

# *New Race*

*A Journal of Integral & Future Studies*

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*New Race*

*blessings*



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Founder Editor : (Late) Prof. V. MADHUSUDAN REDDY

Editor-in-Chief: V. ANANDA REDDY

Assistant Editor: SHRUTI BIDWAIKAR

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Email: [newracejournal@gmail.com](mailto:newracejournal@gmail.com); Phone: 040 27098414

On the web: [www.instituteofhumanstudy.org](http://www.instituteofhumanstudy.org)

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## *From the Editor's Desk*

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India will be the guru of the world said Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. What does a guru do? He directs, corrects, protects, trains, soothes the pains and embalms the wounds, cares and gives motherly love and sometimes is neutral like a father to teach a lesson to the child; he is a friend who listens to our sorrows and sympathises with us and most importantly, he is the spiritual guide who leads the pupil to his highest good. Such is India. India has been a friend and guide to many in the past. Her wisdom continues to lead the world. Her vision of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* has taken the world into its wave and we translate it loosely into "globalisation" and internationalism. Along with being a citizen of a particular nation, people talk about being global citizens.

India's philosophy of Earth as the Mother, as a living being and therefore the need to protect her is now taking over the world as a movement towards environmental protection. With the recent devastations of war, the world looked towards India for solutions. India has been made the president of the G20 summit at a very crucial juncture in world politics for the world looks upon India for solutions to some of the pressing issues like poverty, green energy, e-governance, climatic changes, increasing diseases and dangers of new pandemics and many such commercial and political issues where she is expected to lead the world.

During Corona, India was a friend and nurse comforting other nations by sending them timely help. When all were busy saving their lives, India saved the lives of others too. While India evacuated the Indians from Ukrain, we also helped the Pakistani students to reach their respective homes safely. It was a supreme example in our recent history when India has acted upon her values: "*paropkarah daiva bhavah asti*". It was *karuna*, compassion which made us act for others in the times of crisis. A true leader, a guru is the one who not only helps his own people progress but makes way for others also to progress.

What India has given to the world is only a fraction of what she will be revealing in the coming days of innovation, technology, spirituality and leadership. Did not Sri Aurobindo say:

So with India rests the future of the world. Whenever she is aroused from her sleep, she gives forth some wonderful shining ray of light to the world which is enough to illuminate the nations. Others live for centuries on what is to her the thought of a moment. God gave to her the book of Ancient Wisdom and bade her keep it sealed in her heart, until the time should come for it to be opened. Sometimes a page or a chapter is revealed, sometimes only a single sentence. Such sentences have been the inspiration of ages and fed humanity for many hundreds of years. (CWSA 7: 890)

*Shruti*

## *Hinduism and the Mission of India*

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Sri Aurobindo

[.....] [That] which is permanent in the Hindu religion, must form the basis on which the world will increasingly take its stand in dealing with spiritual experience and religious truth. Hinduism, in my sense of the word, is not modern Brahmanism. Modern Brahmanism developed into existence at a definite period in history. It is now developing out of existence; its mission is done, its capacities exhausted, the Truth which, like other religions, it defended, honoured, preserved, cherished, misused and disfigured, is about to take to itself new forms and dispense with all other screens or defender than its own immortal beauty, grandeur, truth and effectiveness. It is this unchanging undying Truth which has to be discovered and placed in its native light before humanity. *Tad etat satyam.*

There are many defenders and discoverers of truth now active among us. They are all busy defending, modifying, attacking, sapping or bolstering current Hinduism. I am not eager to disparage but neither do I find myself satisfied with any of them. If I were, there would be no need for any speculation of my own. There are the orthodox who are busy recovering and applying old texts or any interpretations, new or old, of these texts, which will support the existing order,—and ignoring all that go against it. Their learning is praiseworthy and useful; it brings to notice many great and helpful things which were in danger of being misprized, lost or flung away as worthless; but they do not seem to me to go to the heart of the matter. There are the heterodox who are busy giving new interpretations to old texts and institutions in order to get rid of all such features as the modern world finds it hard to assimilate. Their brainwork can hardly be too highly praised; it is bringing to light or to a half light many luminous realities and possibilities which, if they cannot all be accepted, yet invigorate and sharpen the habit of original thinking and help to remove that blind adherence to traditions which is truth's greatest obstacle. Still they too do not seem to me to have the right grasp and discernment. Then there are the ascetics mystical or rationalistic who call men to disgust with the world and point to the temple, the monastery or the mountaintop as the best, if not the only place for finding God, and most of whom, in order to honour the Maker slight and denounce His works. Their position and temperament is so lofty and noble and their solvent force on the gross impurities of a materialised humanity has been so invaluable that it is with some reluctance one finds oneself obliged to put them on one side and pass onward. But it seems to me that we must pass onward if we would know and possess God in His entirety and not merely in a side or aspect. There is a story in the Jewish Scriptures which relates that when God wished to show himself to Moses, he could only, owing to the spiritual imperfections of the Jewish prophet, reveal safely to him His hinder parts. Moses would have died if he had seen the front of God; he had not the dharanam, the soul-power to support that tremendous vision. The story well illuminates the character of materialism generally and to its aggressive modern form, European thought & civilisation, it applies with a quite overwhelming appositeness. But it seems to me that the average Vedantist, too, has only seen, for his part, the crown of the Lord's head and the average bhakta only the Kaustubh-stone over His heart or the Srivatsa mark upon it. On the other hand, there are those rationalists who are by no means ascetical in their views or temperament and their name is legion; they insist on our putting religion and God aside or keeping Him only for ornamental uses in spare moments, leave that, they say, & devote yourselves to practical work for mankind. That rationalism is necessary too if only to balance the error of the ascetics who would make of God's

world a mistake and of its Maker an Almighty blunderer or an inscrutable eccentric or an indefinable Something inhabiting a chaos or a mirage. Nevertheless, from materialism least of all, however philanthropic or patriotic, can our future salvation be expected. Finally, there are the mystics who are not ascetics,—the Theosophists. From one point of view I cannot find praise warm enough to do justice to the work of Theosophy; from another I cannot find condemnation strong enough to denounce it. It has forced on the notice of an unwilling world truths to which orthodoxy is blind and of which heterodoxy is afraid or incredulous. It has shown a colossal courage in facing ridicule, trampling on prejudice and slander, persisting in faith in spite of disillusionment, scandal and a continual shifting of knowledge. They have kept the flag of a past & future science flying against enormous difficulties. On the other hand by bringing to the investigation of that science—not its discovery, for to the Hindu Yogin it is known already—the traditional European methods, the methods of the market-place and the forum, it has brought on the truths themselves much doubt and discredit, and by importing into them the forms, jugglery and jargon of European mystics, their romanticism, their unbridled imagination, their galloping impatience, their haste, bragging and loudness, their susceptibility to dupery, trickery, obstinate error and greedy self-deception, Theosophists have strengthened doubt and discredit and driven many an earnest seeker to bewilderment, to angry suspicion or to final renunciation of the search for truth. They have scattered the path of the conscientious investigators, the severe scientists of Yoga who must appear in the future, with the thorns and sharp flints of a well-justified incredulity and suspicion. I admit the truths that Theosophy seeks to unveil; but I do not think they can be reached if we fall into bondage even to the most inspiring table talk of Mahatmas or to the confused anathemas and vaticinations hurled from their platform tripods by modern Pythonesses of the type of Mr̥s Annie Besant, that great, capacious but bewildered and darkened intellect, now stumbling with a loud and confident blindness through those worlds of twilight and glamour, of distorted inspirations, perverted communications and misunderstood or half-understood perceptions which are so painfully familiar to the student and seeker.

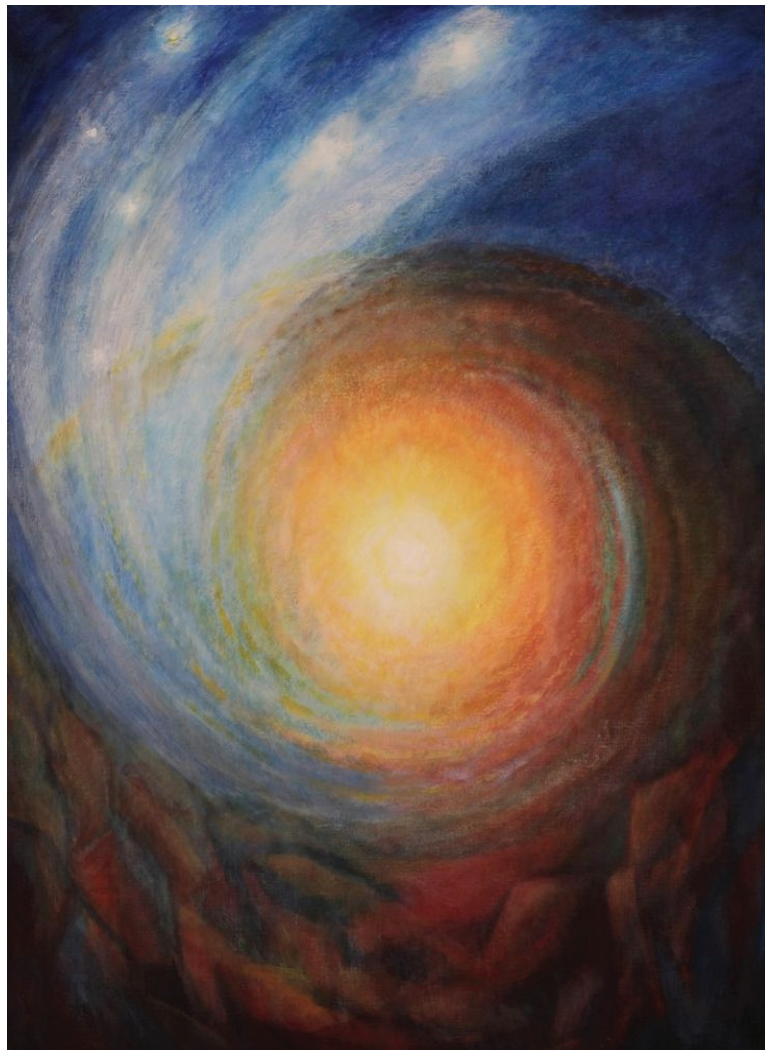
If these things do not satisfy me, what then do I seek? I seek a light that shall be new, yet old, the oldest indeed of all lights. I seek an authority that accepting, illuminating and reconciling all human truth, shall yet reject and get rid of by explaining it all mere human error. I seek a text and a Shastra that is not subject to interpolation, modification and replacement, that moth and white ant cannot destroy, that the earth cannot bury nor Time mutilate. I seek an asceticism that shall give me purity and deliverance from self and from ignorance without stultifying God and His universe. I seek a scepticism that shall question everything but shall have the patience to deny nothing that may possibly be true. I seek a rationalism not proceeding on the untenable supposition that all the centuries of man's history except the nineteenth were centuries of folly and superstition, but bent on discovering truth instead of limiting inquiry by a new dogmatism, obscurantism and furious intolerance which it chooses to call common sense and enlightenment; I seek a materialism that shall recognise matter and use it without being its slave. I seek an occultism that shall bring out all its processes and proofs into the light of day, without mystery, without jugglery, without the old stupid call to humanity, "Be blind, O man, and see!" In short, I seek not science, not religion, not Theosophy, but Veda—the truth about Brahman, not only about His essentiality, but about His manifestation, not a lamp on the way to the forest, but a light and a guide to joy and action in the world, the truth which is beyond opinion, the knowledge which all thought strives after—*yasmin vijñate sarvam vijñatam*. I believe that



Veda to be the foundation of the Sanatan Dharma; I believe it to be the concealed divinity within Hinduism,—but a veil has to be drawn aside, a curtain has to be lifted. I believe it to be knowable and discoverable. I believe the future of India and the world to depend on its discovery and on its application, not to the renunciation of life, but to life in the world and among men.

In these articles I shall not try to announce truth, but merely to inquire what are those things in Hinduism by following which we may arrive at the truth. I shall try to indicate some of my reasons—as far as within these limits it can be done—for my faith in my guides and the manner in which I think they should be followed. I am impelled to this labour by the necessity of turning the mind of young India to our true riches, our real source of power, purification and hope for the future and of safeguarding it in the course of its search both from false lights and from the raucous challenges and confident discouragements cast at us by the frail modern spirit of denial. I write, not for the orthodox, nor for those who have discovered a new orthodoxy, Samaj or Panth, nor for the unbeliever; I write for those who acknowledge reason but do not identify reason with Western materialism; who are sceptics but not unbelievers; who, admitting the claims of modern thought, still believe in India, her mission and her gospel, her immortal life and her eternal rebirth. (CWSA 12: 59-63)

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# The Mother's Vision of Independent India

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Sanat K. Banerji

## The Decision

The Decision had been taken. It was long before the event.

I do not know exactly when it was: it must have been somewhere in the year 1920 probably—perhaps before, perhaps in 1914-15, but I don't think so—it was somewhere in the year 1920. One day—I used to meditate with Sri Aurobindo every day, he sat on one side of a table and I sat on the other side, on the verandah, and one day, like that, in meditation I entered—how to say—I went very high up, entered very deep, or came out of myself—well, say what you like, all that would not say what happened but are only ways of saying—I reached a place or a state of consciousness, where I said to Sri Aurobindo, very simply, just like that: 'India is free'.

This was in 1920. "Then he asked me a question: 'how?' And I replied, 'without a struggle, without a battle, without a revolution: it is the British who will leave because the state of the world will be such that they will not be able to do anything else but go away'. It was *done*.' I spoke to him in the future, when he asked me the question. But where I had seen, I said, 'India is free'. It was a fact. Now, India was not free at that time; this was in 1920. Nevertheless, it was there, it had been done.' (Mother, *Entretiens*, 29.7.53; also see 18.1.56)

And this was an inevitable consequence of Sri Aurobindo's birth, as she explains elsewhere in a Talk given on his birthday.

"On this day there has come into my hands one of those greeting cards which people send... And on this card was written this (I do not remember the words exactly), but anyhow, it was Greetings 'on the occasion of this memorable day of the birth of our nation.' It had been sent by someone who I think had declared himself to be a disciple of Sri Aurobindo a long long time ago..

"That appeared to me one of those enormities of which only human stupidity is capable. If he had said, 'on this memorable day of Sri Aurobindo's birth, *and* its natural consequence, the birth of the nation', that would have been very well. But, in fact, the important point had been left out and the other spoken of, one that is quite simply, a consequence, a natural result: it had to be like that, it couldn't have been otherwise. But people always think like that, all tospyturvy..." (*Ibid.*, 15.8.56)

## A Symbol and a Prophecy

Many people must have noticed a map of India modelled in plaster on a wall adjoining what used to be the Mother's room in the Ashram Playground. The map was drawn by her in her own hand, and is a symbol of her vision of future India. "The map was made after the Partition. It is the map of the true India in spite of all passing appearances; and this will always remain the map of the true India', no matter what people may think of it." (*Mother india*, August 1904)

Long before this map was drawn, in 1948 to be exact, she had a dance-drama staged on the Ashram Playground, to represent the story of India's independence and what was to follow. Sri Aurobindo gives the theme of the dance in a letter to a disciple.

"The Mother has given for your perusal an account of the theme of Anu's dance.

"It rims into three scenes.

"In the first, the curtain rises showing India in slavery and bondage. Then she awakes and



tries to throw off the yoke; the spirit of fight grows.

"In the second scene, liberation has come and its joy and the action of a free people. But she is faced with all sorts of problems such as financial crises, division, corruption, and moral degradation, etc. She looks to every side for a solution, but finds no way out. The confusion grows worse and worse.

"In the third scene, faced with all these difficulties, she aspires and becomes conscious of the Soul of the all-pervading Mother and feels a growing union with that Soul. She finds out her spiritual mission in the world and by it realises the complete unity of the country. From the moment she becomes conscious of the Soul, chorus begins rising into a great force and enthusiasm." (*Ibid.*, December 1972)

### The Reality of the Present

One is not sure if in this prophetic presentation of India's march towards the real goal of independence, she is still in the "second scene". Or is she getting set for the third?

The Mother's answers to a questionnaire published in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in 1964 are rather disconcerting. She made it very clear indeed that "India's true destiny is to be the Guru of the world." But, she added, "the present reality is a big falsehood - hiding an eternal Truth." What had been our saddest failure? "Insincerity", came the reply. "Because insincerity leads to ruin." There were three main barriers that stood in the way: "ignorance, fear, falsehood."

"India has become the symbolic representation of all the difficulties of modern humanity. India will be the place for its resurrection, the resurrection to a life more elevated and more vast." This was the Message read out by the Mother—the original was in French—that electrified the gathering at the inauguration of Auroville in February 1968. (*Ibid.*, March 1968)

The difficulties of India need not be elaborated: the Mother never likes to stress difficulties. But she has mentioned some of the main reasons. These we must know.

"India has, or rather had the knowledge of the spirit, but she neglected matter and suffered for it." (*Ibid.*, December 1968) This was a natural consequence of the illusionist attitude to life, "this idea of a complete renunciation of all physical reality, a profound contempt for the material world which one turns into an illusion and a falls hood, leaving, as Sri Aurobindo used to say always, a free field for the sovereign rule of the adverse forces." (*Entretiens*, 2.1.57)

Another sign, hardly noticed anywhere in our country, has been the growing indifference to beauty. "The Divine manifests in the psychic as love, in the mind as knowledge, in the vital as power, in the physical as beauty. If you discard beauty, it means that you are depriving the Divine of this manifestation in the material and you hand over that part to the Asura." (*Mother India*, October 1976)

But what according to the Mother has caused the greatest harm is a firm belief that spirituality is something up in the air that has nothing to do with life on earth. "You see, what has ruined India is this idea that the higher consciousness deals with the higher things and the things down below do not interest it at all and it does not understand anything about it! It is this that has been the ruin of India. Well, this error must be abolished completely." (Mother, *A Propos*, 10.4.68)

### The Truth of the Future

Chaos reigns all over the world and a furious battle is raging between the powers of Light and the forces of Darkness for the mastery of earth and the minds of men. "India ought to be the spiritual guide who explains what is happening and helps to hasten the movement. But unfortunately, in her blind ambition to imitate the West, she has become materialistic and

neglectful of her soul."(CWM 16: 327) She has to find back her soul and then fulfil her appointed role, by living according to the Truth.

Sri Aurobindo, says the Mother, wished India "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-interest and ignorant prejudice."(*Mother India*, May 1954)

What, in fuller detail, is this mission, how is India to carry it out? The Mother gave some indications in an interview she granted to a P. T. I, correspondent in 1954, on the eve of the merger of Pondicherry with India. This interview was given full publicity through *The Mail*, Madras, *The Times of India*, Bombay, and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta, early in November that year. It deserves to be quoted in full.

"If a country can give an example of a life according to Truth, instead of building its life on competition, commercialism, deception and rivalry with one another, then it will be performing a mission.

"If there is one country in the world to assume this role, I expect India to do it. If one nation sets the example of living according to Truth, in all sincerity and straightforwardness, with a feeling of friendship and mutual help to all, it can show to the world that life can become prosperous and pleasant in all respects; and it can also solve all these problems, social and economic, infinitely better than by the competitive way.

"That should be India's role. And as a spiritual *guru*, India should teach others by her own example."

The word "spiritual" immediately provoked a question. How can spirituality deal with these mundane and material problems? The Mother's answer was direct and simple. "Spirituality means putting oneself entirely under the Law of Truth and bringing down the Law of Truth upon earth. That is bound to bring a solution to all problems."

The Government of India takes as its motto the saying of the Upanishad: Truth alone wins. But what is Truth? This question, was put to the Mother by a child of 15., "I replied: the Will of the Supreme Lord."(*Mere Repond, 3me Serie*) "Truth is Supreme Harmony and Supreme Delight: The Lord's Will is the Truth, in everything and everywhere, always." (*White Roses*, pp. 50, 138) To put oneself entirely under the Law of Truth, as the Mother and Sri Aurobindo did, is to ensure the Supreme Harmony and the Supreme Felicity for oneself. To have brought down the Law of Truth upon earth, as the Mother has done with the Supramental Manifestation, is to ensure the Harmony and the Delight for the entire world.

### The Golden Bridge

A golden bridge has been built between the Truth and the reigning Falsehood. And this gives India a splendid chance.

"India ought to be," wrote the Mother on June 8, 1967, that is, soon after the date (June 5, 1967) to which she attached great importance in the progress of the Manifestation. (*Champaklal Speaks*, p. 150)—for the Manifestation is a progressive affair,—"India ought to be the spiritual leader of the world. Inside, she has the capacity, but outside.... For the moment there is still much to do for her to become actually the spiritual leader of the world. There is such a wonderful opportunity just now! But...." (*White Roses*, p. 168)

How is India to avail of this opportunity? That is the important question.

An answer was succinctly given in the Mother's Message to the Prime Minister in October 1969: "India must work for the future..."

"Sri Aurobindo is the messenger of the future. He still shows us the way to follow in order

to hasten the realisation of a glorious future fashioned by the Divine Will..."(*Message to All India Radio*, 15.8.71) To follow the teaching of Sri Aurobindo is then the surest way to the future. The difficulty is that even among his people, even in India, Sri Aurobindo's teaching is hardly yet known in all its bearings. He is known as a great patriot and a great Yogi. "He has become an international figure, but we claim him more", as a prominent public figure once told the Mother. "But you are not claiming him enough," the Mother had to retort. (*Champaklal's Treasures*, p. 69)

How to help people get out of this difficulty, that is the immediate problem. The only solution of the country's problems is what Sri Aurobindo has given in his writings, the Mother is reported to have said in a talk with some disciples in April 1970. Sri Aurobindo has replied to all questions. His answers are to be compiled in a suitable manner. He wrote mostly in English; but as many Indians do not know English, it is necessary to translate him into the languages which they understand. His message has to be spread all over the country. His solutions must reach all who wish to know. "The times are grave. The situation is serious", the Mother added in her own hand. "It is only a strong and enlightened action that can pull the country out of it."

Her appeal is to the rising generation. "You who are young, are the hope of the country. Prepare yourselves to be worthy of this expectation." Thus runs her Message to the youth of India. "To be young is to live in the future; to be young is to be always ready to abandon what one is and become what one ought to be; to be young is to never admit the irreparable."(*Mother India*, February 1968)

#### Some Fields of Endeavour

This applies to every sphere of the nation's life. Perhaps nowhere else can it be as fruitful and productive of immediate results as in the field of education.

"The effort to increase and enlighten the consciousness", she says, "is the best way to serve the country." And to this end, "the first thing that must be taught to every human being, as soon as he is capable of thinking, is that he must obey the reason... and refuse absolutely to be the slave of his instincts..."(*Entriens*, 8.5.57) There are naturally many more things to follow. But this must be the indispensable base.

Our education must aim at bringing "The legitimate authority of the spirit over a matter fully developed and utilised.... It must insist on the growth of the soul."(*Mother India*, December 1968) How this aim is to be achieved is a matter of detailed study which we cannot undertake here. But there is a point of capital importance which one must note. It is a question of "classification" of the students, not indeed in any arbitrary manner, but based on a careful observation of their particular tastes, capacities, interests. "In this manner, the children will find their true place in society and will be made ready to fill it when they grow up."(*Commentaires sur les Aphorismes*, Nos. 84-87)

Education correctly pursued would help solve most of the social and economic problems. If everyone finds and fills his true place in the social and economic scheme, according to his or her true capacities, tastes and interests, much of the prevailing disharmony will disappear. The economic organisation the Mother envisages for Auroville may perhaps be taken as typical of the future India,—an organisation based "on capacity, the position, the inner position of each one.... The organisation ought to be such... that the material needs of all are assured, not according to the idea of equality or of rights, but based on the most elementary necessities; and once that is established, each should be free to organise his life according to—not his monetary means but his inner capacities..."(*A Propos*, 30.6.67) "Put each thing in its place" is a formula the Mother is never tired of repeating.

