the principle of an organic self-determining communal life. The subcontinent of India was also united on a sound cultural and spiritual basis. This unity was based on the geographical unity of India, the Sanskrit language, the religion of Hinduism and the common reverence for the Vedas. However India could not develop a system to prevent invasions and arrive at a sound and strong political unity. The reasons for this are explained now.

With the advent of invaders from across the Northwest border, the necessity of a strong political centre began to manifest itself. This took the form of empires. These empires saved India from the foreign invasions; in fact all the invaders were assimilated by Indian culture and civilisation and they became an integral part of the nation. But at the same time, the centralising tendency, which came inevitably with the formation of empires, subconsciously led to the wearing out of the freedom and vigour of the subordinate units. The result was that whenever the empire became weak, the regional tendency arose with vigour and weakened the unity of the nation. And this happened because the empire suffered by the inevitable haste, violence and artificiality of its first construction to meet a pressing need; that prevented it from being the deliberate, natural and steady evolution in the old solid Indian manner of the truth of her deepest ideal. As a consequence, the attempt to establish a centralised imperial monarchy brought with it not a free synthesis but a breaking down of regional autonomies. Although their institutions and customs were respected in accordance with the Indian principle, and at first, even their political institutions were not wholly annulled but brought within the imperial system, these could not really flourish under the shadow of the imperial centralisation. The free peoples of the ancient Indian world began to disappear, their broken materials serving afterwards to create the now existing Indian races. And it can be concluded that although for a long time, the great popular assemblies continued to remain in vigour, their function in the end tended to become more mechanical, and their vitality to decline and suffer. The urban republics tended to become more and more mere municipalities of the organised kingdom or empire. The habits of mind created by the imperial centralisation and the weakening or disappearance of the more dignified free popular institutions of the past created a sort of spiritual gap; there was on the one side the contentment with any government that gave them security and did not interfere too much with their religion, life and customs, and on the other, the imperial administration beneficent and splendid no doubt, but no longer that living head of a free and living people contemplated by the earlier and the true political mind of India. These results became prominent only with the decline, but they were there in seed and rendered almost inevitable by the adoption of a mechanical method of unification. The advantages gained were those of a stronger and more coherent military action and a more regularised and uniform administration, but these could not compensate in the end

for the impairment of the free organic diversified life which was the true expression of the mind and temperament of the people.

The Fall from the Rule of Dharma

Finally there was a worse development and that was a fall from the high ideal of the Dharma. In the struggle of kingdom with kingdom for supremacy, a habit of Machiavellian statecraft replaced the nobler ethical ideals of the past; aggressive ambition was left without any sufficient spiritual or moral check and there was a coarsening of the national mind in the ethics of politics and government. The deterioration was held in abeyance by a religious spirit and high intelligence for a long time and did not come to a head till more than a thousand years later. It was then that it came into full force in the worst period of the decline when unrestrained mutual aggression, unbridled egoism of princes and leaders, total lack of political principle and capacity for effective union, want of a common patriotism, and traditional indifference of the common people to a change of rulers gave the whole of the vast peninsula into the grasp of a handful of merchants from across the seas. But however tardy the worst results were in their coming, and however redeemed and held in check were they at first by the political greatness of the empire and a splendid intellectual and artistic culture and by frequent spiritual revivals, India had already lost the chance of a natural and perfect flowering of her true mind and innermost spirit in the political life of her peoples. It was at such a time that the Muslim invasions took place.

We may thus conclude that the political unity of India cannot be achieved unless it is based on a sound cultural and spiritual unity. For, spiritual unity is a large and flexible thing and does not insist like the political and external on centralisation and uniformity; rather it lives diffused in the system and permits readily a great diversity and freedom of life.

In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

After all the spiritual and cultural is the only enduring unity and it is by a persistent mind and spirit much more than by an enduring physical body and outward organisation that the soul of a people survives. This is a truth the positive Western mind may be unwilling to understand or concede, and yet its proofs are written across the whole story of the ages. The ancient nations, contemporaries of India, and many younger born than she are dead and only their monuments left behind them. Greece and Egypt exist only on the map and in name, for it is not the soul of Hellas or the deeper nation-soul that built Memphis which we now find at Athens or at Cairo. Rome imposed a political and a purely outward cultural unity on the Mediterranean peoples, but their living spiritual and cultural oneness she could not create, and therefore the east broke away

from the west, Africa kept no impress of the Roman interlude, and even the western nations still called Latin could offer no living resistance to barbarian invaders and had to be reborn by the infusion of a foreign vitality to become modern Italy, Spain and France. But India still lives and keeps the continuity of her inner mind and soul and spirit with the India of the ages. Invasion and foreign rule, the Greek, the Parthian and the Hun, the robust vigour of Islam, the levelling steam-roller heaviness of the British occupation and the British system, the enormous pressure of the Occident have not been able to drive or crush the ancient soul out of the body her Vedic Rishis made for her. At every step, under every calamity and attack and domination, she has been able to resist and survive either with an active or a passive resistance. And this she was able to do in her great days by her spiritual solidarity and power of assimilation and reaction, expelling all that would not be absorbed, absorbing all that could not be expelled, and even after the beginning of the decline she was still able to survive by the same force, abated but not slayable, retreating and maintaining for a time her ancient political system in the south, throwing up under the pressure of Islam Rajput and Sikh and Mahratta to defend her ancient self and its idea, persisting passively where she could not resist actively, condemning to decay each empire that could not answer her riddle or make terms with her, awaiting always the day of her revival. And even now it is a similar phenomenon that we see in process before our eyes. And what shall we say then of the surpassing vitality of the civilisation that could accomplish this miracle and of the wisdom of those who built its foundation not on things external but on the spirit and the inner mind and made a spiritual and cultural oneness the root and stock of her existence and not solely its fragile flower, the eternal basis and not the perishable superstructure?

(CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 430-31)

KITTU REDDY

The final dream was a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness and begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed him since he first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society.

Sri Aurobindo

SRI AUROBINDO'S FIVE DREAMS— SIXTY YEARS AFTER

ON 15 August 1947 Sri Aurobindo announced that he had five dreams in which free India would play a significant role. What can we make out regarding its status sixty years down the line?

1. A revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India.

As he had forecast, the communal divide that created the partition has now hardened further, raising walls within the country, and civil strife provoked by linguistic, caste and regional parochialism mar the fair face of Mother India. The language problem has been exaggerated by politicians into a formidable barrier, so much so that travellers from one region face increasing difficulties—as the years pass—to communicate with fellow-countrymen in other parts of India. The principle “for the children of the soil only” adopted by various states effectively ensures the growth of insularity and prevents the growth of familiarity with other cultures that makes for national unity. The north-east refuses to be integrated into a polity that it finds nothing in common with and a system of governance that has failed to carry it along on the path of development. Bihar, the centre of India’s greatest empires, has degenerated into a state known for mis-governance. Bengal, the sometime capital of India and torchbearer of the Indian renaissance and the freedom movement, has declined steadily and steeply into intellectual mediocrity and moral decadence, having quite decisively abandoned the spiritual. Perhaps its roots lie in the ancient myth of the hubris of Paundraka who proclaimed himself the true Vasudeva and challenged Sri Krishna.

Sri Aurobindo had stated that the problem of the depressed classes would be solved “without schism or fissure”. Unfortunately, unscrupulous politicians with only short-term personal gains in view keep opening fresh wounds in the body politic, stoking the flames of linguistic and intercaste animosity till the caste cauldron boils over. Moreover, as the N. N. Vohra Committee report submitted to Parliament on the golden jubilee of Independence stated bluntly, the perverse nexus among the politician, the criminal, the police, the executive and even the judiciary has imperilled the Indian polity, and corruption—intellectual and otherwise—has eaten into its very vitals. The highest court of the land once demanded an action-taken report on what government had done about the recommendations made by Vohra, but did not pursue the matter for reasons best known to itself. Taking recourse to shameless sophistry, governments do not hesitate to invest criminals with the formal authority of cabinet posts while renowned institutes of learning invite them to address their students. There are no statesmen who remind the leaders of Sri Aurobindo’s warning that the persistence of civil strife makes “even a new invasion and foreign conquest” possible.