Politics is a much more difficult subject. But here too, her first sketch of Auroville might serve as a guide. The ideal government is one that is under the direct control and guidance of One who represents the Supreme Consciousness. "That may come to pass, you know." But if that is not immediately possible, "it could perhaps be replaced by the government of a small number—this would have to be in the nature of an experiment and the number has to be chosen between four and eight, something like that, four, seven or eight—with an "intuitive" intelligence: "intuitive" is more important than "intelligence", an intuition expressed intellectually. This would have some inconveniences from the practical point of view; but it would perhaps be nearer to the Truth..."(Ibid., 10.4.68)

### A Last Will and Testament

We speak here of education, society, economics and politics. But everything concerning the life and thought and aspirations of man must [undergo a sea-change under the guidance of the Truth: history and culture and art and science, religion, yoga and spirituality must assume a new garb and get a new orientation. We cannot enter into any details here, because that would be to reproduce the enormous mass of the Teaching. But there is a possible misunderstanding that we must try to eliminate about this Teaching. The Mother emphasises this.

"Sri Aurobindo has come on earth, not to bring a teaching or a creed in competition with previous creeds or teachings, but to show the way to overpass the past..."(*Mother India*, February 1968) He has shown that "all the contraries are complimentaries which organise themselves and are unified in an integral synthesis."(*Mère Répond*, 4me Serie) To be able to understand and follow his Teaching, we must liberate ourselves from sectarian notions and share something of his Vastness. "He is as vast as the universe, and his Teaching has no limits..."(Ibid)

There is another possible source of misunderstanding. The Mother speaks of India and her mission. In this context it might be well to recall what she said long ago, in August 1949: "Stop thinking that you are of the West and others of the East. All human beings are of the same divine origin and meant to manifest upon earth the unity of this origin"(*Messages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, Second Series (1952 Edition)).

Each nation has something special to contribute to the total harmony, and there is here no question of superiority or inferiority. The Mother has high hopes that India and America will join together in hastening the coming of the New World. "In the full spiritual knowledge know that for saving the world and building the New World, it is absolutely essential that India and America work together, because these are the two countries that will do it: America with her great material power and India with her spiritual force, both of which are necessary."(*Mother India*, July)

This was a message given by the Mother in 1973. It may perhaps be taken as a last Testament and Will she has left to Independent India.

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# *Bharat as a Civilisation*

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*J. Sai Deepak*

Ever since British author and columnist Martin Jacques<sup>1</sup> proposed about a decade ago that China was a 'civilisation- state' which Europe could not relate to given the latter's nation-state-based worldview,<sup>2</sup> similar assertions have been made about Bharat being a civilisation-state. In 2014, Dr. Koenraad Elst wrote a piece on his blog titled 'India as a civilisation-state' wherein, citing Zhang Weiwei's book *The China Wave: Rise of a Civilisational State*,<sup>3</sup> he contended that Bharat too must make a similar case for itself.<sup>4</sup> Dr. Elst's position was based on his view that Bharat's 'self-understanding' supported its case of being or becoming a civilisation-state. Subsequently, this position has been echoed by others, including the current National Security Advisor Shri Ajit Doval.<sup>5</sup> In my opinion, such a position must be examined and made good from both a conceptual and practical perspective if the purpose is to give effect to that position at the level of law and policymaking, failing which, it would be reduced to just another fashionable buzzword or a mere talking point.

The claim that Bharat is a civilisation-state requires us to address the following layers at the very least, including those which inhere in them:

1. What are the ingredients that constitute a nation and a civilisation, and what distinguishes the two?
2. What separates a civilisation-state from a nation-state?
3. What makes Bharat a civilisation, if at all?
4. Independent of how the Constitution treats Bharat, what is the basis for the view that a civilisation-state model suits Bharat better than the nation-state model?
5. If Bharat is a civilisation, does the Constitution's treatment do justice to its nature?

I will try and address each of these questions as organically as possible with primary reliance being placed on Indic and pro-Indic voices (broadly, 'Indic scholars'), who have taken the considered position that Bharat is indeed a civilisation, based on their knowledge of its history and consciousness. While I leave it to the experts to comment on the merits of the scholarship, the scope of my enquiry for the purposes of the discussion at hand is limited to assessing their positions for consensus on Bharat's status as a civilisation and their basis for holding such a view.

My other objective, as stated previously, is to draw the attention of the reader to Indic scholars whose works have either been systematically sidelined or completely pixelated on the ground that they championed 'Hindu nationalism' and sought to exclude non-Hindu identities from the journey of Bharat. These labels were expectedly hurled at such scholars by the postcolonial and Marxist schools, which have normalised such labels in mainstream discourse, largely due to the monopoly enjoyed by them in the realms of education, journalism, culture and policymaking. Instead of engaging with Indic scholars on the merits of their position, the approach of the postcolonial and Marxist schools has been to impute anti-minority and hyper-nationalist motives to the views of such scholars in order to pre-empt them from reaching a wider audience.

Clearly, the dark legacy of European nationalism and its destructive tendencies have been foisted on genuine Indic decolonial attempts in order to silence the voice of the native. As stated earlier, the Eurocentric criticism and stifling of indigenous efforts to regain agency over native consciousness is writ large on the conduct of the postcolonial and Marxist schools. To push back against this, keeping with the spirit of decoloniality, through the ensuing discussion



I have attempted to showcase the views of a few early Indic scholars, namely Har Bilas Sarda, Radha Kumud Mookerji, Jadunath Sarkar and R.C. Majumdar, who collectively lend support to the position that Bharat is indeed a civilisation and must be treated as such.

These scholars, to me, represent the beginnings of an Indic Renaissance in the realm of history, starting in the second half of the nineteenth century when Bharat's aspirations of self-determination were being called into question on the ground that Bharat had never been 'one nation' and, therefore, could not aspire to independent statehood. It is in response to this colonial position that such Indic voices started generating rigorous scholarship that reinforced the unity of Bharat as a civilisation, and went to the extent: of confidently asserting that (a) Bharat's indigenous identity must be traced to a period before the Islamic invasions (Middle Eastern colonialism) and European colonisation, and (b) 'the Hindu religion' was the glue that bound this civilisation. Their caveat, however, was that Indic GET systems must not be understood through the prism of the faith of the European coloniser despite using the word 'religion' to crudely refer to them for colonial consumption. It is important to appreciate that while some of these works were published in English and also cited or quoted the views of Europeans on the subject, they endeavoured at talking back to the European coloniser and reclaiming the agency of indigenous consciousness to speak for and about itself.

Through their scholarship, these stalwarts successfully refuted the self-serving claim of the White European Christian coloniser that it was his civilising benevolence that led to disparate and unrelated communities being stitched into one political unit. That such Indic voices stood up for the native at a time when European colonialism was perhaps at its zenith speaks volumes of their conviction in the strength and relevance of Indic consciousness. Even if the works of such scholars suffered from colonial consciousness to a certain degree, I am willing to overlook it given the times such scholars lived in, the resources at their disposal and their lionine attempts at speaking truth to a global colonising, enslaving and evangelising power. To my mind, such Indic scholars bravely pursued the goals of decoloniality whilst living under the yoke of the coloniser. This is in stark contrast to the deeply entrenched coloniality that one witnesses in a supposedly independent contemporary 'India' in every discussion where Bharat's past is subject to scrutiny with unadulterated hindsight bias, sanctimony and judgment.

Among the earliest Indic scholars was Har Bilas Sarda, whose book *Hindu Superiority: An Attempt to Determine the Position of the Hindu Race in the Scale of Nations*, which was published in 1906, apart from being relevant to his times, was way ahead of its time when seen through a decolonial lens.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the book, Sarda uses the term 'Hindu civilisation' while referring to 'ancient India'. In his discussion on the defining feature of the Hindu/Indic civilisation, Sarda underscores the integral and indispensable role of nature in the schema of 'ancient Indians', which formed the basis of Hindu laws and institutions. This brings out two significant aspects: (a) that the native identity of Bharat being the Indie/Hindu identity never appeared to be a matter of contestation in Sarda's discussion, and (b) that a harmonious relationship with nature defines the Hindu/Indic consciousness, from which emanates its worldview and institutions.

In etching the arc of the Hindu civilisation, what is astounding in hindsight is that Sarda treats the end of the Mahabharata War, the beginning of Kali Yuga, as the turning point in the history of Bharat—an approach consistent with that of Indie epistemological systems. Now, barely 115 years after Sarda's book was published, anyone who believes in the historicity of the Mahabharata War or the concept of a Kali Yuga, would be ridiculed for putting stock in 'myth' and 'fiction'. This demonstrates the manner in which the agency of the Indic consciousness over time and its subjectivity has become entirely subservient to the totalising nature of the casual



coloniality we encounter in Bharat today. Ironically, the very same servile colonised Indian mind would have no qualms accepting the historicity of the founder of the White European Christian coloniser's faith as a given.

While undertaking an exercise that panoramically surveys Bharat's history, consciousness and civilisation, Sarda posits that religion is one of the tests of civilisation. In the case of Bharat, according to him, guana or knowledge is the true religion of Bharat, which was made possible only due to the 'pre-eminence of morals, philosophy, literature, science and general culture'. While making a case for respecting the Indic consciousness, Sarda cautions against judging the past through the lens of the present given that the present is a far cry from the past.

Sarda defines the Hindu religion as an anthology of eternal truths as follows:

The Hindu religion is the knowledge and comprehension of those eternal principles which govern nature and man, those immutable laws which in one sphere are called 'science', in another, 'true philosophy'. It concerns itself not with things true under certain conditions or at certain times: its precepts are ever true, true in the past, true in the present, true in the future. True knowledge being one, it takes, without any distinction, into its fold, Indians, Arabs, Europeans, Americans, Africans and Chinese. Its principles circumscribe the globe and govern all humanity.

When the construct of 'religion' is reconsidered in light of this description, it is evident that the term does not do justice to Sanatana Dharma, exposing the problem of applying colonial Christian OET and linguistics to Bharat's indigenous systems that are rooted in an onto-epistemology which is vastly different from that of the coloniser's. Naturally, the White European Christian coloniser could not wrap his head around it and presumed that ethnicity and religion were as related in the Indic 'religion' as they were in his faith and worldview, which led to ethnocentric representations of Indic OET as well as its societal structures.

Starting in 1912, another scholar who wrote extensively on various aspects of the Indic civilisation spanning over four decades was Radha Kumud Mookerji. In the context of establishing the civilisational character of Bharat, five of his works are particularly helpful: *The Fundamental Unity of India* (1914), *Nationalism in Hindu Culture* (1921), *Hindu Civilization: From the Earliest Times up to the Establishment of the Maurya*

*Empire* (1936 and 1950),<sup>7</sup> *A New Approach to the Communal Problem* (1943)<sup>8</sup> and *Akhand Bharat* (1945),<sup>9</sup> with the leitmotif of Mookerji's work being captured in the first two.

In *The Fundamental Unity of India*, Mookerji marshals evidence from sources that are central to the Indic OET to make a case for its civilisational oneness through the unification of its geography despite the diversity that meets the eye.<sup>10</sup> Mookerji takes the clear position that this unity antedates the arrival of the British coloniser by millennia and, therefore, the coloniser cannot remotely claim to have unified and created 'India'. The premise of Mookerji's position is that in order for a group identity to take shape as a nation or a civilisation, 'the fundamental and indispensable factor is the possession of a common country, a fixed, definite abode'.

He compares the necessity for a fixed geography for the blossoming of a national or civilisational identity to a body through which the spirit operates. It is the place, the geography the territory that enables the feeling of community, which leads to broader identities, such as national or civilisational. The development of an independent and identifiable cultural identity, which includes language, OET, literature and culture, is itself a function of the place and its characteristics. In the case of a diverse society, such as Bharat, according to Mookerji, an 'expanded geographical consciousness' is a condition precedent to the creation of a

political unit that acts as one. To make his case for a common expanded Indic geographical consciousness, Mookerji first draws attention to the British coloniser's treatment of Bharat as not one but a 'collection of countries' and cites this Eurocentric perception as an impediment in making sense of Bharat. That such a perception is based on European conceptions of nation-statehood is evident to Mookerji since he specifically cites the scepticism of Anglo-Indian authorities, such as John Strachey, who were of the view that 'there is not and never was an India, or even any country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political'.<sup>11</sup> It is remarkable that similar sceptical opinions of Bharat's consciousness and its history are echoed even in contemporary Bharat, which is proof of continued coloniality.

To rebut the coloniser's contention that Bharat did not exist as a single unit, whether political or geographical, Mookerji cites authorities on Bharat's geography, such as Vincent Arthur Smith and George Chisholm, who were of the following view<sup>12</sup>:

India, encircled as she is by seas and mountains, is indisputably a geographical unit, and as such is rightly designated by one name. ...

There is no part of the world better marked out by Nature as a region by itself than India, exclusive of Burma. It is a region indeed full of contrasts in physical features and in climate, but the features that divide it as a whole from surrounding regions are too clear to be overlooked.

Notwithstanding the clear identification of Bharat's natural borders, the sheer human diversity contained within it is bound to confound any observer who superficially attempts to apply the yardsticks of a 'nation' to Bharat. It is evident that the monochromatic concept of a nation does not do justice to Bharat, and therefore as opposed to cutting the head to fit the hat, a different yardstick must be applied, which is that of a civilisation, given that diversity and scale are two of the central requirements of a civilisation. However, that would still require us to demonstrate that despite the scale and variety, there is something that binds this vast land and its ocean of humanity. What is the unity that binds this diversity for it to stake a legitimate claim as one civilisation?

One may be tempted to draw parallels with the idea of a 'Christian civilisation' or 'Islamic civilisation' wherein people belonging to different races, speaking different languages, are seen as being part of one civilisation; however, given that Christianity and Islam impose a common faith and practices that unify the members from within and also explicitly identify the out-group, it is possible to entertain the idea of Christian and Islamic civilisations. This cannot be said of the 'Indic civilisation' since 'religion', as understood in the Abrahamic sense, does not apply to Indic OET, as a consequence of which it may not be possible to distil visible commonalities with the same ease as in Christianity or Islam. In fact, that temptation must be avoided since even the attempt to define a fundamental concept, such as unity in the Abrahamic sense, is proof of unconscious Abrahamic coloniality at work, which defeats the very object of undertaking a decolonial approach to defining an Indic civilisational identity.

Mookerji addresses the question of civilisational unity and quotes Vincent Arthur Smith on the subject, who wrote extensively on Bharat between 1893 and 1919<sup>13</sup>:

[The civilisation of India] has many features which differentiate it from that of all other regions of the world, while they are common to the whole country, or rather continent, in a degree sufficient to justify its treatment as a unit in the history of human, social, and intellectual development.

Building on this thought and to demonstrate that such evolution and existence as a single unit with vast internal diversity was a matter of antiquity with no role played by the European

coloniser, Mookerji cites the use of names, such as 'Jambudvipa' and 'Bharatavarsha', to identify this vast geography both by its people and outsiders. He clarifies that while Jambudvipa is a geographical reference, Bharatavarsha is a political reference, both of which demonstrate a unified geographical and political consciousness much before the idea of a British identity was even born. The underlying premise behind Mookerji's argument is that if a landmass with immense variety, natural and human, is given a common name, it is proof of unity in diversity with clear historical and political significance.

The unification of this land by Emperor Bharata after whom Bharatavarsha is named, just as Rome is derived from its founder Romulus, is the argument advanced by Mookerji to establish Bharat's civilisational unity. He marshals evidence from the *Aitareya Brahmana* of the *Rig Veda* to support his argument. While I am in no position to refute or accept this argument as someone who is not formally trained in the Vedas, I understand Mookerji's reliance on the Vedas given their centrality to Indic OET and their treatment as documents of historicity. Coloniality would result in the Vedas being dismissed as embellished and exaggerated myths, while decoloniality would require us to respect them as primary sources of indigenous OET, and therefore not apply colonial benchmarks to what indigeneity has to say about the journey of this land and its civilisation.

At this point, I must admit that Mookerji's work appears to be premised on the existence of an Aryan identity, which remains the subject of intense debate even to date, with the evidence perhaps going against the Aryan Invasion Theory (AIT). In fact, the treatment of AIT as a colonial invention driven by the European coloniser's race-driven consciousness shall be dealt with briefly in Chapter 9. In any case, since this issue is for better-qualified people and domain experts to comment on, I will limit myself to the position that the spread of a common culture and civilisation through the efforts of Emperor Bharata, from whom the name Bharat is derived, is attested to by Indic sources. According to Mookerji, such efforts resulted in establishing cultural unity within a 'federation' of 'different creeds, cults and cultures with liberty to each to preserve its own special features and genius and contribute its own quota to enrich the central culture'.<sup>14</sup> In that sense, Bharat's civilisation may be understood as a federal civilisation with multiple sub-identities that are free to retain their identities but have remained culturally and politically bound for millennia. This is evidenced by the fact that this land has a recorded history of being politically referred to as 'Bharatavarsha' or 'Bharat' without interruption notwithstanding the Islamic invasions or European colonisation. Simply put, Bharat's self-understanding as a single cultural, civilisational and political unit has not changed and its internal diversity has not come in the way of such unity in the least. The European worldview, which puts stock in the domination of 'one nation' or 'one people' over others at the expense of the identity of others or their very existence, naturally, cannot seem to fathom what keeps Bharat together despite its diversity.

Apart from citing the use of a common name to identify this part of the world as a single civilisational unit, Mookerji explains the nature of Indic land ontology, the understanding of which, according to me, is critical to distinguish it from the European coloniser's territorial approach. Mookerji explains that the connection of the Indic civilisation with Bharat rests on its veneration of the land, quite literally, since She is worshipped as the vast Mother who is a living Deity with Her geographical attributes, such as the land and its rivers, being woven in hymns and prayers to simultaneously evoke shared feelings of devotion, unity and patriotism. This deification of the land itself, the blending of faith and patriotism, is proof of the inseparable and most fundamental connect between the land and its civilisation. The gradual expansion of this civilisation's geographical consciousness went hand in hand with the expansion of its presence and is reflected in the accommodation of a larger geography over time in the hymns of the Vedas. As opposed to being the subject of conquest and dominion, Bharat is treated as an object of worship, with respect for its geographical attributes being richly reflected in the

hymns. This brings out the fundamental divergence between the attitudes of Middle Eastern and European colonialities to Bharat and nature on the one hand, and the attitude of the indigenous Indic consciousness towards its sacred geography on the other. On this, Mookerji has the following to say<sup>15</sup>:

The perennial beauty of the Himalayas has captivated the national imagination and has made them the refuge of holy men, drawing unending streams of pilgrims. Indeed, the Hindu's pilgrimages are always to the glacier-clad mountain, the palm-clad seashore or ocean-isle, or the almost impenetrable depths of hill and jungle, where the tread of the generations of Man has scarcely been heard, and Nature left free to exercise her healing and healthful influence. Thus, the Indian treats the beauty of place in a peculiar way, foreign to the West: his method of appreciating and celebrating it is quite different. A spot of beauty is no place for social enjoyment or self-indulgence; it is the place for self-restraint, for solitary meditation which leads the mind from nature up to Nature's God.

Had Niagara been situated on the Ganges, how different would have been its valuation by humanity. Instead of occasional picnics and railway pleasure trips, the perennial pilgrimage of worshipping crowds. Instead of parks, asramas. Instead of hotels, temples. Instead of ostentatious excess, simple austerity. Instead of the desire to harness its mighty forces to the chariot of human utility, an absorbing subjectivity, a complete detachment from the body, and the outward world to feed the life of the spirit!

Thus, the institution of pilgrimage is undeniably a most powerful instrument for developing the geographical sense in the people which enables them to think and feel that India is not a mere congeries of geographical fragments, but a single, though immense, organism, filled with the tide of one strong pulsating life from end to end. The visit to holy places as an imperative religious duty has made wide travelling a national habit in India in all ages of life, with young and old alike, and travelling in ages preceding the era of steam and mechanical transport could not but promote a deep knowledge of the tracts traversed which is easily escaped by modern globe-trotters. It was this supremely Indian institution in fact which served in the past in place of the modern railway and facilities for travel to promote popular movements from place to place and intercommunication between parts producing a perception of the whole. It allowed no parochial, provincial sense to grow up which might interfere with the growth of the idea of the geographical unity of the mighty motherland; allowed no sense of physical comforts to stand in the way of the sacred duty of intimately knowing one's mother country; and softened the severities of old world travelling by breaking the pilgrim's route by a holy halting place at short intervals. It is difficult indeed to count up the innumerable sacred spots which an overflowing religious feeling has planted throughout India.

This excerpt captures the essence of my deliberations in the previous section on the vast differences in the land ontology of the European coloniser and indigenous societies. From its mountains to its rivers, almost every geographical feature of Bharat is treated as a place of pilgrimage, which brings out the triple matrix of nature, faith and patriotism that was used to forge cultural unity while keeping the diversity alive. In fact, according to Mookerji, the institution of pilgrimage not only sanctified the parts but also mandated reverence of the whole. For instance, worship of the seven rivers, the seven mountains, the seven cities, the four abodes of pilgrimage and the like created and strengthened the idea of Bharat as a sacred geography. As a consequence, the people were not merely encouraged but also enjoined to see themselves as citizens of a living civilisation whose territorial metes and bounds were deeply embedded in popular memory through traditions, prayers and rituals. The network of shrines spread across the length and breadth of the land naturally triggered a movement of people so that their allegiance to vibrant regional identities did not submerge or prevail over the

civilisational identity. Simply put, from the Vedic period to the time of Adi Shankaracharya, the establishment of a network of pilgrimages in the extremities of the land has served to reinforce respect for nature and the fundamental unity of this land and its people as the inheritors of one civilisation with federal components contained within its bosom. Mookerji supports this central assertion in the book with multiple references from what he calls 'Hindu Sources' and what we may call Indic OET in the context of our discussion.

While these sources served as positive proof of an identified landmass being associated with a specific culture, the negative proof, according to Mookerji, lay in the fact that all these objects of veneration, that is, the foci and loci of religious and cultural identities were located within the same geography as opposed to in a distant land. He substantially reiterates this position in his work *Nationalism in Hindu Culture* (1921)<sup>16</sup>; however, what takes the discussion forward is his view that the principal sects of Hinduism not only advanced Indic spiritual thought but also strengthened the bonds of their followers to this land by not limiting themselves to any particular part of the country. According to Mookerji<sup>17</sup>:

All the subordinate sects of Hinduism stand on the common platform of a larger outlook, an imperial conception of the geographical integrity and individuality of the mighty motherland; all the creeds have a common catholicity so far as a devotion to the motherland, a sense of its complete sacredness, are concerned the sacredness not merely of the whole, but of each and all of its parts....

... Thus if one is a Saiva, the Sastras present before him the necessity of his cultivation of the conception of the totality of that vast area throughout which are scattered the various places consecrated to the worship of the great God Siva. If he wants to be a genuine devotee of his God, he must visit all these various places, each of which has been exalted into a holy place for its association with one out of the innumerable aspects of the deity...

...Similarly for the Vaishnava are singled out innumerable sacred places distributed throughout the country in all its four

quarters, so that he may be trained in a wider geographical consciousness and made to identify himself with the interests of a much larger country transcending the narrow limitations of his original place of birth....

...Thus, whether the Hindu is a Saiva, or a Vaishnava, or a Sakta in his choice of the special mode of his spiritual culture, he is bound to cultivate in common with all his co-religionists the sense of an expanded geographical consciousness, which alone can contribute to the expansion of his mind and soul. Indeed, it has been rightly assumed and asserted that the physical geography of India has partially influenced her history and shaped and moulded the course of her culture and civilisation.

It is evident that the objective of establishing such networks even for individual sects was to prevent any sense of regional parochialism from informing the faith of the worshipper, apart from, of course, seeking to disseminate their philosophy in the entirety of Bharat. Consequently, the deities and the devout belong to all of Bharat and all of Bharat belongs to the deities and the devout. This firm territorial connection between Indic OET systems and Bharat is what makes the Indic OET native to this land and, as a corollary, also explains why the OETs that inspire and drive Middle Eastern and European colonialities are not native to it. This is not a matter of subjective opinion or expression of xenophobia of any kind but is a statement of fact.

The other important layer that needs to be peeled away is that while the term 'nationalism' has indeed been used by scholars, such as Mookerji, to make a case for Indian nationalism based on Hindu nationalism, their use of 'nationalism' was meant to signify Bharat acting as a single political unit without taking away the civilisational character of Bharat. In that sense, Mookerji's reference is to 'civilisational nationalism', that is, a living federal civilisation that acts



as one insofar as the rest of the world is concerned. This is obviously very different from the European conception of a nation whose condition precedent is internal homogeneity.

**End Notes:**

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**Courtesy:**

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# *The Greatness of Indian Culture*

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*Indresh Chauhan*

In today's India, we see something that has been missing in her for a long time. This "something" is also the secret ingredient, the presence or absence of which, is at the heart of nations that are either successful or are not. This "X-factor" cannot be measured, but it is very palpable to the outside world and generates a sense of quiet admiration, a lot of grudging respect, and even, awe. Here, we are talking about the mysterious, intangible quality of "confidence".

We must take a moment to distinguish between confidence and another comparable, but different, quality of "pride". While "pride" is outer and often transitory, "confidence" is inner and more permanent. That is because pride is egotistic and hence, subject to the vagaries of time and circumstance, confidence comes from the soul and is everlasting and unchanging.

In the modern world, we forget the significance of the soul, both in an individual and in a nation. It is this forgetfulness that has brought our world and humanity to the precipice of destruction time and again. For Sri Aurobindo, the development of the soul, in the human being, in a country, and in humanity were paramount, and all his writings, in one form or the other, addressed this question from different angles.

More than a hundred years ago, when India was still in the chains of bondage in often deplorable conditions because of famine, poverty, illiteracy, and many social ills, few people could focus on India's soul quality. But not Sri Aurobindo. For him, that was his guiding star, towards which, the compass pointer all his research, study, and contemplation was constantly pointing toward.

However, every nation's future is built on the foundations of its past. In today's times, we often look toward the future but forget the past, and therefore, our outlook is usually on shaky and false grounds often based on personal viewpoints and biases. But not Sri Aurobindo. His vision for India of the future was based firmly on the somewhat mountainous, but rock-solid terrain of India's past that was spread over thousands and thousands of years. To know India's future, we must delve into her past.

At a rather bleak time, when few people would even try to visualize the future of India, it was Sri Aurobindo who called attention to what he referred to as the "Renaissance" of India in a series of insightful essays that were later published as a book, *The Renaissance in India*.

The dictionary meaning of the French word, "Renaissance" is "rebirth". Historically, this has been associated with the revival and renewal of art, culture, and literature in 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe. This meaning of the word is not what Sri Aurobindo associates with India.

With regards to India, Sri Aurobindo uses the word to mean an "Awakening" (CWSA 20: 4). A state of waking up. A state of rising from the "slumber" (Ibid: 14). The unshackling of the "bonds" (Ibid: 4). He calls India the "Giant Shakti" (Ibid: 4)—an Immense Force—freeing herself from the bonds of the past and the present.

Sri Aurobindo takes the reader and lifts them to give them a 30,000-foot view of the historical and cultural landscape of India, divided into what he calls, "three facts" (Ibid: 5):

1. India's great past.
2. The "inadaptive lethargy" or the inflexible state of inertia that existed in India at the time of contact with European cultures.

3. The “ascending movement with some clarity of expression” or the slow, tedious, uncertain, barely perceptible signs of the “awakening” of the true spirit of India.

When describing the great Indian past, Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the 3 components that were the foundations of that greatness:

1. The Spiritual Indian Mind—Sri Aurobindo has called “Spirituality is indeed the Master-key of the Indian mind” (Ibid: 6). Here, spirituality does not refer to religious fervour or orthodoxy, but the deep belief in the Supreme Power of the One Divine behind the existence of this world. The realization that behind all external, visible phenomena, there exists an invisible, Power and Force. The conviction that human beings have the power to exceed themselves by overcoming and transcending lower, animalistic tendencies to rise to higher, God-given potentialities.
2. The Abundance of Energy & Vitality—The India of the past, even as far back as 3,000 years ago, was a throbbing, pulsating, and abundantly alive amalgamation of republics, kingdoms, empires, & communities where the totality of life existed and thrived side by side with spiritual spirit of the land. Temples, parks, public works, art, music, trade, International commerce, and everything that you would associate with modern civilized society existed at that time in Ancient India. The richness of External Life co-existed with the wealth of Internal Life.
3. The Presence of Strong Intellectuality—The India of the past was “the land of Dharma and the Shastra” (Ibid: 7). Dharma—the concept of upholding righteous actions in every area of life. And Shastra—the codification and application of knowledge for the benefit of the individual and the collective.

Sri Aurobindo notes how Human memory and the humble palm leaf were the means of transmission of knowledge and wisdom from one generation to the next. Life was transformed into science and art. There was not even one area of human life that remained untouched by this fierce desire for perfection.

Perfection is the very definition of the Divine. And for the ancient Indian Rishis, seers, sages, and masters, there was no higher homage to the Supreme, than finding and achieving perfection in every sphere of human life. There were 64 domains of expertise or “Accomplishments” as diverse as astronomy, architecture, music, textile-making, horse riding, and even war—all developed to their highest levels of perfection.

We can see how spirituality coexisted with material wealth along with intellectual elasticity that was devoid of any type of dogmatism, narrowness, and discrimination.

From this pinnacle of human perfection, started the slow, gradual, descent into what Sri Aurobindo calls, “the Evening of Decline” (Ibid: 14). The “three Movements of Retrogression” (Ibid: 14) or the 3 reasons for the decay of the ancient Indian civilization. These three movements or reasons were:

1. The Fading of Joy of Life & Creation—Human beings are creative creatures and find joy, happiness, and purpose when their creativity bursts out in the open to create something new, unique, and useful. When this creativity and joy declines, it is usually a sign that lethargy and inertia have set in, and society has lost its vigour. This is exactly what also happened with the Indian civilization. However, the saving grace was that this loss of vigour and vitality was not total but only partial and temporary.
2. The Cessation of Intellectual Activity—Another reason for this decline was the loss of the critical capacity to think, intellectualize, experiment, debate, critique, to

question. Often, societies become complacent and lazy when they are at the peak of their accomplishments and the society's power centres become more concerned with maintaining their powers and control through harsh laws and rules, thus, discouraging change and constant introduction of new ideas. Ultimately, the result is that progress and growth suffer.

3. Spirituality without Aspiration—This was perhaps the most important and core reason for the decline of Indian civilization. True spirituality is an inner condition of an intense, burning, & aspirational desire for the self-development and growth of human consciousness. Without this aspiration, spirituality becomes deadwood, a structure without a foundation. When this inner condition is overpowered by the outer condition of mechanistic rituals, worship, and appeasement of Gods for personal and material benefits only, then spirituality becomes weak and fades into obscurity. It is no longer spirituality, but selfishness. It becomes the domain and playground of the rich and powerful. It becomes repressive, oppressive, and discriminatory.

However, in the case of India, there was one key saving grace. Even though the flame of spirituality became weak, it remained lit and burning, even though feebly. It was never completely extinguished. We shall see in a moment why this was so important.

Against this background, and because of the resulting divisions and weaknesses in society and the body politic, slowly at first, and then with speed, the European nations, particularly, the British, entered India and spread their commercial and political tentacles through the length and breadth of the country. Almost no area of Indian life remained untouched by decades of European rule.

However, Sri Aurobindo places particular emphasis on the influence of Western education and culture on the country because they "jolted" India by providing, what he calls, "three needed impulses" (Ibid: 15). It was as if, a person, long in a coma, was being shaken awake by electric shocks. These impulses were:

1. The Indian spirit came face to face with new and different ideas, thoughts, and philosophies in almost every area of society. Whether it was the role of government, or the place of women in society, or the Westernization of education, every facet of traditional structures of Indian life was met with diverse and contradictory forces.
2. Intellectual and critical thinking that had become somewhat dormant and docile suddenly opened to new ideas, fresh perspectives, and bolder experiments in almost every area of life.
3. With new ideas and thinking, there awakened a desire for creation, for living life with renewed vigour. What was earlier confined to only a few, suddenly found avenues for wider dissemination and participation. Faint signals for a greater sense of democratization in society, including among the downtrodden and the disadvantaged also became evident.

At this point, any other society would have probably been overtaken and submerged by the forces of overwhelming foreign influence and power and would have forgotten and buried its ethos and roots.

But not India. Its rich past and strong foundations were built with the bricks of spirituality, intellectuality, and jest for life, and even though these had been weakened over the ages, they still existed and were ready to assimilate new ideas.

According to Sri Aurobindo, it is this ever-present Indian capacity to assimilate new ideas, thoughts, philosophies, and spirit, that has given rise to the beginning of the Renaissance in India.

Sri Aurobindo says that three “essential works” (Ibid: 15) or important considerations are necessary for this Renaissance to develop on a sound footing. These are:

1. The recovery of old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its depth and splendour. In other words, this new awakening must be built on the foundations of essential and realized spiritual wisdom, knowledge, and experiences that have been recorded and clearly, and logically explained in ancient Shastras, texts, and books. This does not mean that we must go back to dogmatic axioms, worn-out rituals, and strict religious interpretations. On the contrary, these must be discarded, and the focus must shift to the essential nature and upliftment of human consciousness for the individual and collective good of all, irrespective of caste, colour, creed, religion, belief, and any other form of discrimination.
2. This spiritual wisdom must flow into new forms of philosophy, literature, science, art, etc. In other words, behind all disciplines of human knowledge, principles of spirituality should be the guiding light.
3. Finally, modern problems of modern society can be dealt with only by a greater synthesis of spirituality in every aspect of society. One must not mistake this synthesis of spirituality to mean that we must regress to a lifestyle of austerity, deprivation, and lack of enjoyment and material comforts. True spirituality gives place to every aspect of human nature and development and does not neglect any part of human aspiration, whether material, emotional, psychological, mental, or spiritual.

The core of spirituality is very simple yet profound. Making the Divine Spirit supreme in everything that we do is the prime objective. Slowly and steadily, we let go of ego, greed, jealousy, and hatred. Our goal is to transmute lower desires and tendencies by keeping the Divine uppermost in our minds, thoughts, and actions.

Ancient Indian literature and text contain the techniques, methodologies, and steps that are necessary for such a transformation to occur not in the distant future, but in this lifetime itself. Instead of our current focus on only the outer aspects of life, we must learn to delve inside the silence of our inner spirit and let it be our guide and creative power. So, you can see that the foundation of the Indian Renaissance is firmly rooted in spirituality.

It is also this “spirituality” that is the soul-purpose of India. This is where India needs to provide leadership and inspiration to the world. Without this leadership, the “ship” of this world will continue to run into the rough seas of extreme materialism, senseless violence, and unsustainable behaviours at the individual and collective levels.

Whether we are an Indian, of Indian descent, or a foreigner, whether living in India or abroad, no matter what our age or background, it is very likely that our perceptions, experiences, thoughts, emotions, and ideas about India are as diverse as the country and her people.

Because India is such an ancient, complex, and diverse country, most pre-existing notions and conceptions about her are a jumbled mass of first-hand experiences, second-hand readings, and third-hand word-of-mouth utterances.

In other words, the essence of “what is India” probably escapes most people, or at the very least, is difficult to articulate clearly. Most historical accounts also give a limited view

because they focus only on a particular period or put forth only one writer's viewpoint at the cost of different perspectives of other thinkers.

Our quest for a better and truer understanding of India, her history, her people, her problems, and her spirit can be far more successful if we can familiarize ourselves with Sri Aurobindo's ideas, thoughts, and arguments that are laid out in the essays in *The Renaissance in India*. Granted that for the modern reader who is used to consuming Twitter-style information "bytes", watching YouTube videos, & listening to podcasts, Sri Aurobindo is rather tedious to read and even more difficult to comprehend. But if we can gather some patience and start reading Sri Aurobindo's essays, one at a time, a few paragraphs at a go, we will be well rewarded with mind-blowing and paradigm-shifting perspectives that will forever change our perceptions about India and her influence—past, present, and future—in the world.

For example, when looking at the past, we must first go back to reflect on the wisdom from the times of the Veda, the Upanishads, the Gita, and the Tantra—the most profound and original metaphysical texts that were realized by the Ancient Rishis not intellectually, but intuitively, from a place of utter silence and deepest wisdom. Although to the non-initiates, the Vedic hymns were intelligible and shallow, behind their symbolic language was hidden the most secret of secrets—the nature of the One Divine and the true purpose of human life.

Profound secrets of astronomy, cosmology, medicine, alchemy, music, architecture, art and more. Imagine, all this, thousands of years ago. When we study the wisdom in these ancient texts, a sudden calm, a profound peace, and a deep sense of awe descends upon us because behind this knowledge, is a higher intelligence, far superior to human intellectual thought.

Most modern knowledge and information are products of brute human intellect and sometimes contain partial truths or one-sided conjectures and often cause confusion, uncertainty, and unease especially when trying to solve complex problems facing humanity. That is not to say that modern knowledge is ineffective or purposeless. But when we combine the wisdom of the past with the rationality and research of the present times, we come to a place of deeper meaning, usefulness, and wholeness.

Sri Aurobindo, in his essays, clearly explains the spiritual aspects that were part of every field in Ancient Indian life. The foundation of Indian wisdom was spirituality—the profound truth of the origination of everything from the Divine Power. The deep interconnection of everything and everyone. The importance of the inner and the unseen. The supreme purpose of human life is towards higher and higher consciousness without neglecting any aspects of our worldly life. When spirituality is used as a benchmark for everyday living, we become grounded and purposeful.

Sri Aurobindo also points out that for true happiness in society, there must be a harmony of spirit, mind, and body. In other words, our physical well-being, emotional & mental well-being, and the soul's need for a deeper connection with the Divine are all necessary ingredients for a happy and fulfilling life at individual and collective levels. This harmony and balance are often destroyed in modern life because of the focus on only one aspect of human life.

For example, by becoming overly materialistic, we tend to neglect mental and spiritual development and suffer the consequences of extreme stress and societal fragmentation. It can be equally detrimental to emphasize spiritual pursuits only at the expense of material, emotional, and intellectual progress for that leads to a lopsided life of scarcity, escapism, and dryness.

By reading and understanding Sri Aurobindo's ideas and thoughts about India's Renaissance and its associated problems and opportunities, we can start to look at India, the society we live in, and the world around us with a new perspective and understanding. The events around us begin to make more sense. In the chaos and mayhem of the world, are seeds being planted for humanity's eventual advancement.

It is in humanity's eventual growth that spirituality will play a big role with India becoming the "Spiritual Guru" to the world. Not only by the efforts of genuinely learned and realized spiritual teachers, but importantly, by the selfless labour and dedication of its common people who themselves need to wake up to their country's wisdom-oriented past and learn from it.

For that to happen, according to Sri Aurobindo, there must be "three steps" (Ibid: 17) to this process of the Indian Renaissance:

1. Step one is what he calls "complex breaking" (Ibid: 17). In other words, the disintegration of the old and existing structures, practices, and beliefs that no longer work or are decayed by misuse and prejudice. This is the phase of conflict and competition.
2. Step two is "reshaping" (Ibid: 17). That is, modifying and bringing new perspectives, ideas, and practices in all areas of life and society. This is the phase of cooperation and unity.
3. And finally, step three is the "new building" (Ibid: 17) of individual and societal norms and structures based on spiritual wisdom and rooted in Divine Guidance. This is the phase of self-giving and sacrifice for the common good.

The 3 steps are not necessarily sequential, they can occur simultaneously, although in varying degrees. For example, while the bulk of society might be in the middle of step 1, a minority of social institutions may be entering step 2.

Where is India in this process? Most likely between steps 1 & 2. Sri Aurobindo clearly states that the final result of this transformation, that is, step 3, is "yet distant in prospect" (Ibid: 17). Meaning that the path to the Renaissance is long, slow, deep, and deliberate but it is not accidental. Nature is always striving towards development and perfection no matter how long it may take to accomplish its task.

It is entirely possible that in the short term, there may be much confusion, conflict, and entangled opinions pulling the country in many directions. But once the firm inner direction is found, a new clarity will emerge.

The richness of the inner spirit of awakened India will guide its outer development in cooperation and integration with the wider world of humanity. New, original thoughts and ideas for the future of humanity will develop and see the light of day.

The Renaissance of India is not for India alone but for the upliftment of all life on Earth. There is no point in trying to forecast the future in all its details, except with the certainty that spirituality and intellectual creativity will be at the centre of everything. It is our fervent trust and faith that India shall not fail humanity in this endeavour.

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## *Sri Aurobindo: The Light of the New World*

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Charan Singh Kedarkhandi

Now that the world already knows about Sri Aurobindo, the greatest unfinished work before it is: to live and breathe in the consciousness of Sri Aurobindo. Acceptance and assimilation of the rishi-avtaar's consciousness in the true spirit will ensure the fate and future of the new world. Let me put it succinctly: the new world that the title of this paper is hinting at is not just a world of ordinary tomorrow, full of new things, some sublime ideas, sky-rocketing structures, cacophonous and dazzling bazaars, new ways of life and expressions. The new world that this paper talks about is, in fact, a world of new consciousness, new understanding and new definition of life, a world of being and a world of the fulfilment of spiritual wisdom in material life. Soul instead of mind, wisdom and empathy in place of reason and rancour, collaboration instead of mad competition, universal acceptance of people, values, diverse ways of thinking, living and believing in place of an absolute monolith power structure which is generally based on ruse and rage, chaos and competition, smirk and schism will be the hallmarks of this new world. It will be a world of new beings, a world of new motivation and a world of new articulation of life. This new world has been waiting for its dawn for the last 75 years. India has not created an ambience suitable for the realisation of this new world. Sri Aurobindo witnessed the growth and independence of India very closely and had a very solid plan for the fate and future of the new India. In December 1948 when Andhra University bestowed an honour on Sri Aurobindo, he expressed his gratitude through a very insightful letter to the university wherein he said that the nascent India should avoid following "certain tempting direction" and instead concentrate on the "deeper issues":

There are deeper issues for India herself, since by following certain tempting directions she may conceivably become a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organization of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power politics with a high degree of success, guarding and extending zealously her gains and her interests, dominating even a large part of the world, but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its Swadharma, losing its soul. Then ancient India and her spirit might disappear altogether and we would have only one more nation like the others... (CWSA 36: 503-504)

There is a great light for today's India in these forewarning and prophetic words of Sri Aurobindo. Number one, he wants newly independent India to focus on deeper issues and resist the charms of the supermarket of shallowness that is owned and advertised by Materialism. For him, if India becomes a force in commerce, industry, trade, military might, political and technological clout and a formidable force on international platform then there is a great danger of her losing her core character, her godsend central vision and destiny's design for India. Secondly, he wants to see India a nation with a difference, a unique nation, a godly nation. Never like 'the others'. Before the readers jump into the pool of imagination, let me make it clear that Sri Aurobindo does not want India developing herself as an arid Spartan country, bereft of the material progress and multidimensional opulence; he only wants to see India establishing her soul in spirituality, at the core of the development of her character. How can the yogi ignore material progress, prowess and prosperity and at the same time strongly advocate spiritual fusion of spirit and matter in his best know poetic audacity, *Savitri*:

Spirit shall look out through Master's gaze,  
And Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face. (CWSA 34: 709)

Material progress cannot be denied and is inevitable but that cannot be the ultimate good, summum bonum, of humanity. India cannot keep material progress at the development of her central character because India is not there to be 'like the others'. India has certain God-ordained responsibilities for the entire earth.

The old world (read current world) has been abysmally a failure in terms of establishing the elevated efflorescence of consciousness here and has turned it into a wasteland. A wasteland without hope and humour. A wasteland of hubris and haughtiness. A wasteland of nothing but rampant devastation everywhere: solid waste, emotional venom, intellectual acrimony and now technological waste. We are witnessing rampant stolidity everywhere: vanished hopes, faded faces and moribund visages, ravished nature, looted greenery, listless and lifeless forests and spectacles of emaciated women and children are but living testimonials of the wasteland.

Thankfully, in this hopelessness is hope for man! Yes, the most tempestuous times are also the times of utmost possibilities of human progress. Night is darkest before dawn.

It is heartening that despite so much mist of moroseness and clangour of meaninglessness around, the magical hand of the cosmic Creator is clandestinely at play, the Archmason is busy building the defining architecture of humanity's sublime tomorrow:

A mystic Presence none can probe or rule,  
Creator of this game of ray and shade  
In this sweet and bitter paradoxical life,  
Asks from the body the soul's intimacies  
And by the swift vibration of a nerve  
Links its mechanic throbs to light and love. (CWSA 33:138)

That mystic Presence is very much around us! It works through sages and savants, avtaars and mystics, mahayogis and murshids. In our times when the world is emotionally and intellectually fast turning into a desert, Sri Aurobindo is one such promise of an everlasting oasis and efflorescence. Let us salute the Dawn that has descended down in the form of Sri Aurobindo and celebrate this new destiny. In the land of mortals, he has promised immortality; in the world of falsehood, he has assured us of unfaltering Truth, in a world which has become headquarters of arrogance and stupidity, the Rishi-Yogi of *Bhawani Bharati* has come up with —through his letters and luminous messages, his writings and mystic utterings—lessons of humility, wisdom and heroic courage. If only the world listened to him! But then the world has no other option in the long run.

### **Why Sri Aurobindo?**

One of the most insightful introductions of Sri Aurobindo is that he is an avataar of the future, a herald of hope and a harbinger of harmony. He is a bard who is convinced that the age of Spirit will dawn and engulf everything in her glory. His life is a classic example of the assimilation of the best from the past and the gateway of possibilities of the future. He uses the present as ballast for the future. He assures humanity that the best possible development of man is yet to be realized. He came for the conscious creation of the future, brick by brick.

The Mother says,

Sri Aurobindo belongs to the future; he is the messenger of the future. He still shows us the way to follow in order to hasten the realisation of a glorious future fashioned by the Divine Will.