In the midst of the ever-darkening gloom, faith offers the only light. Fervently we pin all our hopes on Sri Aurobindo's trenchant assertion, "the division must go; unity must and will be achieved..."

2. *The resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia.*

In the new millennium, it is a reality. The Far Eastern countries have overtaken the West in the twin fields of knowledge-engineering and money-making. The overwhelming success of tiny Japan's business systems has compelled the management savants of the West to study and teach the Zen way to worldly success in motorcycle maintenance, war or otherwise! Business concerns have compelled USA to accord "Most favoured nation" status to their sometime favourite whipping boy, the inscrutable mandarin. China itself has given a new content and form to Communism after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, while maintaining its totalitarianism and the unenviable world record for the largest number of executions of corrupt officials. At home, West Bengal, with the longest lasting stable government and for three decades under communist rule, now proactively sponsors Capitalism.

3. *A world union... multilateral citizenship, willed interchange or voluntary fusion of cultures.*

The European Union has shown the way and gone a step farther by introducing a common currency. Business concerns have led to the forging of regional country-blocs that will usher in a common citizenship and currency. Food, mankind's first production of culture, is integrating widely disparate cultures through the phenomenon of fusion which is also reflected in humanity's most sublime art-form: music. The Millennium Development Goals subscribed to by most member countries of the United Nations aim precisely at the "fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind" that Sri Aurobindo spoke of in his speech. The problem is the absence of "that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer (which) may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift development." As a matter of fact, the word "statesman" itself appears to be as much a misnomer in India today as in most of the other countries. Otherwise we would not have to witness pogroms and the most horrific civil wars going on for years in Cambodia, African countries, Indonesia, Myanmar and elsewhere with the powerful nations not just looking the other way but doing nothing to put a stop to the supply of illegal arms to the combatants. We seem to be caught

as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Matthew Arnold: "Dover Beach"

Indeed, T. S. Eliot seems to have been so very right in wondering,

Where is the life we have lost in living
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

As Sri Aurobindo put it so pithily, “only human imbecility and stupid selfishness can prevent it (the unification of nations).” Both, unfortunately, are in evidence in abundant measure. Quite uncannily, Vyasa’s description of Kali Yuga in *Harivamsa* fits the twenty-first century to a “T”. The saving grace lies in Sri Aurobindo’s assurance, “but these cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will.” Only, the ordinary human being, thrashing about frenziedly as he is sucked remorselessly into the depths of these Serbonian bogs, sobs aloud, “How long, O Lord, how long!”

4. *The spiritual gift of India to the world.*

The evidence of this is far too well known to need spelling out. Even within the country the powerful resurgence of popular interest in the mantras of the Vedas and Upanishads and in the Epics, pervading the gamut of media (literature, compact discs, DVDs, tv, computer animation) and the sudden proliferation of *yajnic* performances holds forth hope that it will foster a deeper search for the spiritual truths lying behind the glitzy packaging and the fascination with ritual. There is, however, a new phenomenon that has emerged threatening to overshadow the pristine truth of India’s spirituality by a cloud of fundamentalist confusion, “red in tooth and claw”, hiding behind the transparent excuse of battling communalism. While in *artha* and *kāma* India appears to be soaring higher and higher in the spiralling gyre of development, it seems, indeed, that it has lost touch with its spiritual roots and ‘the falcon can no longer hear the falconer’. In terms of *dharma* ‘things seem to be falling apart, the centre does not hold’. When we look around for comfort in the fellowship of good men, what we experience instead is that ‘the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of a passionate intensity’.

5. *A step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness.*

Indirect evidence of the advancement in evolution is scattered around the globe in the astonishing advancements in technology in all fields, shrinking the globe to a situation where one can indeed say “the earth is flat”, in a worldwide reaching out from the heart to succour the distressed, and in the remarkable intelligence right from infancy displayed by the children of the new millennium.

“SLOWLY THE LIGHT GROWS GREATER IN THE EAST...”

“PEOPLE of the West say that acquiring things will make them happy, but in the East we believe that we are born with this happiness within us.” These were the words of Ruming Pan, a Chinese student in her early twenties who was having dinner at the table adjoining ours and whom we had invited to join us, as she was alone and we were entertaining our Chinese business delegates at the Park Sheraton in Chennai, India. She had made this statement in support of her earlier observation that China was very much like India and different from the United States, where she was pursuing a degree in Business Management at the Emory University and had currently been posted on a project to Chennai. She exuded a quiet confidence, was firmly rooted in her culture yet open to fresh influences; anchored within herself while choosing to travel thousands of kilometres to the West to learn about, participate in and master the external environment. She was completely at ease with her Asian identity amidst the Western milieu of which she was presently a part and could easily assimilate the two. To me she epitomised the Resurgent East, the New Asia.

In 1947, a major part of Asia was under foreign rule. Available figures for 1950 tell an interesting story. Compared to 17% of the world’s population and 56% of the world’s income that arose from the Western World, Asia housed 67% of the world’s population but was only responsible for 19% of the income. In 1955 Taiwan was as poor as Zaire and South Korea was no richer than Sudan. In 1960 each Japanese had one eighth of the dollar income of each American. At that time it might not have seemed altogether insane to argue that Africa would outperform Asia over the next three decades.

It was during such a time and age that Sri Aurobindo dreamt the seemingly impossible dream. In his message of August 15, 1947, Sri Aurobindo said that one of his dreams that seemed on the way to fulfilment was “the resurgence and liberation of Asia and her return to the great role which she had played in the progress of human civilisation...”

Over the next 40 years from 1947, the whole of Asia got liberated from the foreign dominion, and even while much of the world faced periods of economic recession, East Asia persevered on its own in a period that later became known as the East Asian Miracle. In 1992, Asia had climbed to 33% of the world’s income and as analysts prepared for the turn of the century, many predicted this trend would continue, and even went as far as to state that by the year 2025, Asia would produce over 50% of the world’s income, stepping in as the new economic superpower. In the past 35 years, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan have transformed themselves from technologically backwards and poor economies to relatively modern, affluent economies. Each has experienced more than a fourfold increase in per capita income. In each, a significant number of firms are producing technologically complex

products competitive with firms in Europe, Japan, and the United States. Their growth performance has exceeded that of virtually all comparable economies.

Several reasons have been attributed to this unprecedented growth of Asia but none of them are able to explain it completely. What really happened nobody really knows. As Richard Nelson put it in a recent review of Growth Theory, “the extremely uneven performance among nations that were very poor as of 1960 remains a nagging puzzle”. The phenomenon has rightly come to be known as a “miracle” which the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines as “an act or happening that cannot be explained by the laws of nature” or a “wonderful surprising unexpected event”.

The Asian countries have been the fastest growing economies in the world—a geographical concentration so extraordinary that the World Bank estimates that there is only one possibility in ten thousand that it happened at random. There seems to be an unseen plan behind this rise which is difficult to explain using known theories of economic growth. It can only be explained from an evolutionary and spiritual point of view.

The 19th and the 20th centuries belonged to Europe and the US and were representative of the Age of Individualism and Reason. The next age according to Sri Aurobindo is the Subjective Age and for this the rise of Asia and in Asia, India is a must and Asia would rise not for herself but for the progress of human civilisation: “...in the next great stage of human progress it is not a material but a spiritual, moral and psychical advance that has to be made and for this a free Asia and in Asia a free India must take the lead...for the spiritual and intellectual benefit of the human race.”

At this stage, we need to clarify that Asia and the Indian subcontinent form a region which is not just a geographical territory, but a culture with a shared set of values and a distinct psychological identity. By the rise of Asia and India, is therefore meant a resurgence of a certain set of values that have been nurtured in this cradle of civilisation from times immemorial. And what are these values? What does Asia and India stand for? What is the meaning of the rise of Asia and India?

In his famous Uttarpara Speech, Sri Aurobindo says, “When therefore it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall be great. When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the Sanatana Dharma that shall expand and extend itself over the world. It is for the *dharma* and by the *dharma* that India exists.”

Regarding Asia, Sri Aurobindo says, “...Asia young, strong and vigorous, dowered with the gift of immortality and the secret of self-transmutation, is preparing to step forward and possess the future. She alone can teach the world the secret of immortality which she possesses and in order that she may do so, she must reign.”

If by the rise of India is meant the rise of the Sanatana Dharma and if Asia stands for its quest for immortality, then where is the quest of immortality or for the

eternal religion in GDP growth and per capita incomes? Where is God in the midst of rising skylines, towering skyscrapers, booming trade and flourishing economies?

We ask this question because we see only the external and material rise of Asia as we are trained in viewing the world mentally and objectively. When we are unable to perceive the spiritual in one human being how can we see the Will of the Divine in this complex national or regional phenomenon which is replete with currents and cross-currents of social, political and economic issues and problems? But just as there are certain pointers that hint at the spiritual nature of a person,—for instance, equality in the face of circumstances, a state of desirelessness, a detachment from the fruits of action, an atmosphere of inner joy and peace,—can we arrive at some pointers that would prove that this economic rise of Asia has a spiritual force behind it? Is this rise of Asia and India merely economic as is overtly visible or is there a deeper psychological and spiritual truth trying to establish itself, of which this affluence is the outer sign?

In his book, *The Indian Spirit and the World's Future*, Amal Kiran writes,

All events and movements must be evaluated by reference to one standard: Do they, however remotely, tend towards the increase of such spirituality? The phrase, “however remotely”, has some importance. For, all happenings do not have an easily perceptible connection with the Spiritual Truth. There are plenty of intellectual questions, social issues, political problems, economic situations that seem far away from matters mystical. The apparent far-away-ness should not lead us to regard them as irrelevant and to decide them with considerations within a narrow and isolated sphere. If the Divine is the centre of things there can be nothing on even the remotest periphery without an invisible radius running out towards it. We must find the radius and discern in the peripheral object the point at which contact is made or refused.... The labour of discovering whether there is or there is not a point of contact, however subtle, with the spiritual goal of mankind calls for intellectual no less than intuitive examination.

The Divine is hidden under many layers of existence and evolution is nothing but the layer by layer unfolding of this hidden Divine. Each unpeeling of the layer is essentially a movement for the unveiling of the Spirit within. Life coming out of matter and mind evolving out of life may not have revealed to us the face of the Divine, but were nevertheless spiritual movements as they opened up future vistas of consciousness. In the present context, any aspiration to unveil the deeper and higher dimensions of our being beyond the mental consciousness could be interpreted as a spiritual movement. Spirituality is not a static goal; it is an endless becoming. And every step towards this becoming and bringing us closer to the Divine constitutes the increase of spirituality.

For hundreds of years under the yoke of the British, India was in a stupor and a

state of self-forgetfulness. It had forgotten even to dream of freedom. It took a Mangal Pandey to shake the people of India and assert the need for freedom. When Mangal Pandey laid down his life, how many perceived his act as a spiritual happening? It looked like a stray incidence of mutiny at that point and for many years after that. Later, when Sri Aurobindo clarified that “India must have Swaraj in order to live; she must have Swaraj in order to live well and happily; she must have Swaraj in order to live for the world, not as a slave for the material and political benefit of a single purse-proud and selfish nation, but as a free people for the spiritual and intellectual benefit of the human race” the stray mutiny of Mangal Pandey was revealed to us as the working of a conscious Hand leading India to freedom, and the mutiny rightly come to be known as the “first war of Indian Independence”.

When the Divine lies buried in poverty and squalor, the removal of this layer of poverty, a converting of it into abundance constitutes a spiritual rise; when He is shrouded in ignorance, a movement towards knowledge is a spiritual movement. The Divine reveals Himself to us through Knowledge, Power, Beauty and Perfection; so any aspiration towards the establishment of any or all of these is essentially a spiritual effort.

Any progress, however preparatory, is a movement towards the spiritual when its ultimate goal is the Divine. Seen in this context, even the rise of reason in the West was a necessary movement because it helped to lift humanity from the clutches of superstitions and a mass of blind beliefs into the light of reason thereby making it possible for it to take the next leap. This next leap according to Sri Aurobindo will come from “the influence of the East [and] is likely to be rather in the direction of subjectivism and practical spirituality”.

What then does this age of subjectivism constitute of? What are the conditions and characteristics of this age of subjectivism? Do we see it reflected in the rise of Asia?

1. Following One's Swadharma

In recent centuries, Europe and the United States played a leading role in world affairs; international exchanges were largely one way, leading many Western nations to believe that their economic, social and political systems were suitable for the whole world. Having destroyed most of the original civilisations and cultures of the world by means of military power, law and trade, and Christianity and in their over-confidence that their ethical standards were superior and could effectively set up new standards all over the world, the Western countries aggressively exported their social system, developmental model and values to other countries. And the Asian countries could do nothing but submit to the Western supremacy.

But now, economic vitality and interdependence have enhanced the self-confidence of the Asian countries and they have begun to make clear that Western

values do not conform to Asian ideals. Asians are undergoing psychological changes from “Everything being the best in the West” to finding again the values of their cultural heritage and achieving a modernisation which is not equal to westernisation.

A case in point is the preaching of democracy by the West. The West has been sparing no efforts to aggressively promote democracy and criticise the “autocracy” and “centralisation” of South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. Without understanding the local conditions and without mentioning the problems in its implementation in the West, they believe it to be the best form of Government for every country just because they are following it and it seems to have worked for them. But the experts and scholars of Asian countries unanimously hold that democracy itself is not bound to lead to economic development, but economic development will definitely promote democracy. They began their growth stories with diverse political systems and stuck to them. Korea began its extraordinary economic growth under a military dictator, Park Chung Hee, while Hong Kong did it under the British colonial rule and China managed its remarkable economic transformation under communist party rule. They sought a balance between economic growth and political democracy and built forms of democracies suitable to their countries and economic phases. The tide of democratisation in Japan, Korea and Taiwan has proved that in this context democracy could be successful only after the economy had risen to a certain level. The fact that the economy of Phillipines whose political system was most similar to the US was long stagnant further corroborated the point.

This understanding of the deep saying of Gita, “Better the law of one’s own being though it be badly done than an alien dharma well-followed; death in one’s own dharma is better, it is a dangerous thing to follow the law of another’s nature” by Asia is a big step in the rise of her consciousness and is hence spiritual. “...in his subjective return inward he gets back to himself, back to the root of his living and infinite possibilities, and the potentiality of a new and perfect self-creation begins to widen before him. He discovers his real place in Nature and opens his eyes to the greatness of his destiny.”

2. Effortless Assimilation of the Best of the West

The people in the original colonies and semi-colonies experienced a painful cultural impact. They were forced to abandon their native cultures and adopt foreign cultures. The compulsion resulted in two deviations. One was to fiercely boycott all Western culture while resisting the exploitation and oppression of colonialism and imperialism; the other was to feel keenly their own apparent backwardness, to worship the West and copy it indiscriminately. But national independence enabled them to eliminate the two deviations and learn to choose on their own. And the economic success has led to a resurgence of cultural and political confidence in Asia and given rise to an awakening of Asian people’s cultural identity. Asia’s economic success today is not

merely a renewal of ancient Asian cultures, nor is it a simple copy of modern Western civilisation; it is a brand new culture incorporating both Eastern and Western traditions.

An official Chinese document, 'Outline of Patriotism' states: "Patriotism is not narrow nationalism. We need not only to inherit and develop the fine heritages of the Chinese people, but also to study and absorb the civilisations created by other people. Only by doing so can the Chinese people make their due contributions to world peace and human progress along with other nations." This finds its echo in the following words of Sri Aurobindo, "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."

This ability and willingness to learn the Western 'best practices' and to adapt, assimilate and apply them is the key distinguishing feature of the Asians. Instead of being afraid of losing their cultural identity in trying to copy the West, they retained their deep cultural confidence that they could learn from the West and not lose their souls. In this capacity to learn and the confidence to accept 'best practices' from the West or from anywhere else in the world, the two key central elements of the Asian success story, we see the practical yearning of Asia, for this adaptive flexibility is the hallmark of both the ancient philosophies, Hinduism or the Sanatana Dharma of India and Taoism of China that have enabled the only two ancient civilisations to survive till date.