All those who want to collaborate for the progress of humanity and for India's luminous destiny, must unite in a clairvoyant aspiration and in an illumined work. (CWM 13: 14)

There is an invitation in these words of the Divine Mother. An invitation for the conscious collaboration with Sri Aurobindo in his adventure of new humanity, his call for the summits insurmountable, dreams unrealized, milestones untouched. No matter what the response and receptivity of the world is, Sri Aurobindo's work is bound to be fulfilled. The Divine doesn't have paucity of time; only humans have! We must hasten the work because we are running short of time and the hour of God is passing for us! One man who attains himself radiates the fragrance of his enlightenment everywhere. Such is the power of spiritual awakening. There is a promising Buddha waiting in the secret heart, hriday guhyam, in each of us. We must hear the The Mother's call as a cuckoo hears the footfalls of Spring and we must assimilate Her rapturous voice as desert sand assimilates the memory of rain. We must accept the invitation because "the progress of humanity" and "India's luminous destiny" has to go together, simultaneously. A little has been achieved; much remains to be realised. A great loss would be to the perpetually warring, jarring tribes of humans if they ignore the rare but clear voice of Rishi and Avatar of new earth and new humanity that Sri Aurobindo is. M.G. Umar, a scholar in the line of Sri Aurobindo, views,

A great being, a great genius does not come often to this world...Sri Aurobindo is one such rare genius of the modern era...He has brought a new element of spiritual dynamism into the world that marks him out as the new prophet of Life Divine, the harbinger of a New Dawn. (*Thinker and Yogi of the Future: 1*)

Dawn is the face of possibilities, full of promises, prophecies, exuberance and excitement. Sri Aurobindo's birth and his ephemeral lila is the decisive sign of this New Dawn. He has thought over all our problems and complexities through his cosmic yogic vision and has deciphered every puzzle, cleared all mist. He writes that humanity is swinging between the doldrums of animal—man and man-animal. Humans are suffering because they are trapped in the snare of their minds. They are living under the delusional belief that they are the most advanced and evolved species of the planet! But this, according to Sri Aurobindo, is a gross fallacy and a humiliating disparagement of man's earthly possibilities. Sri Aurobindo looks at man with eyes replete with love and compassion of Buddha and fondles humanity with his wisdom and yogic empathy. Current social, economic, political, intellectual problems, racial acrimony, religious bitterness, communal distrust, oppression and agony is unavoidable on earth because Ego and Ignorance are ruling through the mental men. Leaders and readers, captains and chieftains, tycoons and teachers--all are but puppets in the hands of these forces. A radical shift in human consciousness is inevitable. Self exceeding is the only path. Man has to transform himself into something more, into a better and brighter race, a devpuruṣha or a divine Superman. Therefore one of the essential conditions for the transformation of man and earthy conditions is: realisation of the superman in man. Sri Aurobindo writes,

Man is not final, he is a transitional being. This imperfect thinker embarrassed by the limitations of his brain and senses, this ignorant mind seeking after the truth of himself and things and never arriving at a certain knowledge, this stumbling reasoner capable of only speculation...is not the final essay of Nature, her last word, the crown of her evolution, the summit of consciousness, her master creation. (CWSA 12: 232-233)

I find this piece of writing Sri Aurobindo's perfect essay on human nature, his limitations and infirmities. Sri Aurobindo and The Divine Mother have repeatedly and emphatically said that Nature is not, and cannot, satisfied with the present man; she is still preparing for the perfection, silently weaving the plot for Superman. Superman will first take birth in individual consciousness and then gradually in collective humanity. Advent of the Man of Tomorrow or

the New Race is one of the fundamental principles of Sri Aurobindo's sadhana and the core of his message and living action. Echo of the footfalls of the Superman could be heard in all major books of the mahayogi.

In *Savitri*, he prophesies about the coming of the avataar of tomorrow who, moved by human cry, would "bring perfection to the scheme of things":

...surely one day he shall come to our cry,  
One day he shall create our life anew  
And utter the magic formula of peace  
And bring perfection to the scheme of things.  
One day he shall descend to life and earth,  
Leaving the secrecy of the eternal doors,  
Into a world that cries to him for help,  
And bring the truth that sets the spirit free,  
The joy that is the baptism of the soul,  
And strength that is the outstretched arm of Love. (CWSA 33: 200)

The aforementioned promise and the subsequent glories associated with it have been somewhat/to some extent fulfilled through the birth of Sri Aurobindo. He, together with the compassionate Mother, has left behind "the secrecy of the eternal doors" and accepted and embraced earth and the sobbing, suffering and crying humanity. This earth is bound to transform into an Elysian because they are on it! They have taken the charge, "the sacred charge", of humanity. The spirit-liberating truth is bound to kiss earth now; the inexhaustible bliss hidden in the secret recesses is ready to shower its honeycombs on man, the unfaltering, unflinching strength is now a practical possibility for man because he has been touched by the primitive fount of Love, the divine duo.

This author believes that the future of earth and fate of man belongs to Sri Aurobindo and the swiftness of the action and realisation of the results will depend on the man's ardent aspiration, his appreciable collaboration and opulent opening of hearts. Following are some prominent reasons why Sri Aurobindo is the Light of the new world.

### **1) All - Encompassing Vision of Spirituality**

One of the things that we learn during the study and assimilation of Sri Aurobindo is: he is as vast as the sea and as lofty as the sky. He is immeasurable and—encompassing. He never looks at the problems and issues of the earth through specific lenses of East and the West, India and the Rest or the rich and the poor. There is no bitterness in Sri Aurobindo's honeycomb. He looks at the world from the ethereal heights of the space and compassionately works for everybody. When needed, he chastises Indians too and cautions them of any kind of jingoism and narrow nationalism and suicidal sectarianism. At one place in *The Renaissance in India*, he writes—'Spirituality is not the monopoly of India' ( p.64) . He is a true friend of his age and the suffering world. Empathetically looking at the fault lines of race and religious beliefs, Sri Aurobindo negates the supremacy of one religion over another and believes that,

Each religion has helped mankind. Paganism increased in man the light of beauty, the largeness and height of his life, his aim at a many-sided perfection; Christianity gave him some vision of divine love and charity; Buddhism has shown him a noble way to be wiser, gentler, purer; Judaism and Islam how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to God; Hinduism has opened to him the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities. A great thing would be done if all these God-visions could embrace and cast themselves into each other;

but intellectual dogma and cult-egoism stand in the way. (*The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings*: 364)

The religions are but God visions in different codes and colours, manners and mores. They can learn to accept and assimilate each other. But alas, intellectual dogma and cult-egoism spoil the game.

Sri Aurobindo's spirituality is not a narrow cult or culture with limited appeal; it has comic charisma and universal significance. All his fundamental teaching, his yogic action, is directly addressed to humanity as a whole and anybody who has developed preliminary requisites for his work—faith, sincerity, surrender, receptivity and submission before the Divine Will—is fit enough to take the call and be an active collaborator in the Divine's dream.

## 2) Earth and Humanity: The Pivot of Sri Aurobindo's Vision

C.R. Das was prophetic when he described Sri Aurobindo—as a defence council in the famous Alipore trial—as 'the lover of humanity'. For the remaining forty-two years of his stay on earth, Sri Aurobindo proved Das right through his utmost care and concern for humanity. In his vision and approach, Sri Aurobindo is neither of the East nor of the West; he belongs to the whole earth and looks at the earth from the sagacious eyes of a patron-sage and the solicitous regard of a father.

It is an irony of our times that a sizeable part of humanity is worried about and regretful of the past and busy building ariel castles of the future. More than this life, we are concerned about afterlife! More than the problems and possibilities of this earth, we are busy gossiping and guessing the future worlds. We have created hellish conditions on earth for fellow humans and other creatures and are now cherishing dreams of the aureate splendours of heaven! Sri Aurobindo belongs to earth, to the future of earth and it is only and only on earth that he wants all the mirth.

I am concerned with the earth and not with the worlds beyond their own sake; it is a terrestrial realisation that I seek and not a flight to distant summits. All other Yogas regard this life as an illusion or a passing phase; the supramental yoga alone regards it as a thing created by the divine for a progressive manifestation and takes the fulfilment of life and the body for its object. (*Savitri.in*)

He knows that what he dreams is audacious and the loftiest dream of earth. He knows the file and phalanx of armies visible and invisible waiting for him! His is an adventure of consciousness, a rare battle of consciousness, a march, a seize with a difference. As for fellow travellers, devout disciples and surrendered seekers, in unmistakable terms the Mahayogi cautions them:

Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger  
Who shares my kingdom and walks at my side (CWSA 2: 201)

Samurai, hero warriors, the daunting champions are the befitting people to live and prosper on earth. They are the one who will share and savour the glories of earth. An old adage goes in sanskrit, Veer bhogya vasundhra, the earth belongs to the valorous and valiant! Chicken-hearted have no place in God's scheme. All florridly edifices are destined to bite the dust.

Earth is the chosen place of the mightiest souls;  
Earth is the hero-spirits battlefield,  
The forge where the Archmason shapes his work. (CWSA 33: 686)

The mist is cleared now. Sri Aurobindo's sadhna, his yogic and avataric action is the transformation of entire earth and not just individual emancipation. He uses earth as a forge

to shape his dreams, to materialize his ideals, to carve his icons. Every corner of this world, no matter howsoever dark and dolorous, is the field of Sri Aurobindo's yoga and sadhna. His work remains unfulfilled till the last man of Svalbard and last woman of Alaska are changed. This is the price one pays to be a lover of humanity!

Hailing and heralding Sri Aurobindo as Avtaar as the future, prominent sadhak and scholar V. Madhusudan Reddy writes,

Sri Aurobindo inaugurates the Age of a New Consciousness and lays the foundation of a New Creation. The object in Sri Aurobindo's yoga is not redemption of the soul, it is the supramentalisation of earth itself...earth is only and proper place for the integral progression of mind, life, body and soul. (*7 Studies in Sri Aurobindo*: 113)

### 3) India for the World and not just for Herself!

No other spiritual personality of India has laid so much stress on this as has done Sri Aurobindo: he believes and knows that India is the centre of the world's possibilities and perfections, her summits and symphonies. The future of the world depends upon the present of India. The present of India depends on the passing moments of Indians. A strong, emerging, asserting, resurgent India is essential and inevitable for the strong world. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother firmly believe that God has taken the charge of India into his hands and is performing his lila through India. India must be saved for the world.

In *Bhawani Mandir*, the revolutionary pamphlet which still gives goosebumps to conscious readers and devout worshippers of *Bhawani Bharati*, the fiery nationalist in Sri Aurobindo silenced all doomsday prophets of his times by speaking aloud the following words—

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 most splendid destiny, the most *essential* to the future of mankind. It is she who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal Religion, which is to harmonise all religions, science and philosophies and make mankind one soul. (*Bande Mataram*: 84)

Today's younger generation needs to understand the actual and inherent meaning of Sri Aurobindo's aforementioned words. He uttered these words when India was chained and divided, subjugated and suppressed. When neither the colonial masters nor desy superstars of Indian politics were ready to predict a future for India. When stalwart moderate politicians no less than Gopal Krishna Gokhale were busy announcing that complete independence is a Chimera! At that time, Sri Aurobindo was predicting not only the future of India but the destiny of the world! He was talking about unity, harmony and oneness of humankind when clouds of first world war were hovering over the sky. He was seeking rapprochement between religion and science when there was no hope of such osmosis and the entire age was busy lampooning religious beliefs and philosophical flights.

Sri Aurobindo associated thinking with existence and said that a nation incapable of thinking large, lofty and independent ideas and visions, lives under constant threat of extinction. In his book *Essays Divine and Human* Sri Aurobindo wrote,

Our first necessity, if India is to survive and do her appointed work in the world, is that the youth of India should learn to think,— to think on all subjects, to think independently, fruitfully, going to the heart of things, not stopped by their surface, free of prejudgments, shearing sophism and prejudice asunder as with a sharp sword, smiting down obscurantism of all kinds with the mace of Bhima. (CWSA 12: 40)



The thinking class or intellectual aristocracy in any society is the real royalty of that society and nation. It is thinking—deep, unbiased, original and fruitful—that strengthens the roots of a country and shape the stream of her inner and outer development. All great creations of the world are results of meaningful thinking and sublime reflection on life. If India is to reclaim her position of vishwa guru, the world teacher, she has to exert herself into deep thinking. Our people are still abysmally captivated to religious orthodoxies and fault lines of narrow beliefs boosted by caste and creed. We need to free ourselves before we start any talk of claiming the position of vishwa guru. One can never be a guru without having the essential qualifications for a disciple! First we have to be good and receptive disciples. We have to learn from others and imbibe, adopt and assimilate the best ideas and insights from any corner of the universe. This will be not a deviation from our forefathers' teaching but an adherence to their sage advice: ॐ नो भद्रा कृतवो (let noble thoughts come from all sides). Today, the West is ruling economically and technologically over the world only because she has invested very heavily on the free thinking and widely promoted development of scientific temper and investigative spirit of her nations. Let us take a leaf out of the West's book and, if possible, assimilate every significant page of that book that is suitable to the development of our body and spirit as a nation. Is this too difficult ?

### **Spirituality: The *Master-Key* of India**

Spirituality, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the "master-key of the Indian mind". One cannot understand and assimilate the spirit of India and enjoy the blessings of India's soul without developing a sound spiritual vision, a connoisseurship of soul, to appreciate and appraise India. A casual curious mind, a wayward intellectual pursuit is not sufficient to understand India. Indian spiritual and knowledge traditions, her art and aesthetics, philosophy and philology, her robust religious mores and multidimensionality of ethos and ethics, the intricacies of her culture and cuisine cannot be fully grasped without developing an Indian spirit and a sound spiritual vision.

India has, despite thousands of hiccups and hindrances, never left her spirituality in doldrums. She has always been honest to the truth of her centre. This has been the secret of her survival and the longevity of her appeal. Spirituality is the defining feature of her existence, her very *raison d'être*. Surely, matter has dazzled India but it has failed to blind her. Revealing the secrets of the Renaissance of India, in India, The Mahayogi writes,

India alone, with whatever fall or decline of light and vigour, has remained faithful to the heart of the spiritual motive. India alone is still obstinately recalcitrant; for Turkey and China and Japan, say her critics, have outgrown that foolishness, by which it is meant that they have grown rationalistic and materialistic. India alone as a nation, whatever individuals or small class may have done, has till now refused to give up her worshipped Godhead or bow her knee to the strong reigning idols of rationalism, commercialism and economism, the successful iron gods of the West. (CWSA 20: 65)

### **Conclusion: Sri Aurobindo's Call to Young India**

What changes the destiny of a nation or a people or a civilization? The swift and succinct answer is: youth. Youth is the reservoir of energies and exuberance, hope and happiness, tenacity and tempestuous will power and irresistible optimism. But today across the world we see youth fettered in different chains—nationalistic jingoism, parochialism, regionalism, tribalism, intellectual factionalism and ideological fault lines. Politicians use youth as cannon fodder for their selfish, inherent and at times hideous ulterior motives. There are stark and

unbridgeable social, political and economic schisms among youth. They are assertively divided on caste, creed and communal lines. Young energy unleashed in perverted direction is the worst spectacle of the world and a great psychological wound to the soul of any nation. The present chaos and clash of the world is but a preparation for the such enlightened humanity:

Sri Aurobindo invites youth power for building a new, resurgent India and a new humanity upon earth. But his parameters of youth are very high and grand. He wants a class of youth, of knowledge aristocrats, who are free in minds and hearts. The other requisite is that they must be audacious and tenacious adventurers of the future, ready to take on the tornadoes of Time! With this young energy, nothing can stop India from becoming Vishwaguru or the standard-bearer of new humanity. He writes,

Our call is to young India. It is the young who must be the builders of the new world,—not those who accept the competitive individualism, the capitalism or the materialistic communism of the West as India's future ideal, nor those who are enslaved to old religious formulas and cannot believe in the acceptance and transformation of life by the spirit, but all who are free in mind and heart to accept a completer truth and labour for a greater ideal. They must be men who will dedicate themselves not to the past or the present but to the future...It is with a confident trust in the spirit that inspires us that we take our place among the standard-bearers of the new humanity that is struggling to be born amidst the chaos of a world in resolution...(The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings: 294).

*Is young India listening ?*

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## *Emergence of India as a World Leader*

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Lakshmi Jyothi C

The terms Vishwaguru and *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* have been etched in the collective consciousness of the Indians for time immemorial as if it were just a matter of time for India to fulfil her global role and propel the world to the cherished ideal of Human Unity. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the G20 has provided India with the platform for the realization of the two terms. While she chose *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* as her vision, she was a natural choice of the elite group of nations to lead. But these terms were coined by realised seers with a spiritual consciousness and therefore, contain a depth and vastness of meaning beyond the ken of ordinary men. A leader can be a dictator, an all accommodating democratic leader or a Raja-rishi who leads with an inner realization. His cognizance of the crisis at hand and the mastery over himself as well as the visible and the invisible forces that are at play defines the status of his leadership. The deeper the awareness, the more absolute and lasting is the leadership.

What is the present crisis of the world and does India have the wherewithal to lead it to a more splendid future?

Sri Aurobindo says that the present understanding and studies in History and Sociology are very superficial and "We have found no plummet that can fathom these depths;"(CWSA 25: 279).

However, even a most superficial study reveals that there is a pattern to humanity's evolution." We have seen that there are necessarily three stages of the social evolution or, generally, of the human evolution in both individual and society" (Ibid: 184). From the infrarational stage of animal instincts and living within the life-forces to a developed rationality and intellect and presently, an effort to move towards the suprarational realms of psychic subjectivity and spirituality. While the transition from one stage to the other in an individual is much easier, when a collectivity has to evolve, there is a huge mass of resistance along with the surfacing of all the defects and limitations culminating into an evolutionary crisis.

Writing about the World War I Sri Aurobindo says, "The dominant activities of the world, the great recent events such as the enormous clash of nations in Europe and the stirrings and changes within the nations which preceded and followed it, were rather the result of a confused half struggle half effort at accommodation between the old intellectual and materialistic and the new still superficial subjective and vitalistic impulses in the West."(Ibid: 31)

It is the clash between the forces that have been dominant so far and fast losing their significance and the new forces which are waiting to manifest and uplift mankind to a higher consciousness. As new, vaster ways open up in the upward evolution of mankind, the old, narrow, limiting ways need to be given up and if not done voluntarily a clash ensues whose severity depends on the resistance offered by the old and outdated processes and the immensity of the decisive change that has to be effected in the order of social evolution. A destruction becomes inevitable to enable a new reconstruction.

Nature has her own ways of working and accomplishing her tasks. "Working through the imperfect individual and still more imperfect collective mind, she raises up the facts and powers of our existence as opposing principles and forces to which we attach ourselves through our intellect and emotions, and favouring and depressing now this and now another she leads them in the mind of man through struggle and conflict towards a mutual knowledge and the sense of their mutual necessity and towards a progressively right relation and synthesis of

their potentialities which is represented in an increasing harmony and combination of realised powers in the elastic potentiality of human life". (Ibid: 420)

A conscious leadership sees or responds to this evolutionary effort of the Nature, falls in step with it and quickens it by leading his / her flock in that direction.

After the rush of the globalization prompted by the booming IT sector and the humongous economic dividends, there is a sudden reversal among some of the key powers including the US, Britain and France towards a more vocal nationalism and exclusivity. Tilting between extreme transnationalism and exclusive nationalism, each nation is struggling to dig into its own Nation Soul and grapple with her internal problems while coming to terms with external influences.

With the successive shocks of the pandemic, Afghanistan crisis, Ukraine war and a total collapse of old power balance, there is a call for a complete re-organization of the world geopolitical order and powerplay. Through China's robust development and ambitious expansionist ideas, the East is indeed rising. Sri Aurobindo has hinted at the resurgence of Asia and return to her great role which she had played in the progress of human civilization. Asia is considered to be the birthplace of all religions, her cultural characteristic, be it Sanatana Dharma or Taoism or Buddhism or Abrahamism, is indrawn, exploring into the inner realms of consciousness and its ramifications on the outer world. It responds to the outer life with inner vision and means. However, it is only India that retained the essence of the ancient civilization and therefore, has exclusive opportunity in playing a superior role in Asia. China has slipped into a false subjectivity of a vitalistic, egotistic mode. The struggle between China and India is perhaps, the precise faultline between the false and true subjectivity that has to be overcome for the manifestation of a higher order of life. The immensely mental-vitalistic approach of China has to be offset by India taking her place in the true subjectivity of inner, pure consciousness.

The following words written by Sri Aurobindo about a hundred years back put the present global crises into a perspective. "A structure of the external life has been raised up by man's ever-active mind and life-will, a structure of an unmanageable hugeness and complexity, for the service of his mental, vital, physical claims and urges, a complex political, social, administrative, economic, cultural machinery, an organised collective means for his intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfaction. Man has created a system of civilisation which has become too big for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it." (CWSA 22: 1090)

This divide between the inner and outer growth is evident from the genie of Artificial Intelligence that is let out and has risen to hijack the psychological spaces of man and shake the very foundations of the society. Rajiv Malhotra says the future battle grounds are in the realm of AI. "As in any outsourcing arrangement, the provider of services becomes more knowledgeable about the client's internal affairs and the client becomes more dependent on the supplier. The quest for deep knowledge and critical thinking is becoming a thing of the past..." (*Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Power*: xix) This also runs the risk of foreign surveillance and threat to national security and integrity. The vested interests of AI companies are interfering with elections in other countries and overthrowing governments.

In Mark Zuckerberg's own admission, "In a lot of ways Facebook is more like a government than a traditional company" (Ibid: 302)

India is a specific target for these AI platforms originating in the thoroughly capitalistic countries.

“Most leaders are fully aware that India has big data unique to its immense diversity of genetics, culture, and natural resources.” (Ibid: 303) There is a battle to control the Indian populace by these foreign capitalistic agents.

Rajiv Malhotra further emphasizes that “Anti-India groups I have described as breaking India forces in my previous writings are becoming organized to use AI for their goals to psychologically divide Indians into hostile camps fighting each other and the country at large. This will further weaken India at a time it faces numerous challenges” (Ibid: 348)

If India’s strategy is to come up with her own AI platforms under the Atmanirbhar Bharat, it is only a battle of equals. If India can counter this imbalance by reverting back to her civilizational values and grow in inner consciousness, it plays as a superior and shows the way out of the box to the world. It is an obvious push towards the psychic subjectivism and a society led by suprarational consciousness.

He (man) finds that he can only know himself entirely by becoming actively self-conscious and not merely self-critical, by more and more living in his soul and acting out of it rather than floundering on surfaces, by putting himself into conscious harmony with that which lies behind his superficial mentality and psychology and by enlightening his reason and making dynamic his action through this deeper light and power to which he thus opens. In this process the rationalistic ideal begins to subject itself to the ideal of intuitional knowledge and a deeper self awareness; the utilitarian standard gives way to the aspiration towards self-consciousness and self-realisation; the rule of living according to the manifest laws of physical Nature is replaced by the effort towards living according to the veiled Law and Will and Power active in the life of the world and in the inner and outer life of humanity. (CWSA 25: 29)

To have a lasting solution from the present crisis there has to be “the transition from the rationalistic and utilitarian period of human development which individualism has created to a greater subjective age of society.” (Ibid: 31) There may be efforts in economic or nuclear or ideological realms but if the motive is not transcending the current blatant egoisms and moving towards a more universal consciousness, the reprieve is transient ensuing fresh outbreaks in the future.

India, as the world is aware, is the only surviving civilization that retains this inner spiritual knowledge in its innumerable yogic systems, ancient and modern, and can be the panacea to the present world predicament.

However, it is not enough that a leader has a perfect vision and all the theoretical knowledge required but he has to walk the talk and live the virtues he preaches. International Yoga Day is celebrated with exuberance in all quarters of the world but how far modern India is delving beyond the superficial tokenism of a few physical and mental exercises and endeavouring, at least, to understand the essence of her own scriptures and yogic systems?