3. Strength and Resilience of the Soul

For centuries, Asian nations suffered from economic backwardness. When some of the peoples of Asia undertook the task of catching up with the West economically and accomplished industrialisation in just a few decades whereas it had taken the West hundreds of years to industrialise, the following words of Sri Aurobindo about Asia, "She will now learn the scientific method of the adult and senescent West and apply it with a far greater force and ability to lines of development in which Europe is a bungler and novice", were proven true.

The swiftness and determination with which China fought the vice of opium or the grit with which East Asia regained its confidence after the East Asian financial crisis when all these economies began to collapse like dominoes, showed the world that unlike Africa and Latin America, Asia possesses a secret source of limitless strength and "...it is this moral strength, this ability to go to the roots, this gift of diving down into the depths of self and drawing out the miraculous powers of the Will, this command over one's own soul which is the secret of Asia. And he who is in possession of his soul, the Scripture assures us, shall become the master of the world."

4. Swarajya precedes Samrajya

The Asian countries adopted industrialisation strategies that were export oriented and enjoyed an export-led growth. While countries in Africa export primary goods and natural minerals to the First World, only to buy them back in the form of finished goods paying many times over, Asian countries utilised their own or imported raw materials and minerals and sold them as finished products after the required value addition. In order to accomplish this they set up industrial bases by indigenising production technologies from across the world and specialised in the finished goods they could produce most efficiently. They first utilised their produce to achieving self-reliance and self-sufficiency, kept what was necessary for growth within and only then exported the rest to the world for one “can help the world by his life and growth only in proportion as he can be more and more freely and widely his own real self.”

This export-led growth, besides adding to the foreign reserves of the Asian countries and shifting the balance of trade in their favour, has made these economies outward-looking and confident and are reflective of the resurgence of the self-assurance of Asia.

5. Mutuality, Regional Co-operation and Harmony

The dominant values used by the West in past cycles of rise and expansion were individualism, war, strife and competition, whereas, increasingly, the way of the rise of the East, in its current cycle of growth and expansion, barring artificial exceptions, has been through mutuality, regional co-operation, and harmony in spite of their cultural and political differences. This is evident from the acceleration in relevance of multi-lateral organisations like ASEAN, SAARC and APEC that aim at free trade and higher co-operation within the region. Further, Asian economies and industries have been increasingly focusing their output on the needs of their region, and there is a conscious and concerted effort to balance regional trade levels between Asian countries *vis-à-vis* trade levels with the rest of the world. This movement has a natural multiplier in the fact that the region, in its own right, is amongst the fastest growing markets in the world, and will continue to be so for a while given China and India’s growth rates.

“Freedom and harmony express the two necessary principles of variation and oneness... and these are the two conditions of healthy progression and successful arrival.”

6. Strong Leadership and Silent Learning

The critical difference between Asia and the rest of the developing world is the nature

of the Premiers who have been leading and managing the successful states. While they have achieved and retained power in different ways, they have remained focused on uplifting their nations and societies while in office. Even though the societies of Asia are quite different and their leaders seem independent of each other, there has been a lot of silent learning among them. Goh Keng Swee, one of the founding fathers of Singapore learnt from the Meiji reformers who are credited with the Japanese success story. It is little known that China, under the initial guidance of Deng Xiaoping, had made a significant effort to learn and adapt from Singapore. Deng visited Singapore in 1978 and what he saw there became a point of reference as the minimum the Chinese people should achieve. It is remarkable how he turned the most populous country in the world and moved it almost instantly from socialist central planning to free-market economics. Similar is the story of South Korea having learnt its economic lessons from Japan. On the surface, one often witnesses popular hostility towards Japan in Korea because of the bitter memories about the Japanese occupation. Yet, underneath this hostility, there is also a layer of deep cultural respect for Japan and its enormous accomplishments. All these countries learnt from one another and yet there was no slavish copying; they remained “true to themselves”. “For it is necessary, if the subjective age of humanity is to produce its best fruits, that the nations should become conscious not only of their own but of each other’s souls and learn to respect, to help and to profit, not only economically and intellectually but subjectively and spiritually, by each other.”

In Conclusion...

Sri Aurobindo has said that before achieving spiritual freedom, any country must first attain political freedom, economic freedom and intellectual freedom, in that order. Asia has already achieved political independence; it is swiftly on its way to achieving economic self-sufficiency, which too cannot be eschewed and is an essential step in its journey. Behind this political and economic rise are clearly visible the signs of the arrival of the subjective age, the age of living from within and of seeking for answers within of matters without. If these trends of subjective thought are seen in politics and economics—“that hard refractory earthy matter which most resists all but a gross utilitarian treatment”, then we know for sure that we are on the right track because then these signs must be present, however “incipient and sporadic”, in other areas of human thought and social endeavour as well, and the story of the rise of Asia can be portrayed as the journey of human progress from the age of Reason to the age of Subjectivism—the next step in social evolution. Whether or not this subjective turn, which is the precursor to the spiritual age, will lead to the spiritual renaissance of Asia and Eastern values will depend on the depth and wideness of this inward gaze. Asia to rise spiritually will have to learn individually and collectively that the real truth of man or nation has to be found in the soul which is immortal and every

part of human life, the intellectual, the ethical, the aesthetic, the vital, the dynamic and the physical, has to be touched and transformed in the light of this Reality, “the true self of man”.

The dominant cultures of Asia, namely India and China, have survived so persistently, as if immortal because they have always sought the Immortal. They failed for a while because they did not seek after it sufficiently and did not learn how entirely to make it the master of life. Now having come round a full circle, and in the process having learnt their lessons, we can be sure that once again the journey of Asia towards its highest has begun and this time on a stronger footing and any nation anywhere in the world can join in the journey to establish “the Kingdom of God on earth”. For, in line with the Will of the Divine,

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:
 I shall hear the silver swing of heaven’s gates
 When God comes out to meet the soul of the world.

GEETANJALI J. BHATTACHARJEE

This is still a personal hope and an idea, an ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this evolution is to take place, since it must proceed through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and, although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.

Such is the content which I put into this date of India’s liberation; whether or how far this hope will be justified depends upon the new and free India.

Sri Aurobindo

GLOBALISATION—FOR OR AGAINST HUMAN UNITY

I

The third dream was a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind. That unification of the human world is under way.... But an outward basis is not enough; there must grow up an international spirit and outlook, international forms and institutions must appear, perhaps such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship, willed interchange or voluntary fusion of cultures.

THIS is how Sri Aurobindo describes one of the five dreams in his famous message on the fifteenth of August 1947.¹ How far the world has indeed moved in the direction dreamed by Sri Aurobindo is a deep question; but let us note this assertion by the world-famous Sociologist and Director of the London School of Economics, Anthony Giddens: “Globalisation has something to do with the thesis that we now all live in one world.”² Globalisation—a buzzword and our constant companion—signifies, as Manfred Steger puts it, a social condition characterised by the “existence of global economic, political, cultural and environmental interconnections and flows that makes many of the currently existing borders and boundaries irrelevant.”³ Keeping this in view, we may try to look for the initial signs of unification, if any, emerging in the process of globalisation.

However before we proceed, we must keep in mind a most important fact that is sometimes forgotten—as Peter Berger, the renowned Professor of Sociology and Theology at Boston University and Director of the Institute for Study of Economic Culture (ISEC) reminds us,—that the term “globalisation” has come to be “emotionally charged” in public discourse; for some it implies the promise of an “international civil society” that will usher in a new era of peace and democratisation; for others it implies the “threat of American economic and political hegemony, with its cultural consequence being a homogenised world resembling a sort of metastasised Disneyland (charmingly called ‘Cultural Chernobyl’ by a French Government official).”⁴ Well, if Globalisation goes this way then there is little hope of Sri Aurobindo’s dream getting fulfilled. But Berger looking at the findings of a three-year study by an International Research Team (co-directed by Berger and Huntington) informs us that both the promise and the threat have been greatly exaggerated and the real picture is a “complicated” one. Let us first have a close look at some of the findings coming out of this international research conducted at ISEC at Boston University particularly

1. Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1972.

2. Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World*.

3. Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization*; 2006, Oxford.

4. Edited by Peter L. Berger and Samuel P. Huntington, *Many Globalizations*, 2002, Oxford.

in the cultural sphere, for that is one of the very important spaces where the push for unification or interchange or fusion can be seen to be moving apace.

II

The picture that emerges is one of a “Cultural earthquake” affecting virtually all parts of the world. But when this earthquake hits different people they respond differently. First, there are cases of what Berger calls “supine acceptance”—a sort of “yuppie internationale” whose members “speak fluent English and dress alike and eat alike, at work and at play and upto a point think alike.”⁵ Obviously this is more a state of “uniformity” than one of “unity” in the sense of Sri Aurobindo. Next we see attempts at “militant rejection”: it may be under the banner of religion (Taliban) or nationalism (North Korea). Since total isolation from the Global Culture entails near total isolation from the world economy, the costs of these attempts at rejection are quite high. But there are less “totalistic” forms of rejection—China is the most important case in point. More interesting are the cases in between acceptance and rejection. Berger gives quite a few instances. There is almost everywhere, he notes, what James Watson called, “localisation”: that is, the Global Culture is accepted but with significant local modifications. As Watson points out, “McDonald’s in America has an implicit contract with its customers: it promises clean, inexpensive food; they eat it and leave promptly. That, after all, is the meaning of fast food. In East Asia this contract had to be modified because customers linger.”⁶

If this appears to be a simple affair, let us look at examples of localisation that can have more far-reaching aspects. Here, Berger cites the example of the Buddhist movement in Taiwan: they have taken on many of the organisational forms of American Protestantism to a “decisively non-American, non-Western religious message.”⁷

Nor is this all. Localisation, Berger shows from the research, shades over into another response, best described by the term “hybridisation”. This may be a little more close to unification which assumes assimilation and not uniformity. Berger says this hybridisation is the “deliberate effort to synthesise foreign and native cultural traits.”⁸ Well, let us see. Berger first cites the old example of Japan which ever since the Meiji Restoration has been a “most successful pioneer” of this response. Coming to recent times, we have the example of China: Chinese business culture combines the most modern business techniques with traditional “Chinese personalism”. The case of software engineers in Bangalore who garland their computers in Hindu ceremonies is a particularly “dramatic” example of the same thing. The synthesis of Christianity and traditional religions in the so-called African indigenous churches

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

(AICs) is another fascinating case. All these cases go to show that the idea of a “mindless global homogenisation” greatly underestimates the capacity of human beings to be “creative and innovative in the face of cultural challenges”.⁹

This type of response to the challenge of the emergent global culture does not provide the whole picture. Berger points out that there is also the increasingly significant phenomenon of “alternative globalisations”; that is “cultural movements with a global outreach originating outside the western world and indeed impacting on the latter.” (In her discussion of India’s hoped-for new “tryst with destiny”, Tulsi Srinivas uses the term “emissions” to refer to the same phenomenon.¹⁰) This is of considerable importance; for, as Berger concedes, this not only corrects the notion that non-Western and non-American cultures are “simply reacting” to the forces of “cultural globalisation”, but this also implies that there may be more than one path to modernity. This is not quite a new idea, but what is certainly encouraging is that in recent years it has been revived in the writings of Harvard Sinologist Tu Weiming, the Israeli Sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt and others. In other words, alternative globalisations open up the possibility of “alternative modernities”.

These movements, Berger shows, can be found on both elite and popular levels. For example, Western business and policy circles were for a while eagerly trying to imbibe Japanese industrial policy and management techniques. A good religious example is *Opus Dei*, the most influential Catholic organisation in the world today. It began in Spain but now its influence has spread considerably in Latin America (including notably, Chile), the Philippines, and other Catholic communities. As Berger narrates its story, it is “militantly conservative” in its theology and morality but “very positive” in its attitude towards modern global capitalism. It was very active politically when the Franco regime was on the wane and played an active role in the transition to a market economy (and later indirectly to democracy in Spain). The two most prestigious business schools in Spain are run by *Opus Dei*. Berger reminds us that here is something more than an “intelligent accommodation with social change”: there is the “deliberate attempt” to construct an “alternative modernity”—capitalist, democratic, but at the same time resolutely loyal to Catholic religion and moral traditions.¹¹ Here Berger brings in an interesting point: this process of alternative modernity explains why Pope John Paul II had been favourably disposed towards *Opus Dei*, in contrast with his scepticism towards the “Jesuits” who used to be “the elite cadre of militant Catholicism” but whose traditional loyalties have become “somewhat shaky in recent years”.¹²

On the popular level but sometimes extending to more elevated social strata, India is mentioned by Berger to have “emitted” a number of highly influential religious

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

movements like the Sai Baba movement, Hare Krishna movement etc. Similarly successful in the West have been a number of Buddhist movements such as the Soka Gokkai which comes out of Japan. The “Buddhist renaissance” in Taiwan intends a global outreach—the Tzu-Chi Foundation has branches in forty countries.¹³

In this context, Berger points out also the Islamic movements in Turkey and all over the Muslim world—these also point to an alternative modernity: that is, as Berger puts it, not rejecting modernity in the style of Taliban in Afghanistan or even the militant factions in the Iranian regime, but rather seeking to construct a “modern society that participates economically and politically in the global system”, but is animated by a self-consciously Islamic culture.¹⁴ A comparable Islamic movement in Indonesia is another case in point. It was pro-capitalist, pro-democratic, tolerant of religious pluralism, but decisively committed to Muslim faith and it proved to be an important factor in the collapse of the Suharto regime and the election of its own leader, Abdurrahman Wahid to the Presidency.¹⁵ Throughout the Muslim world today, even in Iran such visions of an alternative Islamic modernity are gaining ground.

Berger also points out that the most important cultural influence coming from Asia to the West is not carried by organised religious movement but arrives in the form of the so-called “New Age Culture”. Berger says that it has affected millions of people in Europe and America both at the level of beliefs (reincarnation, karma, the mystical connection between individual and all of Nature) and of behaviour (meditation, yoga, *shiatsu* and other forms of therapeutic massage, *tai chi* and martial arts; generally, the use of alternative medical traditions of Indian and Chinese provenance).¹⁶ The British Sociologist Colin Campbell has described the New Age phenomenon as “easternisation”.¹⁷ As far as popular Culture is concerned Japan has been the most successful “emitter”. As Berger says: “The Japanese automotive and electronic products have earned their reputation for reliability, and in consequence Japanese notions and techniques of quality control have greatly influenced European and American industry as well as consumer behaviour. The case of Sheseido cosmetics is interesting, like that of the Japanese fashion and design industries, in combining modern products with traditional Japanese notions of aesthetics and finding that this has an appeal beyond the borders of Japan.”¹⁸

Berger adds a further complication to this picture, as there are what he calls “subglobalisations”. He describes them as “movements with a regional rather than global reach that nevertheless are instrumental in connecting the societies on which they impinge with the emerging global culture.”¹⁹ “Europeanisation” is probably the

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

most important case of this, particularly in the countries of the former Soviet bloc. Berger cites some examples: German and Austrian influences in Hungary and other ex-communist countries, Scandinavian influences in the Baltic states and Turkish influences in central Asia serve both to “Europeanise” and to globalise.

These are the preliminary attempts towards unification—the “willed interchange or voluntary fusion of cultures” that Sri Aurobindo spoke of in his 15th August, 1947 message. But, there are problems too. Berger informs us that under certain political conditions tensions between global and indigenous can give rise to what Samuel Huntington, the eminent professor at Harvard called a “clash of Civilisations”. The point that Huntington raised in his famous book is still being hotly debated. But what cannot be ignored is what Berger calls sharp cultural conflicts “within” societies (*i.e.* an internalised “clash of civilisations”): the conflict between a “secularised” elite and “religious revitalisation” movements (in Turkey, other Muslim countries, Israel and India); the cultural tensions between the “Wessies” and “Ossies” in the wake of German reunification; conflict between free market ideology and environmentalism; freedom of speech versus “politically correct” speech codes, Hollywood “machismo” versus feminism, American junk food versus American health foods and so on. In other words, “the West”—Berger rightly shows—is hardly a homogenous cultural entity and its “conflict-laden heterogeneity” is carried along by its globalisation.