Sri Aurobindo gives three salutary steps for the Indian Renaissance. “The recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its splendour, depth and fullness is its first, most essential work; the flowing of this spirituality into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge is the second; an original dealing with modern problems in the light of the Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society is the third and most difficult”. (CWSA 20: 15)

However, distant may be the goal and however difficult may be the path, it is best to

informed of the right goal and path. "...though the ideal may not be immediately practicable, it is that to which our action ought more and more to move. And if the best method cannot always be employed, it is well to know the best method, so that in the strife of principles and forces and interests something of it may enter into our dealings with each other and mitigate the errors, stumblings and sufferings which our ignorance and unreason compel us to pay as the price of our progress." (CWSA 25: 428)

India is indeed making the right moves and noises and increasing her influence in global affairs, but it is best to be cognizant of the gravity of the situation and build her muscle – economic, intellectual and spiritual, rather economic and intellectual in the spiritual – to fulfil her much anticipated role as Vishwaguru.

While she strengthens herself in her unique civilizational values perfectly adapted to the modern conditions and transformed to the future demands, she extends her hand to the neighbourhood and beyond.

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. (Ibid: 40)

Present-day Indian's aspiration is best summed up in the words of Jaishankar, the External Affairs Minister, "To start with, the nation must be more secure. Building on that, its development should progress better using foreign partnerships. On global issues, its influence in determining solutions is expected to be stronger. In the international arena its standing as a polity and the stature of its leadership should be higher. And not least, the routine challenges faced by the common person in dealing with the world must be better addressed. Every Indian out in the world must have the confidence that we have his or her back". (*The India Way*: xvii)

"India must make a virtue of reconciling global good with national interest". (Ibid: 9) Through this India sets a perfect model for unity IN diversity. While each nation holds on to its unique values, it also transcends itself and contributes to the global progress in its own unique way.

Yet the unity of mankind is evidently a part of Nature's eventual scheme and must come about. Only it must be under other conditions and with safeguards which will keep the race intact in the roots of its vitality, richly diverse in its oneness. (CWSA 25: 284)

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# The “New Nationalism” and India’s Renaissance

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Makarand R. Paranjape

## I

Not Westernized, bourgeois gentlemen, but Samurai, or more appropriate to our civilization, inspired yogis and dedicated tapasvis, would transform the nation and make India great again. But for this to happen, the spirit of the nation would have to be awakened. This was the message of Sri Aurobindo, whose 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary we have just finished celebrating along with India@75, Azaadi ka Amrit Mahotsav.

A posse of armed inspectors and policemen arrested Sri Aurobindo from his modest digs on 48 Grey Street, Calcutta, on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1908 in what was to become the famous Alipore Bomb Case. He was charged with “conspiracy” and “waging war against the King,” an offence tantamount to high treason, punishable with death by hanging. Among the papers seized were unpublished essays, intended for *Bande Mataram*, the periodical he edited. “The New Nationalism,” one of these, was presented as evidence against him by the prosecution during the trial. It has now been republished in *Bande Mataram*, vols 6 & 7 of *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (2002).

This extraordinary essay has great bearing on India’s culture wars of today. In fact, some of our current debates bear an uncanny resemblance to the quarrel between the so-called extremists and moderates or the “garam dal” and the “naram dal” of the Indian freedom struggle. No one articulates what the former stood for more forcefully and clearly than Sri Aurobindo. He refutes the idea that the extremists did not respect the law of the land or that they preferred violent methods to peaceful ones. In fact, he preferred to call them nationalists rather than extremists.

But who, according to Sri Aurobindo, were these “new nationalists”? What did they really stand for in contradistinction to what was imputed to them in the derisive, if not dismissive, term “extremists”? To Sri Aurobindo, the new nationalism then sweeping across India, which Mahatma Gandhi also referred to in the opening chapter of *Hind Swaraj* (1909), was actually “negation of the old bourgeois ideals of the nineteenth century” and to “transform the bourgeois into the Samurai.” Furthermore, “to extend the workings of the Samurai spirit to the whole nation.”

Sri Aurobindo mocks the prevalent misunderstanding of “extremism,” and “the respectable ease and safety of Congress politics”:

The ordinary Congress politician’s ideas of Nationalism are associated with heated discussions in Committee and Congress, altercations at public meetings, unsparing criticisms of successful and eminent respectabilities, sedition trials, National Volunteers, East Bengal disturbances, Rawalpindi riots. To him the Nationalist is nothing more than an “Extremist”, a violent, unreasonable, uncomfortable being whom some malign power has raised up to disturb with his Swaraj and Boycott, his lawlessness & his lathies... (CWSA 07:1110-1111)

The new nationalists might differ in their aims and methods but are quite different from the regular Congressmen in that “they are united by a common faith and a common spirit; a common faith in India.” This, according to Sri Aurobindo, “is the heart of Nationalism.” (Ibid) The new nationalism, in the other words, “is an attempt to create a new nation in India by

reviving in spirit and action ancient Indian character, the strong, great and lofty spirit of old Aryavarta, and setting it to use and mould the methods and materials of modernity for the freedom, greatness and well-being of a historic and immortal people." (Ibid:1110)

The new nationalism does not advocate "unreasoning violence of spirit and the preference of desperate methods."(Ibid) It does not advocate "lawlessness for its own sake".(Ibid) But the law that the new nationalists are "called upon to obey"(Ibid:1111) is not the law of the colonial power imposed upon an conquered people but "the law of the nation, an outgrowth of its organic existence and part of its own accepted system of government."(Ibid:1111)

What, then, is this law of the nation? Sri Aurobindo repeatedly asserts that it is spirituality. In the opening essay of "The Renaissance in India," he says

Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it. India saw from the beginning,—and, even in her ages of reason and her age of increasing ignorance, she never lost hold of the insight,—that life cannot be rightly seen in the sole light, cannot be perfectly lived in the sole power of its externalities.(CWSA 20: 6)

But what is spirituality? As Sri Aurobindo clarifies in *The Life Divine*, it is neither the "The Materialist Denial" nor "The Refusal of the Ascetic." Indeed, it is

...not a high intellectuality, not idealism, not an ethical turn of mind or moral purity and austerity, not religiosity or an ardent and exalted emotional fervour, not even a compound of all these excellent things; a mental belief, creed or faith, an emotional aspiration, a regulation of conduct according to a religious or ethical formula are not spiritual achievement and experience. (CWSA 22: 889)

Instead, according to Sri Aurobindo,

...spirituality is in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul which is other than our mind, life and body, an inner aspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with the greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion with It and union with It, and a turning, a conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, the union, a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, a new self, a new nature.(Ibid)

The soul of the triple-bodied Indian nation, with the gross outer body, the deeper subtle body within, inhabiting "another more deeply hidden"(CWSA 07: 1115) third body, was its Shakti, the spirit of the nation, "the source of life and form...unchanging and imperishable."(Ibid) This great power could be found by a living faith "not in an Anglicised and transmogrified nation" (Ibid:1110) of people "unrecognizable as Indians, but in India of the immemorial past, India of the clouded but fateful present."(Ibid)

This nation of Sri Aurobindo's dreams, echoing Bankim's Durga, was what the Mother was destined to be in *Anandmath*, "India leonine, mighty, crowned with her imperial diadem of the future; a common spirit of enthusiasm, hope, the desire to dare and do all things so that our vision of her future may be fulfilled greatly and soon."(Ibid) This is the true meaning and manifestation of the Indian renaissance.

## II

### **Bhawani Mandir Revisited: Sri Aurobindo's Idea of Swaraj**

On 24 January 1908, almost two years before Gandhi wrote his seminal treatise *Hind Swaraj* on his way back from England to South Africa aboard S.S. *Kildonen Castle*, Sri Aurobindo made a speech in Nashik, Maharashtra. It is not one of his famous or well-known orations because it is not available in its original English. It was translated into Marathi and published the following morning in a Marathi paper, *Nasik Vritta*. In fact, we know about it only because of a colonial intelligence report.

Sri Aurobindo elaborates on the meaning of Swaraj in this speech:

If we do not acquaint ourselves with the object in view, viz., Swaraj, I am afraid we, thirty crores of people, will become extinct.... Swaraj is life, it is nectar and salvation. Swaraj in a nation is the breath of life. Without breath of life a man is dead. So also without Swaraj a nation is dead. Swaraj being the life of a nation it is essential for it.(CWSA 07: 834)

But the roots of Sri Aurobindo's experiments and ideas for freeing India go back much farther, even to his days as a Cambridge undergraduate (Lotus and Dagger 1893). But in 1905, while still in the Maharaja of Baroda's service, he received an intriguing message from 'Sri Ramakrishna' in a séance, with his younger brother Barindara serving as a medium. It consisted of only two words: *Mandir Gado!*—raise a temple! Sri Aurobindo interpreted it as a commandment to propagate a new revolutionary creed based on the consecration of a temple to Mother India.

This would not be a physical temple, so much as a nation-wide invocation of Mother India as Bharat Shakti in a number of revolutionary cells spread across the country. To elaborate this plan, Sri Aurobindo wrote a small, but extraordinary manifesto, *Bhawani Mandir*. A copy of this pamphlet was submitted as evidence in the Alipur Bomb case in 1908, with Barindra's signature on the cover, and police markings all over.

Sri Aurobindo starts with a startling assertion, 'We in India fail in all things for want of Shakti' (CWSA 6: 80). He elaborates: 'We have all things else, but we are empty of strength, void of energy. We have abandoned Shakti and are therefore abandoned by Shakti.' The consequences of such weakness are disastrous as the heading of another section avers: 'Our Knowledge is a dead thing for want of Shakti'(Ibid. 82)

Sri Aurobindo says that our knowledge is inadequate and cannot save us. Why? Because it lacks strength; it is "a dead knowledge, a burden under which we are bowed, a poison which is corroding us rather than as it should be a staff to support our feet, and a weapon in our hands."(CWSA 06:81) His reason is simple, "Our knowledge then, weighed down with a heavy load of *tamas*, lies under the curse of impotence and inertia."(Ibid) How true this is of today's India!

If India has been a knowledge society for millennia, we are also not lacking in Bhakti or devotion. But again, "Our Bhakti cannot live and work for want of Shakti" (ibid: 82). Without strength, even devotion is useless: "in the absence of Shakti we cannot concentrate, we cannot direct, we cannot even preserve it."(Ibid) Sri Aurobindo believes that India must be reborn to manifest its strength and genius: "No man or nation need be weak unless *he* chooses, no man or nation need perish unless *he* deliberately chooses extinction."(Ibid: 83)

The cultivation and exaltation of strength as the crying want of Indians is Sri Aurobindo's motto in *Bhawani Mandir*, an idea that hearkens back to Swami Vivekananda's injunction "Strength and manliness are virtue; weakness and cowardice are sin" (*Personality Development*: 102) or "This is a great fact: strength is life; weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery, weakness is death." (Ibid: 83-84)

In his *Bengali writings* in *Dharma* published in October 1909, Aurobindo elaborated his idea of Swaraj or full political independence, rather than Dominion Status within the British empire: "Aryan Rishis used to designate the practical and spiritual freedom and its fruit, the inviolable Ananda, as 'Swarajya', self-empire. Political freedom is but a limb of Swarajya, self-empire.... As long as there is an alien government or ruler, no nation can be called a free nation possessing self-empire." (*Bengali Writings*: 227)

For Sri Aurobindo, freedom was the law of the soul: "For all people, subjection is a messenger and servitor of death. Only freedom can protect life and make any progress possible." (Ibid) The nation would die out of 'weakness and sterility' as long as the foreigner was in occupation of our country. Therefore, if any nation loses its freedom by its own fault, an untruncated and full independence should be its first aim and political ideal.' He said this long before the Congress adopted Purna Swaraj or full independence as its stated policy in 1929.

While Sri Aurobindo was in the forefront of the national struggle for only a brief period of five years, 1905-1910, his actual contribution was much larger. This sense of historic destiny is evident in his All India Radio Independence-eve broadcast: 'August 15<sup>th</sup> is the birthday of free India.

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. (CWSA 36: 474)

This self-confidence in shaping India's destiny is reflected in a realization he had much earlier, when he explained his 'three madnesses' to his young wife in a letter of 30 August 1905:

While others look upon their country as an inert piece of matter—a few meadows and fields, forests and hills and rivers—I look upon Her as the Mother. What would a son do if a demon sat on his mother's breast and started sucking her blood? Would he quietly sit down to his dinner, amuse himself with his wife and children, or would he rush out to deliver his mother? I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race. It is not physical strength—I am not going to fight with sword or gun—but it is the strength of knowledge. This feeling is not new in me, it is not of today. I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. (*Bengali Writings*)

The first part of the passage, the duty of a son when a demon is drinking his mother's life-blood, is also the theme of Aurobindo's only Sanskrit poem, *Bhavani Bharati*. But what is striking is the unmistakable sense of special mission to 'deliver this fallen race' by the special knowledge that he has, authorized by the Divine: "God sent me to earth to accomplish this great mission." (*Navajata, Sri Aurobindo*: 40)

During his incarceration in Alipur jail in 1908-1909, the conviction of India's special role in world affairs is also renewed: "When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the *Sanatan Dharma* that shall expand and extend itself over the world. It is for the *Dharma* and by the *Dharma* that India exists." (CWSA 8: 10)

But what is *Sanatan Dharma*? Sri Aurobindo explains this in terms that are quite unambiguous:

That which we call the Hindu religion is really the eternal religion, because it is the universal religion which embraces all others. If a religion is not universal, it cannot be eternal. A narrow religion, a sectarian religion, an exclusive religion can live only for a limited time and a limited purpose. This is the one religion that can triumph over materialism by including and anticipating the discoveries of science and the speculations of philosophy.(Ibid: 11)

Before he ends, Sri Aurobindo offers this resounding summation of his theory of nationalism in the "Uttarpara Speech":

I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith; I say that it is the Sanatan Dharma which for us is nationalism. This Hindu nation was born with the Sanatan Dharma, with it it moves and with it it grows. When the Sanatan Dharma declines, then the nation declines, and if the Sanatan Dharma were capable of perishing, with the Sanatan Dharma it would perish.(Ibid:12)

"The Sanatan Dharma that is nationalism"—this might sum up Sri Aurobindo's credo of what we might term a spiritual nationalism. Or still better, the nation of the spirit. Different from ethnic or civic nationalism, or even cultural nationalism based on language, region, religion, or ways of life and cultural practices, Sri Aurobindo's nation of the spirit is about humankind's march to higher consciousness. In this manifest evolutionary destiny of the species, past and present forms of nationalism are fated to prove inadequate.

Revisiting Sri Aurobindo's idea of Swaraj suggests to us that we are Sanatani nation with a secular constitution, that Sanatana Dharma cannot be narrow and exclusionary, that the remnants of dead or encrusted knowledge of yesteryears will not suffice to make us a great civilisation again, and that patriotism or devotion to the nation cannot substitute a consistent quest for truth and understanding; and, finally, that new creation requires a new consciousness which cannot spring only from the past. For as Sri Aurobindo famously said in *Essays on the Gita*, "We do not belong to the past dawns, but to the noons of the future."(CWSA 19: 10)

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# *Understanding Sri Aurobindo's Integral Education: Nationalism and Sustainable Harmony*

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*Richa Tiwari*

The conditions upon which men live upon earth is the results of their state of consciousness. To seek to change conditions without changing the consciousness is a vain chimera.

*The Mother*

## **Introduction**

The central concern of humanity in its evolutionary process has been a creation of a global environment for sustainable progress and harmony. However, the paradox of multiplicity in terms of opinions held, sense of duty, expectations of the society and our own distinct sense of ethics, morality and convictions make it a formidable task. Living through and within the confines of caste, class, religion, language, ethnicity has further distanced the gap between humanity and its desired goal of establishing a lasting foundation of global harmony. The spirit of harmony in essence is nature's endeavour to promote the cause of evolutionary journey of mankind. The world today is undoubtedly moving steadily and definitely towards globalisation. Therefore, the realisation of global peace and harmony becomes even more imperative for the advent and smooth functioning of an international world-order. A subtle undercurrent which is characteristic of a certain revolution towards principles of globalisation is conducting itself on multiple levels. On a surfacial material level we see this progress aided by technology, information, science, infrastructure, trade, industry, global issues and international organisations. However, the inner consciousness has not matured in keeping with the outer developments and parameters of progress of the human spirit. Which is reflected time and again through instances of conflict and disharmony across individuals, societies and nations. As long as our actions, duties and thoughts are guided and moulded externally, merely because we are told to do them without developing an inner understanding of why we should do them, the disharmony and vagueness will continue to persist between inner spirit and exteriority.

Keeping in mind the lack of homogeneity and universality between these indicators that set boundaries of distinction, this paper seeks to address the need to develop systems, pedagogies and principles that can help modify and work towards harmonising the existing disparities to a certain extent. The mind is a significant starting point in this respect. Integral education can perhaps play a crucial role in mending the human weaknesses and ignorance that often leads to these mindsets of intolerance and discrimination. The beauty of human diversity may continue to prevail. The acceptance of diversity must become the highest legitimate aspiration springing from the innermost consciousness of humanity, by means of integral education, as propounded by Sri Aurobindo. The merits and necessity of education have been accepted by ancient minds and modern intelligent alike, beyond dispute. "But there is not quite so universal an agreement or common attainment to a reasoned or luminous idea on what education is or practically or ideally should be." (Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, *On Education: Preface: 5*)

This paper seeks to establish the necessity of an integral education that helps in formulating the right pedagogical mindset so as to facilitate sustainable peace and harmony and eventually lead to the evolutionary internationalism. Delicately yet closely associated



with the right philosophy of education is the philosophy of nationalism. It is imperative to develop a contemporarily relevant pedagogy of nationalism. This paper highlights on the value and the decisive role of integral education in the shaping of national and international human mind, consciousness, soul and character. The all-inclusive form of education can help in formulating the right pedagogy of nationalism and eventually internationalism.

Without undermining the significance of ancient wisdom across all cultures, the need perhaps is to build an understanding and philosophy of education that is entirely new and not just an edited version or sterile resuscitation of a past system. Like Sri Aurobindo said, what we need is, "An education proper to the Indian soul and need and temperament and culture that we are in quest of, not something faithful merely to the past, but to the developing soul of India, to her future need, to the greatness of her coming self-creation, to her eternal spirit." (Ibid.:5).

The main aim of this paper is thus to explore the idea of integral education and the philosophical aspects associated with it. What is the basic premise of integral education? What is its philosophy? What are the principles of application and consequential vision? How can its practice become a guiding light towards cultivation and inculcation of a true philosophy of nationalism for the contemporary nations of the world? How will integral education foster an environment conducive to creation of that variety of social genius that may be able to lay foundations of progressive international civilisations?

### **Approaches and Theories of Nationalism**

The human race has been on a continuous journey towards the arrival at the point of a creation of perfect balance between antithetical elements. This quest has witnessed mankind at various stages of transition. In this process we see the variations in the laws of development of the individual, society and the nation. One such concept is that of nationalism, which has shaped the course of human life. Despite the extensive affect it has on determining and moulding inter-personal behaviours of nations; nationalism was relatively not given much recognition as a subject of scholarly interest. Nationalism as a concept and doctrine has been surrounded by controversies, not only with respect to the realities of its origin but also its nature and intent. Umut Ozkirimli says, 'For much of nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was seen as 'passing phase' both by liberalists and marxists alike, hence as 'intellectually unproblematic.' (*Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*:1). We find two sorts of responses to nationalism in the nineteenth century. "First was the approach of scholars and thinkers who were sympathetic to nationalism and who used their works to justify or enhance particular nationalisms. The second was the critical approach of those who have been sceptical of nationalism and who saw it as a temporary stage in the historical evolution of human societies" (Ibid, 22). Even when nationalism was recognised as a subject matter of study by sociologists, historians and political scientists, for a long time, the projection of its understanding was piece-meal. The scholars understanding of nationalism upto the First world war was more concerned with the merits and defects of the doctrine than with the origin and spread of the national phenomenon (*Theories of Nationalism*: 257). Another group of philosophers believed nation-state to be an alternative to the 'idiocy of rural life and pre-capitalist parochialism.' ('Nationalism as an Autonomous Social Force': 1) Evolutionist thinkers asserted that nationalism would gradually wither away with the establishment of a peaceful international order (*The Globalisation of World Politics*: 360). While others have attempted to label nationalism as the modern and secular surrogate for religion (*Theories of Nationalism*, Ch. 5) 'The Marxists were indubitably the most important group within the critical camp. That

nationalism has always created difficulties for the marxist school is well known, and these difficulties have been both political and theoretical.' (*Nationalism: The Instrumental Passion: 99*)

Marxist Historian Eric J. Hobsbawm believed that both nations and nationalism are products of 'social engineering.' (*Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction: 116*). Hobsbawm says that to preserve and consolidate the foundations of unity, nations invent and even reinvent traditions in situations of fragmentation resulting from rapid industrialisation or other sudden social changes. Talking of 'Invented traditions' Hobsbawm says, 'a set of practises, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rule and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.' (*The Invention of Tradition: 1*)

Sri Aurobindo's view of nationalism on the other hand is more integral and holistic. Not only does he recognise the essential conditions that forms the basis of nation and at the same time professes love for one's country—*Janmabhumi*'— but also expounds the love for the culture of the land, which imparts the essential element of cultural uniqueness. Sri Aurobindo says, 'geographical unity, a common past, a powerful common interest impelling towards unity and certain favourable political conditions which enable the impulse to realise its self in an organised government expressing the nationality and perpetuating it's single and United existence.' (*Bande Mataram: 507*)

According to Sri Aurobindo the nation is not just a piece of earth, not a figure of spirit nor a fictions of mind, rather it is a mighty '*Shakti*' which is composed of the '*Shaktis*' of all the millions of units that make up the nation. He says the nation is veritably a soul, which is immortal and even when geographically fragmented or divided it has the power to reunite itself as one unity in diversity. He believes that even though the spirit, form and equipoise worked out differently in different parts of the world, the aim and the need of creating a social, political and economic order, bearing the attribute of fixity of status and striking unity of individual and collective interest, that is uniform and widespread. This consciousness of unity according to Sri Aurobindo, is fostered as a result of an evolutionary process involving diverse stages of development, that are dependent on common types of civilisation accompanied by an apparent order of society. Sri Aurobindo believes in the existence of a 'nation-soul' along with other external manifestations that help in building the concept of nations. He has thus provided a 'spiritual-evolutionary' model of nationalism which is grounded on the consciousness of inner psychological unity. He believes that, "a nation unit is basically a manifestation of the psychological unity or of the nation-soul, which has the quality of abandoning of egoism both individually and collectively and also venturing to think beyond communal lines." (*Bande Mataram: 360*)

The philosophy of nationalism given by Sri Aurobindo aims to reinforce the ideal of fraternity. Sri Aurobindo says is it possible "For man rise to the third ideal of French Revolution along with liberty and equality the greatest of all the three, till now only an empty word on man's lips, the ideal of fraternity or, less sentimentally and more truly expressed as inner oneness. That no mechanism social, political, religious has ever created or can create; it must take birth in the soul and rise from hidden and divine depth within." (*Ibid.*)

The key point that differentiates Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of nationalism from most other approaches to understanding this term is that the general nature of thought and thought-process does not go into the detail of ideas of things. The growth of an idea generally finds its source from the tangible corporeal world of human existence, dwells a

little in the mind of an individual or the race and then in that partial stage of its growth, scrambles to manifest itself in the outer world. Just like the sculptor who chisels and carves a chunk of stone into a beautiful image. It is true that he transforms it's Form and also fills it with great substance, but only superficially. The Philosophy of nationalism as postulated by Sri Aurobindo seeks development of the term nationalism on both material as well as spiritual planes of human activity and thought. Complexities of human nature cannot be understood superficially alone. In order to incorporate the ideal law of social development, a harmony between material—rational and spiritual-mental world has to be strived for.