Thus from the findings of the International Research Team Berger comes to the following conclusion: “Cultural globalisation is neither a single great promise nor a single great threat.... Globalisation is, *au fond*, a continuation albeit in an intensified and accelerated form, of the perduring challenge of modernisation. On the cultural level this has been the great challenge of pluralism: the breakdown of taken-for-granted traditions and the opening up of multiple options for beliefs, values and lifestyles. ... this amounts to the great challenge of enhanced freedom for both individuals and collectivities... In the face of emerging global culture, this means middle positions between acceptance and militant resistance, between global homogeneity and parochial isolation. Such a search has its difficulties, but as the data of our project show persuasively, it is not impossible.”²⁰

Does this scenario rule out the possibility of human unity? What can we say from the standpoint of Sri Aurobindo? Well, it seems obvious that, at the present juncture, humanity badly needs a unifying and harmonising consciousness—at no other time in history has the opportunity come for the advent of such a consciousness—what Sri Aurobindo calls the “Truth-Consciousness”. Moreover, Sri Aurobindo too has always stressed the fact that unity is a law, a necessity of Nature, but that it can never flower in the dreary desert sands of uniformity: man has to achieve an ascension beyond the principle of ego which lives by separativeness; and yet, says Sri Aurobindo,

20. *Ibid.*

there must be no “destruction of individuality, for without that man would stagnate”. What remains important therefore, is a “principle and arrangement of the common life which would give free play to the individual variation, interchange in diversity and the need of adventure and conquest”.²¹ Thus whatever may be the aberrations in the current phase of cultural (and other) globalisation, Sri Aurobindo’s main point is borne out by the major conclusions of the International Research Team led by Berger and Huntington (as mentioned above) and can push its upshot in the desired direction of the human destiny.

III

There is still another issue before we close. Says Sri Aurobindo in the same message: “...unification is a necessity of Nature, an inevitable movement. Its necessity for the nations is also clear, for without it the freedom of the small nations may be at any moment in peril and the life even of the large and powerful nations insecure. The unification is therefore to the interests of all, and only human imbecility and stupid selfishness can prevent it; but these cannot stand forever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will.”²² Now what do we observe in the unfolding scene of globalisation?

To answer this question, let us first have a look at one of the dark sides of globalisation: the rise of global terrorism with worldwide networks. The distinguished British Sociologist Giddens has given a brilliant analysis of its implications for world peace, cooperation and unity. First of all he notes that the US and Russia have drawn close together in the face of “what their leadership sees as ‘shared threats’”.²³ Next Giddens observes that the worldwide terrorist networks can only be combated through “worldwide collaboration, both among nations and between nations and other agencies”.²⁴ The sharing of information, cooperation in the gathering of intelligence, and mutual planning to reduce strategic vulnerabilities, would, Giddens rightly says, seem the ways forward.²⁵ But little of this has been forthcoming. As Giddens reminds us, the Bush administration in the US was determined to follow a more “unilateralist line” than the outgoing President Bill Clinton had pursued. President Bush refused to sign the Kyoto accord on Climate Change and disavowed the treaty designed to counter chemical warfare.²⁶ Some of these hardcore positions were softened down after September 11, but Giddens would have us note that the thrust of America’s position has remained the same. He particularly draws our attention to the very

21. Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Chapter XXXIII, Pondicherry, 1977.

22. Sri Aurobindo, *On Himself*, 1972.

23. Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World*, London, 2004.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

disturbing fact that the Bush administration does not feel the need for an “International Court of Criminal Law” and seeks to “weaken the strength of international law rather than bolster it.”²⁷

President Bush responded to the incident of September 11 by thinking of means to achieve “national security” rather than meet the challenge of the global age. As Giddens very rightly points out, “security can no longer be wholly or even primarily national even for the most powerful nation of the world. Military preparedness is essential but even the most sophisticated weaponry can be outflanked, or can simply be irrelevant to combating organisations whose aims and methods have nothing to do with conquering territory.”²⁸ Giddens describes these organisations as “global guerrillas” and suggests that on the global level too, guerrilla wars almost always can be brought to end through political means—through compromise, negotiation and dealing with the problems that caused these insurgencies in the first place.²⁹

This brings us to a most important issue standing in the way of unity: anti-Americanism. This is a common sentiment, not only in Arab and Islamic nations or communities, but in a diversity of other nations besides. Many people across the world have raised this uncomfortable question: Is globalisation geared to the concerns of America and the other rich nations? Giddens shows that there is plainly a good deal of truth in the assertion. “The United States”, says Giddens, “is easily the dominant power in the world, militarily, economically and culturally. Most of the world’s biggest companies are American, and all the top fifty corporations have their home base in the one or the other of the industrialised countries. The wealthy countries dominate some of the most influential world agencies, such as G8, the World Bank and the IMF—and also many would say, the UN. World society is radically imbalanced in respect of who holds the levers of power and who does not.”³⁰

Well, if this is the reality on the ground, then it leaves us with little hope for the vision of unity to take concrete form. But Giddens makes a searching analysis of the situation and convincingly shows that the picture presented above conceals deeper layers of truths. Globalisation today is not identical with Americanisation or Westernisation. Neither the US nor the industrial countries taken as a whole, control the global economy which is “far too complex and encompassing for any nation or groups of nations to bend to their own will.”³¹ In spite of President Bush’s apparent turn towards unilateralism, “there is little the US can do in most contexts without the collaboration of other nations.” Geopolitically the world is becoming more “polycentric”. The European Union (EU) does not possess the military muscle of the US, but the stubborn fact remains that it is becoming more and more of an “independent player”

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*

in world affairs. Russia has the potential of a major power. Japan, South Korea and China have been developing their “geopolitical clout” and Giddens does not forget India: he says—“India is certain to assume a more powerful influence in world affairs than it had hitherto.”³² These changes, Giddens points out, are already affecting the composition of the world bodies where there is “much more direct involvement of non-western countries than there used to be.”³³

Giddens hastens to add that American involvement is of course of “crucial importance” in the reform of global institutions and agreements. But he adds that even if such involvement is not forthcoming, the rest of the world can often push on anyway. Giddens puts forward the examples of the progress that is being made by the other nations in respect of the Kyoto agreements and the establishment of the International Criminal Court, in spite of the hostility of the US.³⁴

As for Western and more specifically American cultural influence, Giddens observes that it is a “relatively superficial cultural veneer”; a “more profound effect” of globalisation is to produce “greater local cultural diversity, not homogeneity.”³⁵ The US, Giddens reminds us, is the very opposite of a “cultural monolith”, because it consists of a “dazzling variety of different ethnic and cultural groups”.³⁶ And because of what Giddens calls the “push down” effect, globalisation tends to promote a renewal of local cultural identities.³⁷

Coming to the role of the big corporations, we need a similarly “nuanced” view of their role. Those who are concerned at the expansion of corporate power and hence are critical of their role, are definitely right up to a point. Corporations, Giddens admits, can threaten the democratic legitimacy of states in the industrial as well as the developing countries where they can manage to buy votes or dominate the funding of political parties. Yet, as Giddens shows, the power of the big corporations can easily be overestimated: Nations, especially where they act together, have far more power than corporations, and will continue to do so. Nations control territory, corporations do not; nations control military power, corporations do not; nations establish frameworks of law, corporations do not. As globalisation goes on, it becomes practically difficult for big corporations to act irresponsibly. A major reason, says Giddens is the rise of NGOs (Non-governmental organisations)—which can monitor what companies do, in any part of the world and bring sanctions to bear upon them.³⁸ Organisations like Greenpeace or Oxfam are themselves global in scope. They can bring corporate malpractices to public attention and organise opposition to them.³⁹

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

But those in the anti-globalisation movement are right up to a point to emphasise that the divisions between rich and poor in the world today are unacceptable. The talk about unity against this grim outlook sounds a bit hollow. But is it true that global economic inequalities are increasing? And if so, is this the result of globalisation?

The answer that Giddens offers shows that no definitive conclusion can be drawn: The data from many countries are less than wholly reliable, and trends cannot always be inferred with much certainty.⁴⁰ Comparisons are often made between countries on a misleading basis. Giddens concludes that “we cannot really be sure that world economic inequalities have grown or declined.”⁴¹ And further, “the most comprehensive research that we have on poor countries shows that over the past twenty years, those that have opened their economies up to external markets have had average growth rate of 5%. Poor economies that have remained closed have had average growth rates of 0%.”⁴²

Giddens grants that the worries of the anti-globalisers are not without foundation. But he makes the point that a retreat from globalisation would not resolve them. He says, quite rightly, “We need to advance globalisation further rather than retard it, but globalisation has to be managed more effectively and equitably than has happened over the past few decades, and the ideological agenda of economic development shifted.... A country which opens up its economy to free trade without other social and economic reforms is likely to experience economic deterioration rather than growth. The guiding hand of the state is needed, as are institutional reforms promoting education and the emancipation of women, banking reforms and the fostering of a stable investment climate. These goals are not beyond the reach of even very poor countries, as the major advances made in nations such as Botswana and Mozambique show.”⁴³

The United Nations has declared its aim to halve world poverty by the year 2015. What Giddens says on this bears quoting: “It will take some doing, but given goodwill on the part of the richer societies in the world community and positive changes in the poorer ones, the ambition can be met.”⁴⁴

IV

Coming to the political level, we see that under the impact of globalisation, national sovereignty has become fuzzy. As Giddens comments: “Nations and nation-states remain powerful, but there are large democratic deficits opening up—as the political

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*

scientist David Held points out—between them and the global forces that affect the lives of their citizens. Ecological risks, fluctuations in the global economy, or global technological change, do not respect the borders of nations.”⁴⁵ It is here that some united stand becomes imperative and the possibility of unity looms large.

In order to attain some measure of unity among nations, democracy must be fostered above the level of the nation-state. How can it be done? Giddens offers one answer: we have to look to the “transnational” organisations as much as the “international” ones.⁴⁶ The UN is an “association of nation-states”. It rarely challenges the “sovereignty” of nations and its charter too does not permit it. The European Union is different. Giddens suggests that the way that is being forged by the EU can be followed in other regions too. Though it is located in Europe, it is pioneering a form of transnational governance. Correcting the notions of the supporters and critics of the EU, Giddens makes a very subtle point: “...it is not a federal state or a super nation-state. But nor is it merely an association of nations. The countries that have entered the EU have voluntarily given up some of their sovereignty in order to do so.”⁴⁷

Next, Giddens makes a very interesting remark: the EU is not itself “particularly democratic”. Says Giddens: “It has famously been said of the EU that if it applied to join itself, it wouldn’t get in. The EU doesn’t meet the democratic criteria it demands of its members. Yet there is nothing in principle that prevents its further democratisation and we should press hard for such change.”⁴⁸ But the existence of the EU, Giddens grants, drives home a “cardinal principle” of democracy, when seen against the background of the global order. This is that “the transnational system can actively contribute to democracy within states, as well as between them.”⁴⁹ The European courts, for example, have made a range of decisions, including measures protecting individual rights, “that hold within the member countries.”⁵⁰ Sri Aurobindo would have definitely welcomed such institutions for the gradual achievement of human unity and this point may be justified by a close reading of his *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

V

Finally, there remains the question of the clash between a cosmopolitan outlook and fundamentalism. Surprising as it may sound, fundamentalism has arisen in response to the globalising influences we see all around us. Giddens sets the record straight

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

when he defines it: “Fundamentalism is not the same as fanaticism or authoritarianism. Fundamentalists call for a return to basic scriptures or texts, supposed to be read in a literal manner, and they propose that the doctrines derived from such a reading be applied to social, economic or political life. Fundamentalism gives new vitality and importance to the guardians of tradition.”⁵¹

With this Giddens goes on to give an objective meaning to fundamentalism: “Fundamentalism is beleaguered tradition. It is tradition defended in the traditional way—by reference to ritual truth—in a globalising world that asks for reasons. Fundamentalism therefore has nothing to do with the context of beliefs, religious or otherwise. What matters is how the truth of beliefs is defended or asserted.”⁵²

Thus fundamentalism can develop on the soil of traditions of all sorts—materialistic or religious. What is ominous is that it has no time for “ambiguity, multiple interpretation or multiple identity”; it is a “refusal of dialogue” in a world whose peace and continuity depend on it.⁵³ Sri Aurobindo has always cautioned against fundamentalism (as interpreted here by Giddens) for real unity among human beings to be possible. Time and again he has stressed the supreme need for freedom, the need for constant growth of consciousness, self-experience and realisation; the need for creative interpretation of texts freed from the trammels of any narrowly traditional or too literal rendering of any texts. One must be grounded in the truths of the spirit, but these must be discovered by oneself in freedom and the style of adaptation of the inner discoveries to the new needs and modes of living in every age has also to be discovered.

But, fundamentalism, as Giddens finally points out, also has some positive core in it. The most basic question that it poses to globalising modernity is this: can we live in a world where nothing is sacred? To this question Giddens gives a most inspiring answer: “I have to say in conclusion that I don’t think we can. Cosmopolitans, of whom I count myself one, have to make plain that tolerance and dialogue can themselves be guided by values of a universal kind.... Cosmopolitan morality itself needs to be driven by passion. None of us would have anything to live for if we didn’t have something worth dying for.”⁵⁴

Though fundamentalism is to be pitied, this essence of its search for sacredness needs to be salvaged. It is a pity that the kind of Cosmopolitanism that Giddens advocates here so passionately has not yet fully informed our minds in a globalised world, though the outward opportunities have been gradually coming within our reach. But the stage is set for keeping the flame of hope alive and seeing it burning ever brighter.

SUPRIYO BHATTACHARYA

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

‘THE HOUR OF GOD’

‘The Hour of God’ is a prophetic writing of Sri Aurobindo.

There are moments when the Spirit moves among men and the breath of the Lord is abroad upon the waters of our being; there are others when it retires and men are left to act in the strength or the weakness of their own egoism. The first are periods when even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny; the second are spaces of time when much labour goes to the making of a little result.¹

The idea of the hour of God also occurs in the earlier writings of Sri Aurobindo.

In an article entitled ‘Force Universal or Individual’ published in the *Karmayogin*, he writes:

...there are particular movements in particular epochs in which the Divine Force manifests itself with supreme power shattering all human calculations, making a mock of the prudence of the careful statesman and the scheming politician, falsifying the prognostications of the scientific analyser and advancing with a vehemence and velocity which is obviously the manifestation of a higher than human force.²

These then are the special occasions when the Divine Shakti prepares for a mighty change.

The hour of God came to India with Sri Aurobindo’s fiery call to the nation, rousing it from its long torpor, the period of the Nationalist Movement (in the first decade of the 20th century). In the Uttarpara Speech, Sri Aurobindo reveals that Vasudeva came to him in jail and said:

It is Shakti that has gone forth and entered into the people. Since long ago I have been preparing this uprising and now the time has come and it is I who will lead it to its fulfilment.³

In a message for the National Education Week, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

This is an hour in which, for India as for all the world, its future destiny and the turn of its steps for a century are being powerfully decided, and for no ordinary century, but one which is itself a great turning-point, an immense turn-over in the inner and outer history of mankind. As we act now, so shall the reward of our Karma be meted out to us, and each call of this kind at such an hour is at once an opportunity, a choice, and a test offered to the spirit of our people. Let

it be said that it rose in each to the full height of its being and deserved the visible intervention of the Master of Destiny in its favour.⁴

We could consider 15 August 1947 as an hour of God, the birth of free India, and the immense possibilities that were opened up then.