### **Defining Integral Education**

The need for an integral approach arises from the complexities of individual human nature coupled with the diversities of societies and nations. The historical struggle between an individual and a collectivity has always been to create conditions of genuinely symmetrical balance of human interests. Both are equally crucial for the survival and progress of mankind. Harboring an exclusivist view of one from the other may only bring out conflict. Creation of a physically strong and mentally healthy individual combined with the trait of a socially good citizen, through integral education, is a possible means to realise a true understanding of the relationship between the individual and the society. Like Sri Aurobindo says: "Then the description of individual virtue runs thus, the evolution by the human being of the inborn qualities and powers native to his personality; that is to say, just as every beautiful building has the solid earth for its basis but is built in a distinct style of architecture, so the beautiful human soul will rest on the solid basis of humanity but build up for itself a personality distinct and individual." (Sri Aurobindo, 2003: 56).

Sri Aurobindo in his book "*The Life Divine*" observes that, "For all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony. They arise from the perception of an unsolved discord and the instinct of an undiscovered agreement or unity." (*The Life Divine*: 2). The problem of reconciliation of the interest of the individual and the society is also representative of lack of harmony. This problem can perhaps be addressed by adopting an integral approach to problems of harmony. Pavitra in his book, '*Education and the Aim of human life*' says that "In his imperfect vision of things, the human minds tends always to emphasise one aspect to the detriment of others." (*The Purpose of Education*: 5)

The philosophy behind integral education seeks to address this imperfection of subordinating and even sacrificing one unit to satisfy the overwhelming demand raised by the other one. Many philosophers have tried to define the term 'integral' and one of them given by Ken Wilber (2008) provides a convincing understanding of this term. James Duffy ('A Primer On Integral Theory': 4) in 'A Primer On Integral and its Application to Mental Health Care' of Ken Wilber's work says, "Integral theory describes a comprehensive map that pulls together multiples includes comprehensive, inclusive, non- marginalising, embracing. Integral approaches to any field attempt to be exactly that: to include as many perspectives, styles, and methodologies as possible within a coherent view of the topic. In a certain sense, integral approaches are "meta-paradigms," or ways to draw together an already existing number of separate paradigms into an interrelated network of approaches that are mutually enriching."

Ken Wilber in his book '*Integral Psychology*,' looks at the term 'integral' from the perspective of human consciousness. He says that there are multiple aspects of understanding human consciousness which are addressed by different schools of psychology. These include aspects pertaining to functions, structures, states, modes, development, relations and behaviour. He

then says: "The great problem with psychology as it has historically unfolded is that, for the most part, different schools of psychology have often taken one of those aspects of the extraordinarily rich and multifaceted phenomenon of consciousness and announced that it is the only aspect worth studying (or even that it is the only aspect that actually exists)." (*Integral Psychology*: 1) This fragmented outlook towards understanding humans and their world does not confine itself only to the discipline of Psychology. Most part of our learning process seems fractional. Most arguments limit themselves to the existence of 'this' or 'that.' The majority of the grey areas are lost completely with the fixations of the black and white view of the world. In reality nature has created life not just in shades of black, white or grey but there is an entire spectrum of the colours of a rainbow. The need is to open our minds and hearts towards its acceptance and exploration.

If the ultimate human purpose is the creation of conditions of sustainable peace and harmony and to achieve the highest stage of human evolution and its spiritual destiny, then we need to prepare the ground for integral progress through the instrument of integral education.

The existing pattern and system of education is not only fragmented but also disconnected. It highlights certain aspects of knowledge and information as crucial and self-sufficient and blurs out other parts as redundant or non-essential. One key element of integral education can thus be to cultivate a new line of thought process that takes all truth, knowledge and wisdom in its fold and look at them all at once, not just in their individual essence but also in their totality and also as parts and aspects of the larger truths.

Ken Wilber in his analysis of Psychology has described a similar pattern of fragmentation of the subject with respect to study of human consciousness. He talks about the various branches of psychology such as psychoanalysis, existentialism, transpersonal psychology and cognitive science. He believes that each one of them studies an important aspect of human consciousness but as long as we do not attempt a holistic study of each in connection with the other the perception will only be partial. In order to rise above this fragmentation and generate a holistic view one must incorporate all rational aspects of a particular concept. He says: "A logic of inclusion, networking, and wide-net casting is called for; a logic of nests within nests within nests, each attempting to legitimately include all that can be included. It is a vision-logic, a logic not merely of trees but also of forests." (*Integral Psychology*: 2)

This brings out a significant principle of the concept of 'integralism' that is, finding balance. In our attempt to make sense of the whole we must not forget the unit. The aim is to develop an understating of the forest but the tree must also not be forgotten. A careful balance and awareness must then be maintained in understanding the individual and the universal.

Partho (*Integral Education*: 21) in the book, *'Integral Education: Beyond Schooling*, says that, "Integral education begins with the premise that the human being is not the head, heart or the body separately or successively; there is in fact, no such distinctly separate entity as the heart, head or the body. The human being is all of these — head, heart, senses and body— at once, simultaneously and seamlessly. And it goes beyond the tangible head, heart, senses and body: there is also the spirit and the soul, intangible, somewhat veiled and hidden, but as real and concrete in experience." The movements and processes of human life are multi-dimensional and can never be just linear and fixed. The reason perhaps is, that human beings, their world and the universe are at once exclusive in their manifestation and are at the same

time inclusive of one another. An important aspect of integral education therefore should be to comprehend this separation and the synthesis simultaneously.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (*On Education, Preface*: 13) in their thoughts 'On Education,' have advanced that, "For within the Universal mind and soul of humanity is the mind and soul of the individual with its infinite variations, its commonness and its uniqueness, and between them there stands an intermediate power, the mind of the nation, the soul of a people. And of all these three education must take account if it is to be, not a machine-made fabric, but a true building or a living evocation of the powers of the mind and spirit of the human being." This brings us to another important aspect, that is, integral education in its true form must aim to be organic and evolutionary in nature and contents. This is significant for the simple reason that the subject of education is the human being, who by its basic nature is inherently growing and evolving. Education caters to the human mind from infancy to adulthood and if it does not take into account this progressively unfolding nature of human psychology, it may end up doing more harm than good. Further, there can be no doubt with respect to the timing of the introduction and circulation of the content of education. It must be precisely curated to suit the mind of the infant, adolescent and the adult, respectively, and successively. Imparting unseasonable knowledge may result in premature disintegration or unnecessary collapse of the intended progress. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in their book- "On Education" observes: "The educationist has to do, not with dead material like the artist or sculptor, but with an infinitely subtle and sensitive organism. He cannot shape an educational masterpiece out of human wood or stone; he has to work the elusive substance of mind and respect the limits imposed by the fragile human body." (Ibid: 21)

Crisis, epidemics, terrorism, wars, economic recessions are a part of human journey, varying with time only in nature and degree, posing every now and then an existential crisis for the individual as well as the collectivity. And pushing us to rethink our way of life, our manner of social interactions and our ideas about the future. Time and again question the functioning and utility of the existing social, political and economic organisations and infrastructures. These questions, doubts and dilemmas are indicative of an evolutionary crisis of humanity. Sri Aurobindo has opined that Mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny. Integral education can be an effective answer to these crisis. Evolutionary crisis is, in a manner, nature's design that expects us to grow until we have reached a spiritual culmination that matches our material growth. Integral education should gradually yet effectively work at moulding the human thought process towards strengthening the inclusivist approach and subsiding the exclusivist thought patterns, thereby providing more enduring ideas and institutions with lesser probabilities of collapse and failure.

### **Integral Education of Sri Aurobindo**

The central unit of education is the child and this process of education perhaps begins even before birth, since the time of its inception in the mother's body. Therefore, each nation needs to have a clear understanding of its national system of education and methods of effective articulation. The present process of learning, however, suffers many lacunae. It is fragmented and incoherent, and therefore, looks upon an individual's head, heart, senses and body as distinctly separate entities. The task of integral education is to carve out an educational paradigm that helps in building the true individuality of a child by aligning the growth of all distinct parts of the human body in a harmonious pattern.

This thought has been reiterated in the writings of many writers and philosophers. The



Mother (*On Education, Preface: 21*) in her writings on education, says: "To work for your perfection, the first step is to become conscious of yourself, of the different parts of your being and their respective activities. You must learn to distinguish these different parts one from another, so that you may become clearly aware of the origin of the movements that occur in you, the many impulses, reactions and conflicting wills the drive you to action."

An American Philosopher and educationist John Dewey (*The Child and The Curriculum: 9*) in the book, *The Child and the Curriculum* has also emphasises on the significance of education by means of connecting the seemingly different aspects. He says: "The child is the starting-point, the centre, and the end. His development, his growth, is the ideal. It alone furnishes the standard. To the growth of the child all studies are subservient; they are instruments valued as they serve the needs of growth. Personality, character, is more than a subject-matter. Not knowledge is all information, but self- realisation is the goal. To process all the world of knowledge and loose one's own self is as awful a fate in education as in religion. Moreover, subject- matter never can be got in to the child from without. Learning is active. It involves reaching out of the mind. It involves organic assimilation starting from within. Literally, we must take our stand with the child and our departure from him. It is he and not the subject-matter which determines both quality and quantity of learning" (*Education and the Aim of Human Life: 43*). According to Sri Aurobindo, integral education connects and assimilates five principle aspects related to the five activities of the human being. These are the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual.

The main aim of physical education is to create a constructive model that aims at inculcating respect for physical health, hygiene, strength and balance. Progressively it must also aim at imbibing awareness with respect to harmonisation of the form and its movements.

The education of the 'vital' according to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother must focus "first on developing and utilising the sense organs, the second is to become conscious and gradually master of ones character and in the end to achieve its transformation." (*On Education, Vital Education: 120*). The key idea here is to develop those faculties in a child that help him in the decision making process by means of careful self-evaluation of instincts, impulses, passions and desires. This exercise is essential for the child as it trains and encourages self-assessment. It gives them practical training to distinguish between good habits and bad qualities and in the process, substitute falsehood by truth and malice by love, through their own command over knowledge and understanding.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the third faculty that needs to be nurtured, in the path of integral education of the child is that of mental education. The mind is the storehouse of all our life impressions, sensations, sensitivities, judgements and reasonings. The development of this faculty helps in the growth of the man towards finding a way for its own perfection. According to Sri Aurobindo, there are five principal phases of its development. "These are:

1. Development of the power of concentration, the capacity of attention.
2. Development of the capacities of expansion, wideness, complexity and richness.
3. Organisation of ideas around a central idea or a higher ideal or a supremely luminous idea that will serve as a guide in life.
4. Thought control, rejection of undesirable thoughts, so that one may in the end, think only what one wants and when one wants it.
5. Development of mental silence, perfect calm and a more and more total receptivity to inspirations coming from the higher regions of the being. (Ibid: 132)

The development of the faculty requires skilled educators. The educators who can put



the child on the right road to his own perfection and encourage him to follow it, watching, suggesting, helping, but never interfering. Helps all the while in making the child realise his latent potentialities and creating conditions of natural growth and development. In order to free the mind of its rigidity and increase suppleness so as to prepare it for more complex and comprehensive synthesis, Sri Aurobindo (*On Education, Mental Education*:128) suggests that: "one should not only look to the number and variety of subjects for study, but particularly to the diverse approaches to the same subject; by this means the child will be made to understand in a practical way that there are many ways of facing the same intellectual problem, dealing with it and solving it."

With the new age world and the surplus splurge of information by modern means the mind is liable to experience fatigue and remission. Therefore, along with training the mind it also becomes vital to realise that just like all the other parts of human body, the mind, too needs rest. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (*Ibid*: 132) say: "The art of giving rest to one's mind is a thing to be acquired. Changing mental activity is a way of rest; but the greatest possible rest lies in silence." This realisation is reflective of the deeper aspect of harmonising the seemingly opposite tendencies of movement and stillness. The wholeness of individual personality can be attained by a careful acceptance and assimilation of the opposites, which can be brought about by practising the integral approach towards dilemmas.

The final phase of integral education pertaining to psychic and spiritual education, is based on the premise that each individual is endowed with faculties of consciousness above and beyond the perimeters of normal life and sensory experiences and is capable of realising a higher and vaster life. The multidimensional challenges of the modern age need a holistic and integral perspective. Which implies examining questions and consequences not merely externally but also internally on multiple planes of existence. The goal here is to bring out human psychology from its amorphous understanding of existential challenges and to generate a coherent comprehension between matter and spirit element. The psychic and spiritual education may seem to be mixed up, but in essence is essentially different. The aim of psychic education "is a higher realisation upon earth, for the other, an escape from all earthly manifestation, even away from the whole universe, a return to the manifest." (*Ibid*: 140). Further, "To become fully aware of your psychic being and to live a psychic life you must abolish in you all selfishness; but to live a spiritual life you must be selfless." (*On Education, Psychic*: 141)

The cardinal principle is that each and every child must be allowed to learn and grow according to his own '*Swadharna*.' Every child must be given the necessary space to be the sculpture of his own path and system, according to his ability and strength. After this broad framework of integral education is provided the child should have freedom to apply it as far as he can and as best as he can.

### **Integral Education and the Philosophy of Nationalism and Internationalism**

Nationalism is primarily an identity specific term. In the age when humanity was not differently grouped as nations, the idea of forming clusters symbolising distinct identities still existed. The feeling of belonging to some and being different from the rest is an age-old phenomenon. From the primeval people to the modern contemporary nations, all have ventured to find out common grounds to separate themselves from the rest. Steven Grosby (*Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction*: 1) observes: "Evidence of humans forming large, territorially distinct societies can be observed from our first written records. Writings from the Sumerian civilisation of the area of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers from approximately 2500 BCE record beliefs that distinguished the 'brothers of the sons of Sumer', those of Sumerian

'seed', from foreigners. During the 16th century BCE, Egyptians thought themselves to be distinct from both the 'Asiatics' to their east and the Nubians to their south." Grosby (Ibid: 3) further adds that: "Such divisions, where one group differentiates itself from and opposes another, continue at the beginning of the 21st century: both Chechens and Ukrainians consider themselves to be different from Russians; Kurds distinguish themselves from both Iraqis and Turks; the Taiwanese seek an existence separate from mainland China; Slovaks and Czechs have separated, forming distinct national states."

The reasons for these classifications may vary from political exigencies to social necessities to psychological comforts. These distinctions and classifications, however, reflect diversity of the human race. The diversity is representative not only of singularities associated with geography and physical appearances but also in art, music, literature and the general way of life. This diversity is, in reality, the vital driving force for human race and is therefore essential to be maintained for the higher cause of human evolution. Sri Aurobindo (*The Ideal of Human Unity*: 152) says: "It would seem that the ideal or ultimate aim of nature must be to develop the community and all communities to the full expression of that many-sided existence and potentiality which their differences were created to express, and to evolve the united life of mankind to its fullness of life of the individual or the small commonalty, but by full advantage taken of the diversity which they develop."

A free interchange, acceptance and assimilation of diversity is a significant instrument towards the realisation of united progress of mankind. The acceptance of significance of diversity can be useful in establishing firm foundations of true ideals of nationalism, eventually leading to the goal of internationalism. An international order does not necessarily imply subordination or substitution of the ideals of nationalism. Just like we cannot remove freedom in order to establish more orderly conditions of life; similarly we cannot do away with diversity so as to get rid of notions of separatism and thus create uniformity. "Absolute uniformity would mean the cessation of life, while on the other hand the vigour of the pulse of life may be measured by the richness of the diversities which it creates. At the same time while diversity is essential for power and fruitfulness of life, unity is necessary for its order, arrangement and stability. Unity we must create, but not necessarily uniformity." (*The Ideal of Human Unity*: 153)

Unity established by eradicating diversity would be an illusion of real oneness and hence shortlived. A real psychological unity of human race can be maintained through the process of creating unity with diversity. The rise and fall of the Roman empire is a historic example of how in a desperate attempt to consolidate its vast boundaries, in the name of uniform order and organisation, it lost its life, richness and vitality. Roman empire instituted an admirable administrative structure and achieved unity but also uniformity, which eventually led to stagnation and arrest of life and growth. All existence and human nature are one in its broad constitution but no two human beings are alike in their temper, dispositions and frame of mind. The natural principle of variation has to be respected, its richness accepted, if we want to secure stable foundations of internationalism. In order to maintain this diversity, it becomes essential not to override the differences, but to develop an inner sense of unity towards it, through integral education.

In this sense, developing a true philosophy of nationalism becomes a pre-condition for the successful advent of internationalism. Through the process of integral education certain higher truths have to be imbibed in the mind of the child to develop the right spirit of nationalism and internationalism.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (*On Education: An International Centre of Education*: 184)

have propounded that: "The first aim then will be to help individuals to become conscious of the fundamental genius of the nation to which they belong and at the same time to put them in contact with the modes of living of other nations so that they may know and respect equally the true spirit of all the countries upon earth. For all the world organisations, to be real and to be able to live, must be based upon mutual respect and understanding between nation and nation as well as between individual and individual. It is only in the collective order and organisation, in a collaboration based upon mutual goodwill that lies the possibility of man being lifted out of the painful chaos where he is now. " Nationalism as a concept cannot be done away with merely because its absence gives us a strong illusion of unity of mankind, in place of real oneness, at which it is so much more difficult to arrive. Uniformity does seem to give a more easy way to unification as opposed to true nationalism which supports acceptance of the richness and diversity of all nations.

History of humanity bears witness to the idea that an interplay of minds, forms and activities is a constant attempt to establish balance and harmony. All ideologies, organisations, institutions, dictatorships, monarchies, democracies are instances of experiments undertaken to find out that perfection and balance in human life. They serve their utility and then give way to more evolved systems of organisation. The dark ages, the middle ages, the modern revivals, the renaissance and reformations, struggle for independence all prepared the ground leading more and more towards some semblance of everlasting harmony.

Nationalism too has undergone many phases. Much of what we understand by nationalism is a reflection of our behavioural conduct of acceptance or rejection, as individuals belonging to one nation, towards those belonging to other nationalities. Each nation is cast in a mould of its own ideological beliefs, traditions and diverse ways of life, which in reality is nature's way of enriching and creating an ideal principle of existence. A false notion of nationalism sets in when we renounce everything other- national and claim our own truth as the only truth. Steven Grosby (*Nationalism: 17*) says: "When one divides the world into two irreconcilable and warring camps - one's own nation in opposition to all other nations - where the latter are viewed as one's implacable enemies, then, in contrast to patriotism, there is the ideology of nationalism. Nationalism repudiates civility and the differences that it tolerates by attempting to eliminate all differing views and interests for the sake of one vision of what the nation has been and should be."

A true philosophy of nationalism, however, believes that humanity is one, but different people and nations are variant forms of that humanity. True nationalism is thus a sincere realisation that neither does one need to abolish their own special temperament nor obliterate others. By practising this, we reach a point of acceptance of this oneness of human kind and raise ourselves to be enriched through this richness of diversity. Acceptance and assimilation carried out with modification, without losing our own original spirit of life would be the true sense of nationalism. Talking about acceptance and assimilation of ideas pertaining to the external field of life, such as, liberty, equality, democracy, Sri Aurobindo (CWSA 20: 47) states: "What I mean by assimilation, is that we must not take it crudely in the European forms, but must go back to whatever corresponds to it, illumines its sense, justifies its highest purport in our own spiritual conception of life and existence, and in that light work out its extent, degree, form relation to other ideas, application. To everything I would apply the same principle, to each in its own kind, after its proper Dharma, in its right measure of importance, its spiritual, intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, dynamic utility."

The utility of nationalism is crucial for the realisation of evolutionary goal of Internationalism. True nationalism can help inculcate the ideals of acceptance and

assimilation in the mind and eventually support principles of diversity. It would help in creating an environment of real psychological unity amidst diversity, which can be a sincere step towards the evolutionary goal of mankind. Such a true form of nationalism can be ingrained by means of integral education of the human mind, body and spirit. The first step can perhaps be activated by effecting a change in the national system of education, and synchronising it more with the national mind, spirit and temperament and its right application on problems and challenges. We must unload the mechanical attitude towards education which believes that mind and spirit of man is the same everywhere and can hence be operated on uniform principles of education. Sri Aurobindo (*On Education, Preface: 13*) says: "Within the universal mind and soul of humanity is the mind and soul of the individual with its infinite variation, its commonness and its uniqueness, and between them there stands an intermediate power, the mind of the nation, the soul of a people." Integral education would help evoke such a realisation and function in accordance with the uniqueness and commonness of the individual, society, nation, and cumulative world spirit.

Integral education and philosophy of nationalism are more closely associated than as they appear. Education must be in harmony with the historical and cultural essence of the nation and its people. This harmony can make the education system more natural, easy and effective. As Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (*Ibid: 23-24*) have postulated: "The basis of man's nature is almost always, in addition to his soul's past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed. They mould him not the less powerfully because insensibly, and from that then we must begin." If the indigenous mind of the child is exposed to foreign education, which is opposed to its own Dharma, it will sooner or later find itself in existential dilemma and consequentially revolt. "To force the nature to abandon its own Dharma is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its own growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation." (*Ibid: 23*)

## **Conclusion**

Most of the contemporary problems facing humanity are largely and deeply grounded in ideological differences. These problems would keep multiplying if we keep treating them superficially and externally. An inner re-engineering of the mind, body and spirit needs to be undertaken, by means of integral education, to address the issues from their point of origin.

The idea of integral education demands that we not only look at the process of education of an individual in respect to his outer environment. But at the same time, we understand it from the aspect of various layers and levels of consciousness that exist within the human being. A comprehensiveness of the integral education can be truly instrumental in designing a pedagogy of education for the modern times. This pedagogy may aim to address not only the contemporary needs of humanity towards ideals of true nationalism and internationalism, but at the same time can create humans with spiritual consciousness aiming towards achievement of the evolutionary goal of humanity.

The model of a new world order has better chances of sustaining itself when the individual and the aggregate accept the principle of plurality and respect each other's progress as distinct entities as well as complimentary realities. As such, today integral education becomes a pressing demand to face crises and contemporary challenges. For sustainable peace and harmony, for true ideals of nationalism and for a lasting model of internationalism, we must

develop the spiritual capital of human race by means of true integral education that caters to the genuine needs of mind, body and spirit of the individual, nation and humanity.

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## *Sri Aurobindo as a Patriotic Poet*

( An Excerpt )

A. N. Dwivedi

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1905, a mammoth rally was held at Pantir Math, Calcutta, in which Subodh Mallik, an affluent and inspired patriot, announced that he had set apart a lakh of rupees for founding a national College which would be free from the control of the Britishers. Mr. Mallik put forth a very welcome condition that Sri Aurobindo, till then in Baroda Service, must be requested to come down to Calcutta to shape the destiny of the proposed institution. On being requested, Sri Aurobindo accepted the new assignment gladly and entered into the open arena of politics in 1906.

The same year Sri Aurobindo received an invitation from Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal, the renowned patriot, to help him in launching the *Bande Mataram*. Sri Aurobindo extended his help to Mr. Pal, as desired. The newspaper soon became the herald of Indian revolution.

Though Sri Aurobindo soon resigned from the Principalship of Calcutta National College, he spelled out a concrete scheme for the expulsion of the Britishers from India. The scheme was popularised in the pages of the *Bande Mataram* and in largely-attended public meetings. The scheme consisted in the promotion of Swadeshi industries and national education and the complete boycott of and the non-co-operation with all Government institutions and the formation of a militant volunteer force. He stressed the point that the country was the Mother and that the complete independence was the goal of India's national awakening.