In his historic message on Independence Day given at the request of All India Radio, Trichinopoly, Sri Aurobindo says that the fact that the date coincides with his birthday was a proof that his life-work had a Divine sanction behind it. It is not that he himself required any such proof but he made that remark so that Indians and the people of the world might know who he was and what was the significance of his life-work. It was a divine mission he came to fulfil at a most critical moment in the history of the world, "*Sambhavāmi Yuge Yuge*". His work was completed by showing clearly to India and the world what was the true goal of human life and how it was going to be accomplished. The fulfilment of the mission depends upon the new and free India:

August 15th is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But it has a significance not only for us, but for Asia and the whole world; for it signifies the entry into the comity of nations of a new power with untold potentialities which has a great part to play in determining the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity.... As a mystic, I take this identification, not as a coincidence or fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power which guides my steps on the work with which I began life. Indeed almost all the world movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my life-time, though at that time they looked like impossible dreams, I can observe on this day either approaching fruition or initiated and on the way to their achievement.

I have been asked for a message on this great occasion, but I am perhaps hardly in a position to give one. All I can do is to make a personal declaration of the aims and ideals conceived in my childhood and youth and now watched in their beginning of fulfilment, because they are relevant to the freedom of India, since they are a part of what I believe to be India's future work...⁵

Sri Aurobindo speaks of his five dreams and that they were either fulfilled or on the way to their fulfilment. These dreams, in their natural order, were:

...a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India. India today is free but she has not achieved unity....

Another dream was for the resurgence and liberation of the peoples of Asia and her return to her great role in the progress of human civilisation. Asia has arisen; large parts are now quite free or are at this moment being liberated....

The third dream was a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind. That unification of the human world is under way; there is an imperfect initiation organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties...

Another dream, the spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.

The final dream was a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness and begin the solution of the problems which have perplexed and vexed him since he first began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society.⁶

60 years have passed since that day. What has free India done to realise his dreams? Has the problem of the partition of India been solved? Civil strife continues still... At the time of India's Independence, Sri Aurobindo had given a warning in the following words:

...the old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that the Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as for ever settled or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. The partition of the country must go, it is to be hoped by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose... But by whatever means, the division must and will go.⁷

These are the precious words of 15th August that we must remember and instill in our hearts.

In 'The Hour of God' Sri Aurobindo writes:

Unhappy is the man or the nation which, when the divine moment arrives, is found sleeping or unprepared to use it, because the lamp has not been kept trimmed for the welcome and the ears are sealed to the call.⁸

And again:

In the hour of God cleanse thy soul of all self-deceit and hypocrisy and vain self-flattery that thou mayst look straight into thy spirit and hear that which summons it.⁹

And he warns us:

...for the hour is often terrible, a fire and a whirlwind and a tempest, a treading of the winepress of the wrath of God; but he who can stand up in it on the truth of his purpose is he who shall stand; even though he fall, he shall rise again; even though he seem to pass on the wings of the wind, he shall return. Nor let worldly prudence whisper too closely in thy ear; for it is the hour of the unexpected.¹⁰

In 1963, the New Year message that the Mother gave was:

Let us prepare for the Hour of God.¹¹

And the message for the next year was:

Are you ready?¹²

And she explained:

The question means: Are you ready for the Hour of God?¹³

NILIMA DAS

References

1. *The Hour of God*, SABCL, Vol. 17, p. 1.
2. *Karmayogin*, SABCL, Vol. 2, pp. 69-70.
3. "Uttarpara Speech" delivered on 30th May, 1909; *Karmayogin*, SABCL, Vol. 2, pp. 8-9.
4. *Supplement*, SABCL, Vol. 27, pp. 506-07.
5. *On Himself*, SABCL, Vol. 26, pp. 400-01.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 404-06.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 402.
8. *The Hour of God*, SABCL, Vol. 17, p. 1.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Words of the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 15, p. 187.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

“YES, LORD, BUT...”: A CONFESSION

SRI AUROBINDO’S message of 15 August 1947 comes as a revelation each time I read it.

Not only does it reveal the hidden meaning behind the fact that India gained her Independence on Sri Aurobindo’s birthday, but also traces the lines on which the future of India, the future of Asia, the future of the world will evolve.

The message also warns of possible dangers that all leaders must try to avoid.

Reading the message today, 60 years from the date it was first given, also brings to me a tinge of sadness, for most of these decades tell a story of missed opportunities and the following of misleading half-lights.

I feel that all of us, the citizens of India, the citizens of Asia, the citizens of the world, denizens of today and aspirants of tomorrow, human in our failings yet striving for perfection, all of us will benefit by reading and rereading the message and trying to understand and apply these words which are not only revealing but also revelatory.

Harsh reality will not allow us to escape into the domains of fantasy. Facts must be faced, at least what is termed facts by our surface intelligence; and that is what sometimes gives rise to despondency.

For example, the other day a colleague asked me a question that must have been weighing on his mind for some time. “Why is it that certain ideas that had caught the imagination of an age, are, in time, relegated to the dustbin of history? How come that so many movements—social, political, religious—that began with a promise of better things, in time, lose their impetus, and in most cases end up as miserable caricatures of the ideals they set out to achieve? Why can’t we move straight and swiftly towards the goal? Why must we wander and founder always? Are all our efforts then doomed to failure? our strivings vain?”

These were not his exact words, but the general drift of what troubled him.

I do not quite remember what I replied, something to the effect that there must have been an incompleteness or a flaw in the conception of the ideal, or that the time and the circumstances were not appropriate, that if there was even a seed of truth in the vision, it would slowly but surely work itself out at the right moment, etc. But I am sure that this could not have been very convincing, for the simple reason that I have myself at times been beset by similar doubts and hesitations.

And why not?

Looking at much that is happening—in the smaller circle to which I belong or in the larger spheres of national and international life—it is difficult at times to keep a firm hold on the ideal. So much suffering, so much injustice, even inhumanity, corruption, falsity, double-dealing all around—coming at us from all sides, often blown out of proportion by petty interests or the media—one wonders if things will some day turn out right.

It is not that there is no faith, there is. But one feels like the father of the boy

who replied to Jesus, "I believe; help thou my unbelief."

"Ideals," Sri Aurobindo tells us, "are truths that have not yet effected themselves for man, the realities of a higher plane of existence which have yet to fulfil themselves on this lower plane of life and matter, our present field of operation." (CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 111) But our 'normal experience' is just the opposite, nay, a stark denial of the very possibility of the ideals becoming realities.

Yet this need not dishearten us, for, "The greater the apparent disorder of the materials offered or the apparent disparateness, even to irreconcilable opposition, of the elements that have to be utilised, the stronger is the spur, and it drives towards a more subtle and puissant order than can normally be the result of a less difficult endeavour." (CWSA, Vol. 21, pp. 4-5)

It is on this and similar arguments that I base myself, these are the rocks that I hold on to, these the affirmations of faith that help to withstand the onslaught of external evidence.

And the faith we have in Sri Aurobindo who is the Future marching towards its realisation. What he has said will happen. The dreams he speaks of in his message of 15 August 1947 are bound to become realities.

He has himself said that a divine incarnation not only shows the way, but gives us the knowledge and will and force to work out what has to be achieved. The Avatar "is nothing but this, the divine Seer-Will descending upon the human consciousness to reveal to it the divine meaning behind our half-blind action and to give along with the vision the exalted will that is faithful and performs and the ideal force that executes according to the vision." (CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 118)

He leads.

He infuses in us the strength that is needed.

His Will will surely be done.

And yet, in my weakness and impatience, I cry out, "Yes, Lord, but let it be soon..."

S. G. MESUR

The Gita is an inexhaustible mine of jewels. Even if the jewels are gathered from this mine for ages, the coming generations will always be delighted and astonished by their acquisitions of new and priceless ones.

Such is this Book, replete with deep and occult lore. And yet the language is perfectly clear, the style is simple, the surface meaning easily grasped. By simply gliding along the surf of this bottomless sea without taking a deep plunge, there is a certain gain in strength and joy. By taking a walk around the peripheries without entering the deep recesses of this mine illumined with jewels, there can be found strewn among the grass bright jewels which will keep us rich throughout life.

Sri Aurobindo

(English translation of Sri Aurobindo's Bengali writing *Gitar Bhumika*)

With Compliments from Well-wishers

Q. Why are we on earth?

To find the Divine who is in each of us and in all things.

*

Only one thing is important, it is to find the Divine.

For each one and for the whole world anything becomes useful if it helps to find the Divine.

The Mother

(Words of the Mother II, CWM, Vol. 14, p. 3)