In 1907, the Government prosecuted the *Bande Mataram* and Sri Aurobindo as its editor for propagating sedition. It created a sensation in the country. Thakur Tagore wrote his famous poem "Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee!" But the prosecution failed, and Sri Aurobindo was acquitted.

In the meantime, the significant Surat Congress sessions took place, in which the Moderates and the Nationalists clashed on the question of passing resolutions of support to Swadeshi and Boycott. The Congress was adjourned and the Nationalists met separately under the chairmanship of Sri Aurobindo. The popular support extended to Sri Aurobindo and Tilak infuriated the Government and the former was arrested and thrown into the Alipore prison.

During the trial of the Alipore Conspiracy Case, Mr. C. R. Das, the celebrated Deshbandhu Chittaranjan, described Sri Aurobindo as the poet of Patriotism in the course of his concluding arguments in defence of Sri Aurobindo. The judge was Mr. Beachcroft, Sri Aurobindo's colleague at Cambridge, a brilliant student next only to the poet!

While inside the prison, Sri Aurobindo wrote a magnificent anthem of freedom and adventure, entitled "Invitation", the last two stanzas of which are:

I sport with solitude here in my regions,  
Of misadventure have made me a friend,  
Who would live largely ? Who would live freely ?  
Here to the wind-swept uplands ascend.

I am the lord of tempest and mountain,  
I am the Spirit of freedom and pride.  
Stark must he be and a kinsman to danger  
Who shares my kingdom and walks of my side. (CWSA 2: 201)

The poem is packed with power and pulse and is sure to delight the youthful hearts.

The concrete scheme that Sri Aurobindo had drafted to awaken the sleeping Indian nationals was the Bhawani Mandir. In it he propounded the theory that Bhawani (whose other names are Durga and Kali) was Shakti, the embodiment of strength. We, the Indians, fail in our mission



because we lack faith in Shakti. There is surely some enormous defect, something vital is wanted in us. It is not that we can't detect our defect. In fact, we have full knowledge about it, we have all things else, but we are empty of strength, void of energy. We have abandoned Shakti and are, therefore, abandoned by Shakti. The Mother Shakti is not in our hearts, in our brains, in our arms.

What is a nation? Sri Aurobindo answers that it is the Shakti of its millions. It is our own choice to make or mar it. In the words of Sri Aurobindo himself, "What is our mother country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind, It is a mighty Shakti..." What he was driving home was the concept of India as the Mother.

The Bhawani Mandir was intended to remind the people that the country was heaving under the burden of her children's stupendous inertia. But that does not mean that noble souls like those of yore were no more born in this sacred land of ours. On the contrary, they were always there whether the country be in a position to benefit by them or not. Such a soul was Bankim Chandra. Sri Aurobindo had written on him, while at Baroda, in the *Indu-Prakash*. He had written a poem on him too, which ran as under:

Thy tears fall fast, O mother, on its bloom,  
O white-armed mother, like honey fall thy tears;  
Yet even their sweetness can no more relume  
The golden light, the fragrance heaven rears,  
The fragrance and the light for ever shed  
Upon his lips immortal who is dead. (CWSA 2: 22)

The *Bande Mataram* also brought out the tribute to him (already published in the *Indu Prakash*).

Soon after coming to Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo wrote a poem on a great soul of another category. It was about Baji Prabhau, who, to cover Shivaji's retreat, held a mountainous pass for two hours together with a small band of men against twelve thousand enemy soldiers. In the poem, Sri Aurobindo made Baji Prabhau, a great fighter indeed, say the following:

...make iron of your souls  
Yet if Bhawani wills, strength and sword  
Can stay our Nations's future from o'erthrow. (Ibid: 295)

The long poem written in blank verse opens on a description of the land and the time that formed the background of the episode:

A noon of Deccan with its tyrant glare  
Oppressed the earth; the hills stood deep in haze,  
And sweltering athirst the fields glared up  
Longing for water in the courses parched  
Of streams long dead. (Ibid)

Was not the glorious sacrifice of Baji Prabhau more than a lusty shower on this parched, sweltering 'Waste Land' condition? The poem, in fact, anticipates a sudden emergence of a tribe of Baji Prabhous, who could withstand the suppression of a tyrannical power and hold arms in their hands to liberate the motherland from its clutches.

In his *Vidula*, first published under the title *The Mother to Her Son*, Sri Aurobindo made a Mahabharata story assume a new significance. The story is: Prince Sunjoy, dethroned by an enemy king, feels so much discouraged that he is ready to forget his dharma (broadly the term means 'duty')—which was to fight on till the recovery of the kingdom or till his death—and is in favour of living the life of an ordinary man reconciled to fate and letting things go in their natural course. But he was very lucky in his mother, a flaming spirit, who inspired her son to do his duty:

'Son', she cried, 'no son of mine to make thy mother's heart rejoice!  
Hark, thy foemen mock and triumph, yet to live is still thy choice.  
Nor thy hero father got thee, nor I bore thee in any womb,  
Random changeling from some world of petty souls and coward gloom!...

Out to battle, do thy man's work, falter not in high attempt;  
So a man is quit before his God and saved from self-contempt  
Sunjoy, Sunjoy, waste not thou thy flame in smoke! Impetuous, dire  
Leap upon thy foes for havoc as a famished lion leaps,  
Storming through thy vanquished victors till thou fall on slaughtered heaps...  
Shrink not from a noble action, stoop not to unworthy dead !  
Vile are they who stoop, they gain not Heaven's doors, nor here succeed...

When thou winnest difficult victory from the clutch of fearful strife,  
I shall know thou art my offspring and shall love my son indeed. (CWSA 5: 113)

The mother's words, charged with fire and passion, are vivifying even to the dullest creature. But in these vigorous words there is also a trumpet-call of Mother India to her Sunjoy like children to shake off their slumber and fight on the mighty, though tyrannical, British empire.

If the poet narrates, in the Bhawani Mandir, the conditions to be fulfilled by the people for the manifestation of the Mother in the country, and if he makes, in Vidula, a mother speak out what she expects of her brave children, he gives, in Durga Strotra (Hymn to Durga), the mantra by which the children can invoke the Mother's Grace. Vibrant with the spirit of aspiration, the Hymn shows the sure path to the Mother's protection:

"Mother Durga! Rider on the lion, trident in hand, thy body of beauty armour-clad,  
Mother, giver of victory, India awaits thee, eager to see the gracious form of thine. Listen,  
O Mother, descend upon earth, make thyself manifest in this land of India.

"Mother Durga! Giver of force and love and knowledge, terrible art thou in thy own self  
of might, Mother beautiful and fierce. In the battle, we are warriors commissioned by  
thee; Mother, give to our heart and mind a titan's strength, a titan's energy, to our soul  
and intelligence a god's character and knowledge" (*Bengali Writings*: 3)

Under the divine inspiration of the Mother, the children of the country can perform miracles and achieve their objectives. Sri Aurobindo wrote about Hitler in 1939 as follows:

Thus driven he must stride on conquering all,  
Threatening and clamouring, brutal, invincible,  
Perhaps to meet upon his storm-swept road  
A greater devil or thunderstroke of God." (CWSA 2: 641)

The first two lines are applicable to the children of Wotan too. When marching forward under the divine inspiration of the Mother, the children can easily avert the danger hinted at in the last two lines. In August 1940, Sri Aurobindo wrote a poem entitled "The Children of Wotan", in which he indirectly expressed the hope that the children won't turn this earth into a hell by their bloody deeds. What the poet desired of them is to be strong enough in order to protect themselves and uphold the cause of the country.

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#### Courtesy:

<http://savitri.in/books/an-dwivedi/sri-aurobindo-a-study-of-savitri-and-other-selected-poems>

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## “Baji Prabhou” as a Metaphor of Ecolect

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Oeendrila Guha

Sri Aurobindo, one of the representatives of Indian writers writing in English, situates “Baji Prabhou” (1909) against the single historical fact of “the heroic self-sacrifice of Baji Praphou Deshpande, who to cover Shivaji’s retreat, held the pass of Rangana for two hours with a small company of men against twelve thousand Moguls.” (CWSA 2: 293) This poem illustrates the Marathas fighting the Moguls to preserve their old set of relations with the Deccan and its natural history. It also helps to disseminate how a foreign power attempts to establish “a new set of relations” with the Marathas and the Deccan. The poet centers the poem around this factual war. The poem translates the locals’ experience of the Deccan as a physical land mass as well as a cultural entity with its own ethnic history. It exemplifies “cultural simulation” (*Beyond Ecology*: 100) of a sense of place that is the Deccan as it inspires a distinct ecolect by reflecting on the natives’ earth-centric traditions and experiences of the locality.

The word ‘ecolect’ is defined as a language variety that is unique to a “household, a dwelling place for an interdependent biological community” (*Ecology*: 202). An ecolect grows from an ideology of space. It captures singular applications of grammar, words and phrases specific to a particular individual, who is a resident of a particular locale. William Howarth defines ecolect as a set of “images and words” (*Some Principles of Ecocriticism*: 77) through which is validated an individual’s experiences of milieu. For instance, Coleridge and Wordsworth often used vivid description to write of the Lake District. They re-defined “place” or the Lake District as the shaping spirit of their language. This makes them “biogeographers”, making “place portraits” (*Beyond Ecology*: 98). Similarly, Sri Aurobindo translates his experiences of the “place” called the Deccan by employing language as an encoded system of signs.

In *Personality*, Rabindranath Tagore says that any form of art is resultant of one’s relation to the place. The foreign surrounding is the “world of appearance” that cannot be identified with without sentiments. One can argue that Sri Aurobindo did not live in Maharashtra (one of the states belonging to the Deccan plateau). But he did spend thirteen years (February 1893 to June 1906) of his life serving the Gaekwar, who belonged to the royal Gaekwar dynasty of the Marathas. He often travelled to Maharashtra with the Gaekwar. So, travelling with a native to a non-native landscape would have given Sri Aurobindo a feel of the Deccan, as if belonging to the territory. Sri Aurobindo, writing of the Deccan, gives us a feel of how the land would look like to us “if we “belonged” there, if it were “our place” (Ibid 98). The poem reiterates the poet’s relation to the Deccan and how he coped with it, thereby communicating the deeper emotions and associations between the duo.

Sri Aurobindo begins by relating that the Deccan is located in a tropical zone and is very hot, dry and arid in summers, rarely experiencing unseasonal rainfall. Nature is parched, and those who are guarding the land are too:

A noon of Deccan with its tyrant glare  
Oppressed the earth; the hills stood in deep haze,  
And sweltering athirst the fields glared up  
Longing for water in the courses parched  
Of stream long dead. Nature and man alike,  
Imprisoned by a bronze and brilliant sky,  
Sought an escape from that wide trance of heat. (CWSA 2: 295)

These lines reiterate Tagore’s belief that any form of art is resultant of one’s relation to the place. It is as if the poet becomes the Deccan and its natives. These lines communicate the

heat of the Deccan, as experienced by the poet. He recounts how the heat makes the land and its guardians "athirst", both "Longing for water in the courses parched/ Of stream long dead." (CWSA 2: 295) The weather conditions allow the land and the locals to forge a sympathetic association with each other.

The word 'athirst' is archaic. It situates us in the seventeenth century, when the battle took place. The poet employs the literary device of archaism in his narration, such as "foe", "lo", "thee", "thou", "shalt", "Mahrattas", "Moslem", "seest", "muskets", "fell", "scimitars", "sovrans". Margaret Sonmez explains that archaisms

...are metonyms for the past: by a small part of the past—a word, a grammatical formation, a spelling—we are meant to understand the invisible presence and influence of influence of the whole. When a writer distributes archaic material throughout his work, the reader understands that the whole of that work is meant to seemingly belong to the time when such material was normally found. (28)

The poet's ecolect is manifested through the application of archaic terminologies that exemplify a diction from a historical period, offering a "cultural simulation" (*Beyond Ecology*: 100) of a sense of the Deccan. His ecolect reveals to the foreign reader an unfamiliar period. Ergo is validated the poet's experience of the invisible "historical periods" (*Ecology*: 215) that exist no longer. These archaic words signify a unique use of language to map a by-gone environment. These associative words imply an anomaly in the current environment and human lifestyle since the onslaught of the industrial revolution of the 1700s, resulting in deadlier weapons, unlike "muskets" and "scimitars".

"Baji Prabhou" is a fine example of ecolect as the poet communicates to the reader "the sensation of being part of a known place" (*Beyond Ecology*: 100) by a select choice of words and phrases, describing its flora and fauna. The "known place" is the Deccan, and the poet assumes role of its resident, just as the jackal is its integral part. The Deccan is a hilly area. Its royal guardian, the Bhonsle, lives in "a high mountain fortress" from where he has a bird's view of the "whole wide land". His warrior subjects are portrayed as "lion-hearted". The Deccan hills have gorges that are "Narrow and fell and gleaming like the throat/ Of some huge tiger, with its rocky fangs". (CWSA 2: 297) The land is depicted as ferocious and unimpregnable, an extension of the Bhonsle and his fearless people. The land protects its residents like a tiger and its protectors stand guard over it as lions. The image of the gorges looking like the tiger and men as courageous as the lion shows that the Deccan maintains an ecological balance. The Marathas and nature live in harmony, serving only each other. The image of tiger and lion and jackal cultivates a "linguistic habitat" (*Ecology*: 216) as it simulates in the reader's mind a unique topography, as seen by the poet himself. "Baji Prabhou" is a land portrait, and the poet is an 'autobiogeographer' of the Deccan.

Baji Prabhou and his company moisten "with their blood/Their mother" (CWSA 2: 295). This image brings to mind the difference in ideology between the Moguls and the Marathas. The land is not the former's extended self. It is this lack of identification that results in possession. History records the fascination of the West with the external "world of appearance" of the East, ensuing in the latter's exploitation of natural resources and cultural identifies. The land is the latter's extended self. It is this whole-hearted identification that results in self-sacrifice, for Baji dares "twelve thousand Moguls" with the might of only "fifty swords". "Fifty swords" is a synecdoche, representing fifty Maratha warriors. As the blood of the injured Marathas wets the dry land, the land that earlier seemed to have abandoned them, now comes alive for it offers its residents refuge in a gorge that is perfectly shaped to delay the Mogul assault while the Bhonsle returns to Raigurh to assemble more warriors. Thus, the Deccan "environment

originates in action" (American Literary Environmentalism:139) by shielding its residents against the Mogul invasion.

The Marathas' identification with the Deccan nurtures their belief in goddess Bhavani, who descends upon Baji Prabhou to defeat the Moguls and protect her territory. Bhavani means "giver of life". She represents the power of nature as well as motherly love as she delivers justice to the unrighteous. It is important to note that Rajputs, Marathas, and other races of the Deccan plateau worship Bhavani. In Bengal, Bhavani is depicted as a manifestation of goddess Durga. Both Durga and Bhavani are characterized as riding the lion. As mentioned earlier, the Maratha warriors are portrayed as "lion-hearted". Lion and men are Bhavani's vehicle of Maratha might and ideology. Sri Aurobindo, a Bengali, uses the word Bhavani instead of Durga as the former validates the warrior-clan Marathas' experiences of the Deccan. As the narrator of the war, besides having sojourned in Maharashtra, he maintains both neutrality and belongingness to the land. The poem lays emphasis on how divergent locales inspire unique ecolects.

...Baji / Or Malsure is but a name, a robe,  
And covers One alone. We but employ  
Bhavani's strength... (CWSA 2: 298)

Baji, who is Bhavani's child, invokes his mother goddess to deliver justice to the unrighteous Moguls, who want to capture and exploit the Deccan and oppress the Maratha identity. At a time when major chunks of India were under the Mogul empire, we see that fear of Mogul tyranny is legitimate. As Baji feels powerless in the face of the Mogul forces, he prays to Bhavani for protection. As he prays, fear is replaced by love, worship, courage and sacrifice. He manifests Bhavani's might and is rewarded with righteous victory. Hettinger says that beliefs are "appropriately directed at some objects and not others." (*Objectivity in Environmental Aesthetics*: 427-428) For the locals of the Deccan, fear of the enemy is underpinned by their belief in goddess Bhavani.

The very same Bhavani "in an arm of flesh/ Is mighty as in the thunder and the storm." (293) The endemic imagery of nature as mother goddess vindicates Sri Aurobindo's influence by pre-colonial ideology, that of the Vedic literature in which the earth has been deified as goddess Prithvi. The Vedic rishis realized this truth by identifying with the soul-essence of all life. The Indian expression of 'motherland' is also literal because the land is "a distinct personality" bearing and rearing and giving food and offering shelter like the woman. (*The Nation as Mother*: 6) It is to her that their allegiance lay, and it is on her behalf that Marathas fight against the Mogul supremacy. Baji experiences Bhavani as residing in him and the natural world. Baji, the strategist, is able to shift from his rational self or 'I' to "relational self" of "bone and flesh" by identifying with the spirit that lives in him and "the thunder and the storm". He believes in the Hindu principle of rebirth, that the body is a "robe" that takes on a new form from birth to birth. The constant is the soul. Clearly, Baji is realised as he has had a glimpse of one of the greatest truths in Indian *darshanas*. Since, this realization is possible only when one has "no firm ego boundaries" (*Feminism*: 186), to Baji the non-human world is as real and conscious as Bhavani herself.

As the creative energy or the universal mother, Bhavani symbolizes the "economy of Nature" (*Ecology*: 216) for she creates and destroys. In this manner, she spurns the Moguls' expansionist policy and keeps her land and authority, epitomizing "a self-regulating system", preserving the old set of relations between the free Deccan and its residents (*Ecology*: 200). Sri Aurobindo's "Baji Prabhou" is an apt example of ecolect as it takes into account the residents' place of dwelling and their experiences of it as "an interdependent biological community" (*Ecology*: 202).

To conclude, the poet penned down "Baji Prabhou" in 1909 to draw similarities between the



Indian occupation of the expansionist Mogul and British empires. The poem sends out a strong message to the then Indian youth, who was too weak and divided in ideology (Sri Aurobindo was the first to demand a *purna swaraj* as opposed to the tepid Congress ideology of partial governance) to overthrow British tyranny, ignorant of India's "past dawns", unwelcoming of her "noons of the future". It is in this context that Sri Aurobindo moved to Bengal to kindle the independent movement that took the nation by storm. He wrote political pieces, essays on India's past and future roles, and poems to inspire men and women to join the freedom movement and fight the British like Baji and his company fought the Moguls in the face of colonization and ideological death. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

...whereas others regard the country as an inert piece of matter and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains and the rivers, I know my country as the Mother, I worship her and adore her accordingly. What would a son do when a demon, sitting on his mother's breast, prepares to drink her blood? Would he sit down content to take his meals or 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; not a physical strength, I am not going to fight with a sword or a gun, but with the power of knowledge. (*Bengali Writings*: 352-353)

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## Mother Nature Needs Love

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Beloo Mehra

Have you ever wondered why is it that since ages, people suffering from various kinds of chronic ailments—physical or mental, have been advised by healers to spend time in Nature? Perhaps there is something truly special which one absorbs in the company of Nature; perhaps it is the simple joy of being and becoming. One of the many things Mother Nature teaches us is how to be rooted in one's true inner nature, *svabhāva*, and blossom simply for the delight of the Divine—with no pretence or performance of any kind for the sake of another, or to live up to one's ego-constructed self-image.

Being in close company of Nature energises and renews. Green is after all, the colour of Life, symbolic of "vital energy of work and action," (CWSA 30: 132) said Sri Aurobindo. A promise of renewal, a feeling of joy, a sense of abundance. But these are not the only gains one has when one spends time with Nature. The Mother once said—"...if one deeply feels the beauty of Nature and communes with her, that can help in widening the consciousness." (CWM, 16: 401). There is so much Mother Nature can help us learn, if we learn how to closely observe. That requires a sort of a communion with Her, a love for Her. Love of Nature is "usually the sign of a pure and healthy being uncorrupted by modern civilisation. It is in the silence of a peaceful mind that one can best commune with Nature." (CWM 16: 401)

The past several centuries—thanks to the widespread influence of the materialistic-industrial-scientific-rational mindset with its push on the satisfaction of individual material wants and desires, there has been a greater and greater tendency to look upon Nature as a resource to be plundered for man's comforts. The ancient idea found in many cultures and civilisations across the world—that Nature is the Mother who must be loved and cared for just as she loves and cares for all her children—has taken a backseat. The sacredness of earth and nature which was at the center of the ancients' view of life and existence has been almost erased from the collective mind of humanity.

The devastating outcome is there for all to see. Preserving the delicate ecological balance and reversing the damage done to the environment ever since the Industrial Revolution are two of the key challenges before mankind today. While the activists, the scientific community, the civil society, the academia, the nation-states, and the international bodies continue their efforts to spread awareness and promote lifestyle approaches that can help stall if not completely reverse the damage that has been done, we know that the real permanent solution lies elsewhere. It is in the change of one's deep-seated mindset; it is not merely about lifestyle change, but entirely changing the way we look at Life itself—as one interconnected Whole where human life is intricately one and completely interdependent with the life of all other creatures on the earth as well as the very earthly life itself.

Indian spiritual culture, in fact, goes beyond this oneness of Life and gives us the deepest vision possible of Oneness of Man, Nature and Divine. Or rather Divine, Nature and Man. This view of starting with Divine at the core of all Existence and Life can actually facilitate a gradual reversal of how we humans connect with Nature and all her precious gifts. A real appreciation and understanding of deeper spirit of Indian culture naturally and organically makes one sensitive and responsible toward Mother Earth and all Nature. As Sri Aurobindo and the Mother remind us that it is in Indian spirituality that we must seek the truest solution to all the modern problems of mankind.

Before proceeding further, let us ask the question—what essentially is Nature? When the

Mother was asked this question, she replied, "...Nature is the most material part of the creative force which is concerned with the creation specially of the earth, of the material world as we know it upon earth."(CWM 7: 160-161) This creative force is the Great Mother, the Maha Shakti herself, the Supreme Creatrix. And what we ordinarily speak of as Mother Nature is one of the emanations of this Great Mother herself, the emanation in charge of the Earth, of the material evolution of the Earth, and of all the beings born from her womb.

As in-charge of the Earth and all earthly beings, Nature is spontaneously generous and continues to shower her rich gifts. Perhaps the oldest description of the rich beauty and generosity of Mother Earth is to be found in the *Pr̥thvī Sūkta* (also known as *Bhūmī Sūkta*) in Atharvaveda (12.1). This hymn to *Bhū Devi* in its 63 verses describes in rich detail all that the Mother Earth provides generously for her children. She also sustains and enriches.

Some of the epithets used for the goddess Earth in this hymn are: *Dhatri* (nursing mother), *Dharitri* (nurturer), *Pr̥shni* (mother of plants), *Vanaspatinam Grbhir Osadhinam* (womb of forest, trees and herbs), *Vishvadhaya* (all-nourishing), *Vishvagarbha* (world's womb), *Vishvasvam* (source of everything), *Dhar* (upholder), *Drdha* (one who is steady), *Ksama* (one who is patient), *Vasundhara* (bearer of treasure), *Ratnagarbha* (repository of gems), and many more. She is also all-preserving, all-supporting and all-bearing.

A culture which invoked such reverence and adoration for the Mother Earth alone has the key to the change of consciousness which is needed to address the acute ecological crisis. The future of ecological balance will impact the next phase of earthly evolution. Solutions are being frantically sought—from science, spirituality, industry, arts; terms like conscious consumerism, ecological living are becoming commonplace among the educated elite. But the truest, the deepest, the most sustainable and effective solution lies in the evolution of consciousness—in the movement from *Avidya* to *Vidya*, from the consciousness of Multiplicity to the consciousness of Oneness, oneness with all Nature, all Existence, all Beings. In the movement of Love. This begins with a deep inner aspiration.

The Mother speaks of an aspiration in Nature for the Supreme Source. The whole life of plants and trees is a worship of Light, the material symbol of the Divine, says the Mother. This is Nature's yearning for its hidden Divinity, and Light awakens in the Nature a seeking for Oneness with the Supreme's Creative Source and Force of it all, the *Para Prakriti*. This is akin to a movement of Love. As the Mother reminds us,

Look at the flowers and trees. When the sun sets and all becomes silent, sit down for a moment and put yourself into communion with Nature: you will feel rising from the earth, from below the roots of the trees and mounting upward and coursing through their fibres up to the highest outstretching branches, the aspiration of an intense love and longing,—a longing for something that brings light and gives happiness, for the light that is gone and they wish to have back again. There is a yearning so pure and intense that if you can feel the movement in the trees, your own being too will go up in an ardent prayer for the peace and light and love that are unmanifested here. (CWM 3: 72)

To unite with the consciousness of the Supreme, to experience that Oneness—both in the individual and in the creation—Love acts as a great Divine Force. Our seers and sages tell us that the entire universe, this manifestation, is essentially an act of Love of the Supreme Consciousness. The manifestation of the Love of the Divine in the world is an act of supreme self-giving. The Love of the Supreme for its creation is a movement to help awaken in the world a longing to get back to its essential divinity.

As is the case with Nature, so is with us humans. Just as there is an intense yearning, a deep

love and longing of Nature, its ardent prayer to Light, the same Love can awaken in us, the humans, an aspiration to seek the Oneness within, the truest Light within. Only when we act from that Centre of Light and Love, we act truly and most powerfully. In other words, only the deepest force of Love for Mother Nature which comes from this Center of Oneness, an inner identification, has the potential to be transformed into powerful and truly disinterested yet effective action.

We see a perfect example of this complete inner identification most clearly expressed in two selections from the Mother's '*Prayers and Meditations*.' These are from the year 1917, written during the time the Mother was in Japan. Giving us a glimpse of her complete identification with the Mother Nature, the Mother speaks of becoming one with the soul of the cherry trees and realising the Divine in the tree which makes the offering of the cherry flowers to the Supreme. And she concludes her meditation with a deep truth which can serve as the mantra for all true spiritually-guided action needed to address today's ecological crisis.

What difference is there between the human body and the body of a tree? In truth, there is none: the consciousness which animates them is identically the same. (CWM 1: 363-364)

Indian spiritual traditions which are known by the name Sanatana Dharma have always spoken of this One consciousness which pervades all existence, which has in fact become all the existence. A spiritually-grounded action which springs from this truth of One consciousness is quite unlike any other action that is merely led by a high mental idealism. During my recent trip to Varanasi, I was reminded of a powerful ecological conservation and rejuvenation movement which has sprung from within the fold of more than 400-years-old Bhakti lineage of Swami Tulsidas.

Sankat Mochan Foundation (SMF), a non-governmental organization devoted to cleaning of Ganga river. It was started in 1986 by Pandit Veerbhadra Mishra who was the *Mahant* of the famous Sankat Mochan Temple in Varanasi until his passing in March 2013, and a professor of Hydraulic engineering and Head of the Civil Engineering Department at the Indian Institute of Technology (BHU), Varanasi.

Mother Ganga was never merely a river for Pandit Mishra, who was recognised as "Hero of the Planet" by Time Magazine in 1999. She was truly a Mother, a Goddess for him, an embodiment of the Mother Supreme who flows on earth to nourish her children, as our Indian spiritual tradition speaks of all rivers. Such an inner realisation of the truth of Mother Nature, when combined with his lifelong *bhakti* for Sri Rama and Hanuman and his scientific training, became the perfect ground for the launching of an important project which is still continuing. Going through the website of SMF, one cannot help but notice that throughout the site, Ma Ganga is lovingly and reverentially referred to as Ganga ji!

In 1992, Pandit Mishra was awarded the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) "Global 500 Roll of Honour". In 2006, he was also decorated with a coronet of golden lotus, as per the Sangam Tamil tradition, and conferred the title "Gangaikkaavalan" (Protector of Ganga). For his lifelong contributions to Indian classical music, particularly Dhrupad, he was awarded the prestigious "SaMaPa Vitasta Award" in 2009.

Highly respected for its work to clean Ganga ji at Varanasi, SMF is currently actively engaged in regular monitoring of the water quality in the religious bathing area of Varanasi. It also helps monitor the efficacy of the Government's ongoing efforts to clean Ganga, builds awareness

among the masses, especially the youngsters, by organising culturally sensitive environmental education programmes. The source of all this outer action is within—that Love for Ma Ganga and that bhakti for Sri Rama!

I also recall reading about several ecological preservation and rejuvenation efforts led by Parmarth Niketan in Rishikesh which is bringing together faith leaders from various lineages and traditions from within the Sanatana Dharma fold and working hard to make impactful change.

It is not a mental idealism to serve humanity which inspires such movements but rather an inner call to serve the Divine through working selflessly in the world. Under the leadership of a handful of spiritually elevated souls who for decades have been perfecting their aspiration and love for the Divine, these efforts are intrinsically guided by the truth that Nature is not separate from the One Divine Consciousness that IS. And that by taking care of Mother Nature, we are serving that One Divine Consciousness.

Such efforts spring from Love. It is in the Force of Love for the Divine that humanity will find a most radical and universal power to exert its influence and action in the world. Such Love radiates not only from the soul but from the whole being, and that is why touches not only the soul but the whole being of others. Such Love alone has the potential to truly help and guide humanity evolve in consciousness, and aspire to grow in Love for and Oneness with It all.

This is a miracle that men can love God, yet fail to love humanity. With whom are they in love then? (CWSA 12: 429)

But in their Divine Compassion, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother remind us that one cannot arrive at such love without a long preparation. All imperfect love with fellow beings is in fact a practice ground so that we may constantly purify our nature and grow closer to the true source within.

Love of man, love of woman, love of things, love of thy neighbour, love of thy country, love of animals, love of humanity are all the love of God reflected in these living images. So love & grow mighty to enjoy all, to help all and to love for ever. (CWSA 12: 491)

It is important to emphasise that Sri Aurobindo regards man as not only made in the image of God, but made to manifest God. Though our oh-too-human nature, at present is limited and tortured by inner and outer conflicts, it is intrinsically divine because it is derived from the Super-Nature or *Para-Prakriti* and can be converted into it.

In Sri Aurobindo's integral vision of life and existence, earthly life is the only field in the created universe where man can not only realise but also reveal God integrally. This is why we must never condemn earth or spurn earthly life. This is why we do not find in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's teachings any disdain of human nature on the basis of some mistaken idea that human nature is like dog's tail and hence irremediable. Rather the emphasis is on the full development of the nature to its utmost perfection so that it can be gradually refined and transformed into what it is meant to be—a true instrument of the Divine for fulfilling His Will and purpose in the world.

Following such an integral approach to human development can help heal the chasm that has been created in modern psyche regarding Man and Nature, Nature and God, and Man and God. With a growing awareness of the workings of Nature—e.g. the *triguna prakriti* of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*—within one's own nature—and the gradual conquering of the interplay of their movements, an individual becomes a real master of Nature in the truest sense of the term, where he need not destroy the outer Nature to fulfill his needs, but rather his aspiration then is to arrive at a deeper harmony with all Nature and Existence.



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**A Scenic Shot of Rishikesh from the Ganga River**



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-scenic-shot-of-rishikesh-from-the-ganga-river-13918457/>

## *A Sacred Spectacle: Witnessing the Ganga Aarti*

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*Padma Asokan*

Varanasi ( known as Benares) really bewitches you. It was always on my wish list to witness the Ganga Aarti. Numerous tales, iconic moments have unfolded, and many have expressed the spiritual bliss that they had felt during the vibrant Ganga Aarti ceremonies.... so then came my obsession and eagerness to visit the oldest living city in the world. It was also my first trip to this city, the land of the Holy Ganges...

We like minded 4 friends decided to make it to Benares to witness the Ganga Aarti, a devotional ritual to thank and praise the river Ganga. As we landed safely in Benares, the intense smells, the strong flavors of food, the hustle and bustle of people, directionless confusion, one could hear cyclists/ good old rickshaws screaming to clear roads, chaos seemed to permeate through the air and probably that's why Varanasi bewitches you. It may be because of the lively life of The Ganga Aarti on the Ghats or the atmosphere one feels, at Manikarnika Ghat during cremations.

Our day started with going to the Kasi Viswanath Ji temple at 2.30 am. Surprisingly the mesmerizing spectacle of the winding queue to the temple at that unearthly hour captured the attention and awe of all who beheld it. Unlike the temples in south of India one could devoutly, touch and feel the deity, offer flowers, pour milk and engage in worshipful reverence .

As evening came by, the skies were clear and there was the picturesque sunset gleaming on the river. We were all looking forward to the spectacular event: The Ganga Aarti. One could see the whole city getting ready to witness this majestic ritual to worship Ganga Maa.

Here we must recall Sri Aurobindo's poem "To the Ganges":

Hearken, Ganges, hearken, thou that sweepest golden to the sea,  
Hearken, Mother, to my voice.  
From the feet of Hari with thy waters pure thou leapest free,  
Waters colder-pure than ice. (CWSA 2: 256)

Here he refers to the action or state of the Ganges River and looks upon her as the Divine mother who listened or paid attention to something. (Hearken Ganges thou that sweepest golden to the sea) he describes it as a thought or consciousness that is pleasant or desirable. The phrase 'to the sea' implies how Ganga is flowing into the sea.

Here the mother could be referred to the Ganges, personified as a nurturing and caring entity. Overall SA paints a poetic picture of the Ganges a scene so sublime, untainted as it flows pure and cold, and that she is somewhere listening and responsive to the poet's voice .

As we walked up to the Ghat, it was one of a pleasant evening, one could see people irresistibly drawn in like moths to the flames, gathering up in the Dasaswamedh Ghat to witness the Ganga Aarti, a majestic ritual of thanksgiving to the river goddess, Ganga.

At Dashashwamedh ghat, one moment there was the hustle-bustle about finding the perfect place to watch the Aarti. One could witness it standing on the ghat or one could hire boats and witness it standing on the boats that were moored on the bank... The other moment the entire city falls silent when a Shankh (conch) is blown to herald the beginning of the Aarti.

The Aarti is a form of expressing gratitude and undying devotion to the river.

It started at about 6:45 pm, after sunset.

We had hired a boat, waited, and watched all head up and towards the Ghat. People had



already gathered around the ghat almost 90 minutes prior to the beginning of the beautiful procession.

We could distantly watch the statue of Goddess Ganga placed in the center at one of the many raised platforms. With the sound of bells and chants and the lighting of incense sticks and diyas, the Aarti began. After blowing into a shell to eliminate all the negativities, the priests began their dance: they waved incense sticks, rotated candles and Diyas, Young pandits, all draped in saffron-colored robes raised huge brass lamps in honour of the River Goddess. Everybody seemed to be in a trance...

The chanting and singing in praise of the Ganga, filled the air, mystical, with a regenerative power. The Aarti was indeed a visual treat to express the gratitude and devotion to the river and seeking blessings from the Goddess. The fragrance of sandalwood filled the air.



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/men-performing-a-ritual-for-a-festival-3988075/>

As the chants were going on, there were young girls and boys coming around with small bamboo baskets with flowers and lamps on a leaf platter asking each one of us to offer as an obeisance to the Ganges. "Take one" said the girl and we thought that we had to pay and hurriedly dug into our bags, "I don't want money", she said, annoyed. "Take one and leave the candle in the river. Take her (Ganga Maa's) Blessings" and she walked away.

We took the leaf platter and with silent prayers in our hearts, bowed down with devotion and lowered the candles into the river. We took a heapful of water in our hands and sprinkled it on our heads... the water was warm and soothing, probably because of HER purifying nature. As the sunlight receded, the innumerable lamps flowing in the water made an unforgettable sight. The Ganges sparkled with hundreds of flames symbolizing many dreams and entrusting them to Ganga Maa asking her to fulfill them.

Soon came a man who approached us with eyes full of joy and offered to draw the tilak or Tika on our forehead. We all applied the tilak and he looked quite convinced and proud of the benefits of these practices.

What was surprising, this ritual transcends borders and cultures and hundreds participate in the ritual, irrespective of religion, beyond cultural differences, people come from all over the world, coming in from different faiths to witness this scintillating sight.

It's simple, maybe people just believe that the essence of performing Aarti is thanksgiving....

There were prayers, the loud chants, the slokas reverberating in the air, one could close your eyes and feel the vibrations all over. One just feels a part of it and the spectacular Aarti felt like, it cleansed us totally. Along its banks on the ghats people had gathered, mystics and sadhus who looked like the embodiment of Shiva covered in ash, with wild looking dreadlocks, looked remote and quiet. Devotees in endless meditation and small temples stood tall whispering ancient tales. And that is why Sri Aurobindo: Says "From the feet of Hari with thy waters pure thou leapest free, Waters colder-pure than ice." (CWSA 2: 256)

He mentions The Ganges are purer than their own inner self, indicating that the river's spiritual power surpasses human capabilities. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the transcendent nature of the Ganges. The poem 'To the Ganges' celebrates the river's powers to purify and inspire and is portrayed as a benevolent and nurturing Mother goddess.

Not in icy lone Gungotry nor by Kashi's holy fanes,  
Mother, hast thou power to save  
Only, nor dost thou grow old near Sagar, nor our vileness stains,  
Ganges, thy celestial wave. (Ibid: 259)

Here Sri Aurobindo expresses reverence for the ganges and the belief in the transformative and the purifying power it possess. The Ganga remains resilient a force that continues to flow, for wrapped in its mild ripples lies a promise, untold, of rebirth , redemption, and a destiny to behold.

The Ganga Aarti still is performed with great devotion and enthusiasm even today because the Ganges is worshipped and paid homage to ,the ritual involves spiritual cleansing of negative energies, Hindus believe that the Aarti can help obtain peace and salvation for the departed souls, to retain the cultural heritage and important is the community participation fostering unity, devotion ,collective energy of the participants.

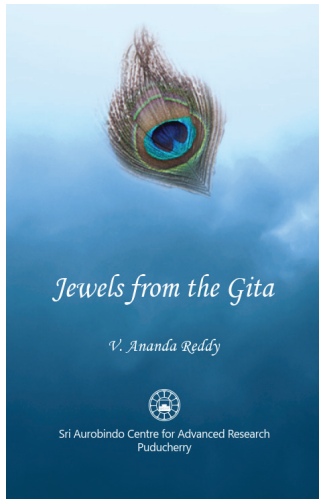
Anyone who has witnessed this can never be the same again... For as this timeless river ebbs and sways, it even teaches us to cherish and protect Nature's sacred displays.

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This book is a collection of my talks given as two courses based on *Essays on the Gita* conducted in 2020 and 2021. The classes were held at Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, (SACAR). Since these are edited transcripts of the talks delivered in online classes the text maintains an oral style.

This book is available at SACAR trust and SABDA, Puducherry.

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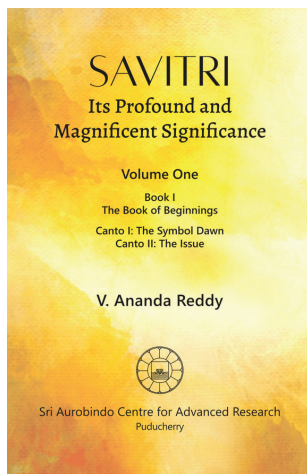
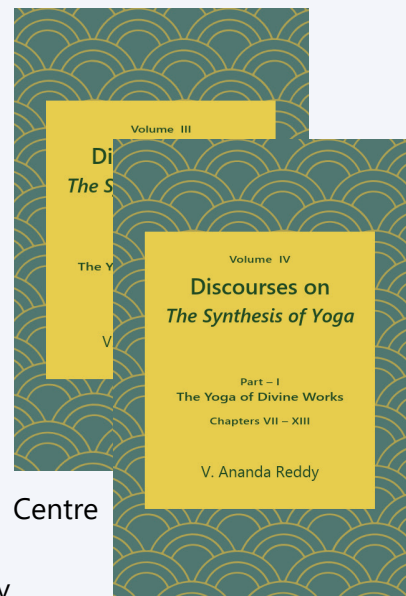
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# Our Contributors

## Dr. Charan Singh

Dr. Charan Singh Kedarkhandi is a poet, thinker and an avid seeker of Sri Aurobindo's path and is closely associated with the works of Sri Aurobindo Society in Uttar Pradesh and Uttrakhand. In 2013, he earned his PhD on Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. He regularly contributes articles and papers on different aspects of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. At present he is working as assistant professor in English at a govt college in Joshimath, Uttrakhand.

## Dr. Beloo Mehra

Dr. Beloo Mehra felt a divine love for Sri Aurobindo and the Mother sometime in the summer of 2004. On the intellectual side it was primarily the cultural, social and educational thought of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which first drew her in. It was the love of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that brought Beloo back to India in 2007 after having studied, lived and worked for more than 14 years in the US. She writes regularly for several journals and magazines and also for her blogs.

## Oeendriila Guha

Oeendriila Guha is an alumna of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (S.A.I.C.E) and Pondicherry University. Her interest lies in literature. She is a Senior Content Editor in one of the leading publishing houses in India.

## Indresh Chauhan

Indresh has over 2 decades of experience in digital learning having worked with global customers in various domains. It was a natural providence that Indresh gravitated towards the learning industry having come from a multi-generational family of educationists. Being a life-long learner, in his own life, his focus is introspection, self-improvement, & spiritual evolution by understanding & implementing Sri Aurobindo & Mother's principles in every facet of life.

## A. N. Dwivedi

He is a poet and a writer who has written extensively on Indian Writing in English. His books are handy for all the University students and scholars of Indian Literature in English.

## J. Sai Deepak

J. Sai Deepak is an-engineer-turned-litigator, practising as an arguing counsel primarily before the Supreme Court of India and the High Court of Delhi. He has been part of several landmark cases, such as those related to the Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple, the Sri Padmanabhaswamy Temple, the Basmati Geographical Indications and the Marital Rape Exception in the Indian Penal Code. In 2019, Sai was presented the Young Alumni Achiever's Award by his alma mater IIT Kharagpur. He is the author of the bestselling first book of the Bharat Trilogy, *India That Is Bharat: Coloniality, Civilisation, Constitution and India, Bharat and Pakistan*.

## Lakshmi Jyothi C

Ms Lakshmi Jyothi is the founder of the portal auroindian.co.in, which promotes spiritual tourism in India. She aspires to apply her understanding of the vision of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, to the changing times of the contemporary world. On her academic and professional front, Ms Lakshmi Jyothi is from the 1st batch of Masters in Tourism Administration in the country, graduating from Pondicherry University. She has held senior positions in a wide spectrum of tourism segments straddling both public and private sectors. These include working with Ramoji films and the secretariat of Andhra Pradesh.

### Sanat K. Banerji

(1911-1978), an I.C.S. officer, Consul General at Pondicherry in 1950 and later an inmate of the Ashram. He was an accomplished scholar of Indian history and world history. He wrote many articles in the Ashram journals.

### Padma Asokan

Padma Asokan is currently associated with three Companies and is the Director with SL Leathers Private Limited, Ram Knowledge Systems Private Limited, Omeon Solutions Private Limited. She is an active trust member of SACAR.

### Dr. Richa Tiwari

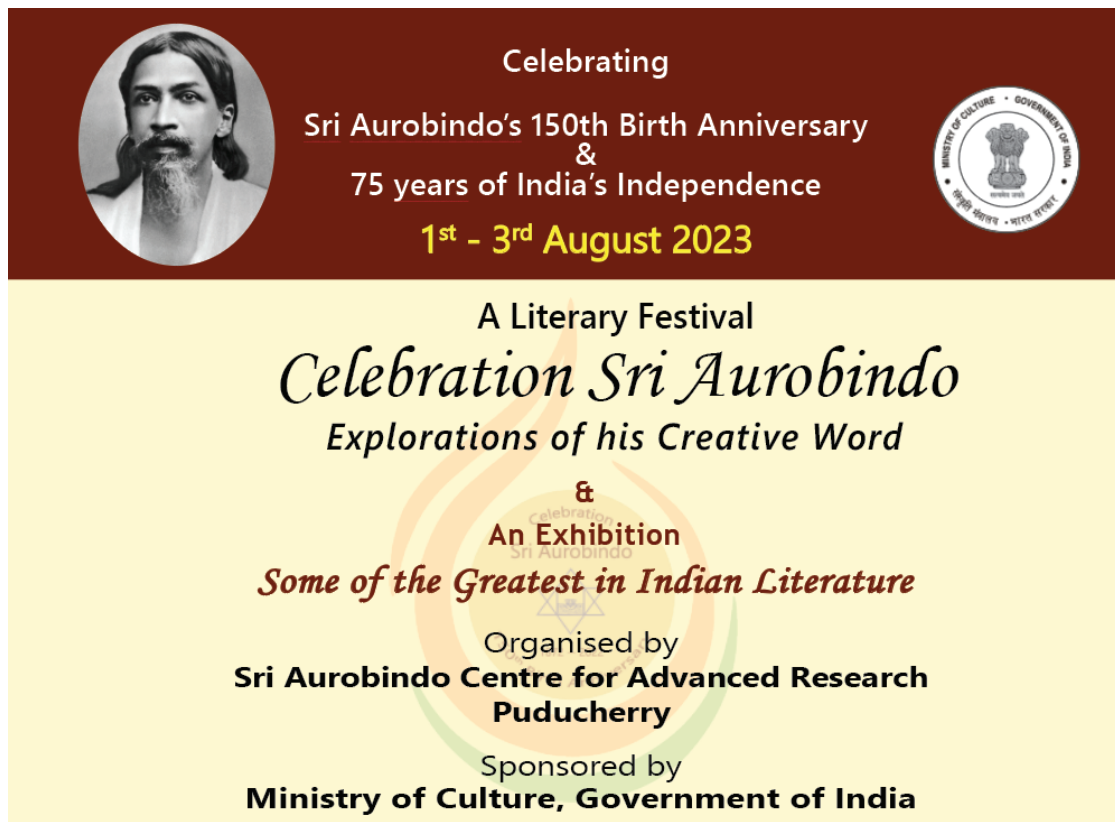
Dr. Richa Tiwari has completed MA in Philosophy and Social Theory from University of Warwick UK. She is serving as Assistant Professor of Politics and International Studies at Pondicherry University. She is the Chairperson of Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry University. She has authored a book named "Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of Nationalism and Internationalism". She also published several articles in reputed journals on Public Sphere, Education and Sri Aurobindo's Ideas on Nationalism and Internationalism.

### Prof. Makarand R. Paranjape

Prof. Makarand R. Paranjape is an Indian novelist, poet, a former Director at Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), Shimla and, since 1999, a Professor of English in the Centre for English Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. He had started his career in 1980 as a teaching assistant at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) and returned to India in 1986 to join the University of Hyderabad. In 1994, he joined the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at IIT Delhi as an associate professor, and between 1999–2018, he served as professor of English at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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**Celebrating**  
**Sri Aurobindo's 150th Birth Anniversary**  
**&**  
**75 years of India's Independence**  
**1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2023**

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## INDIA MUST BE REBORN,

Because her rebirth is demanded by the Future of the World

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. In the sphere of morality, likewise, it is her mission to purge barbarism (mlecchahood) out of humanity and to aryanise the world.

In order to do this, she must first re-aryanise herself.

— Sri Aurobindo