

- ³ *Ibid.*, Vol II, Part 1, p. 27.
⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.
⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.
⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.
⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.
⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Part 2, p. 416.
⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 39.
¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol II, Pt. 1, p. 104.
¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 241.
¹² *Ibid.*, p. 242.
¹³ The original, the cosmic, the egoistic, the temporal, the psychological, the constitutional and the practical.
¹⁴ *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part 2, pp. 442-43.
¹⁵ R. S. Misra, *Studies in Philosophy and Religion*, Bharatiya Vidya Prakasan, Varanasi, Introduction, p. xxxii.

AUROBINDO'S CONCEPTION OF THE NATURE AND MEANING OF HISTORY

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THE METAPHYSICAL CONTEXT

THE PHILOSOPHY of Aurobindo is so eminently an integrated one that the general pattern of cosmic and human history cannot be discussed apart from his metaphysical system described at length in *The Life Divine*. In this system the Sevenfold Chord of Being is the central concept and provides the framework for the meaning and pattern of history. There are three higher and three lower hemispheres of Being in the Sevenfold Chord, and mediating between the two is the Supermind. The three that belong to the higher hemisphere are aspects of the Eternal Reality or Absolute; they are the *Sat*, the *Cit*, and the *Ananda* of Upanishadic thought. As Aurobindo interprets them, *Sat* is the Pure Existent, *Cit* is Consciousness-Force and *Ananda* Delight-in Existence. Although this is Brahman in its eternal, changeless, infinite aspect—the impersonal Nirguṇa Brahman—Brahman is pregnant with all creation. Creation is manifested in the three evolutes of the lower hemisphere—Matter, Life and Mind.

Supermind mediates between the two hemispheres. Its major function is creative activity; it is the manifestation of the Saguna Brahman aspect of the Divine and thus the primal cause of the progressive evolutionary development that is cosmic and human history. The Absolute is infinite, perfect and eternal; why does it choose to manifest itself in creative activity? This activity belongs to the very nature of the Divine; it is the *līlā* (spontaneous play) of Brahman, a familiar view in Indian philosophy. The Saguna Brahman or Supermind, the force behind history, creates in an evolutionary pattern. There is first the involution of the Divine, the descent into Matter, then the ascent to the Life (or Vital) evolute, then to the stage of Mind. The next and final stage to be evolved, the goal towards which all creation aspires,

is that of the Supermind (Supramental or Gnostic), a new species of being.

This general pattern of cosmic and human history was inspired not only by modern Western evolutionary theories, but also by Indian traditional thought. We find evolutionary ideas in ancient Indian philosophy in the *Taittirīya Upanishad* of about 800 B.C. In this *Upanishad* the stages of evolution are related to the sheaths of the Ātman-Brahman, the sheaths of Matter, Life, Mind. These correspond with Aurobindo's evolutionary stages of cosmic history.

These sheaths of the Ātman-Brahman were interpreted by later philosophers of the *Advaita Vedānta*, the dominant school of Indian thought, as *māyā*, i.e., phenomenal appearance and not reality. Man's goal, therefore, was to transcend the temporal space-time universe in an intuitive experience of identity with the eternal Brahman and thereby escape the round of rebirths in this world. In Aurobindo's philosophy the world of nature and history, the space-time universe, is not *māyā*, not a world of appearances, but real, and man's goal is a divine life in this world. Matter is really Matter, the Inconscient level of being; Life the Subconscient, and Mind the Conscient (selfconscious) aspect of the universe. Even when the final stage of evolution is attained, the Supramental, the individual is not one with Brahman in one identity, but remains an individual although he does experience unity, oneness with the higher hemisphere of being, *Sacchidānanda*, as well as unity also with the lower hemisphere. He sees all interfused with the one Divine; yet the individual concrete things, organisms, men are real. Though this integral Supramental consciousness has not yet been reached, human beings, now generally at the Mental level, have individual freedom, though gently inspired by the Divine toward upward progress until all mankind realizes the Supermind.

Aurobindo's view of the pattern of human history directed towards this goal is not a mechanical one, because of the freedom of human individuals. Because of this participation by human beings, Aurobindo thinks that the most adequate approach to an understanding and patterning of human history is a psychological

one. He therefore rejects the materialist (both mechanistic and dialectical) and vitalistic (e.g. Bergson's *élan vital*) theories and builds his own philosophy of history around a psychological approach to the development of human civilizations. He finds Lamprecht's patterning of this psychological development in a series of five stages a true and useful framework for describing 'the human cycle,' the pattern of the evolutionary progress of a civilization from its beginnings. Human history is the story of man's civilizations, the group creations that educate mankind for ever higher goals, eventually the goal of Supermind. The five stages (borrowed from Lamprecht) in the development of a civilization are the Symbolic, the Typal, the Conventional, the Individualist, and the Subjective. Aurobindo sees these stages manifested in Indian history and elsewhere.

STAGES OF CIVILIZATION

The Symbolic Stage

This is a subjective stage like the fifth, but differs in the kind of subjectivism. The Symbolic stage is a subjectivism at the infrarational level, the Subjective (fifth) state at the suprarational. In a Symbolic age man vaguely intuits the Divine that he feels is everywhere, and expresses his feeling in myth, poetry, and art. In Indian history this epoch is the Vedic Age, a time, Aurobindo comments, when the sacrifice was central and interpreted in mystical symbols.¹ Social institutions also were given a mystical meaning. For example, the Rig Vedic marriage hymn in the Vedic Age was a glorification of the divine marriages of Sūryā, daughter of the Sun—the human was 'an inferior figure and image of the divine.'² Also "the Indian ideal of the relation between man and woman has always been governed by the symbolism of the relation between the Purusha and Prakriti. . . , the male and female divine Principles in the universe."³ Another key social institution, the organization of society into the four *Varnas* is given a divine origin in the *Vedas* in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*.

This intuitive, poetic, symbolic age is apparent in the formative stage of all other civilizations, Aurobindo affirms. This is the

view, also, of some prominent Western philosophers of history. Among these theorists, Oswald Spengler posits such a symbolic age in the childhood period of a civilization. Pitirim A. Sorokin, the noted sociologist philosopher of history finds religious symbolism dominant in the beginning epoch of a great culture, the 'ideational' epoch. In this era the culture is integrated around the Divine as the true reality and value. Religious symbolism has, in fact, played a large part in the early phases of civilizations.

The Typal Stage

This is 'predominantly psychological and ethical'. Aurobindo again refers to the development of Indian civilization to illustrate the nature of this era. The *varṇa* system originating in the Symbolic Age develops the notion of psychological human types each with its particular ideal.

In the Symbolic Age the *varṇas* were oriented around the idea of the Divine as knowledge in man (the Brahman *varṇa*); the Divine as power in man (*Kṣatriya varṇa*); the Divine as production in man (*Vaiśya varṇa*); and the Divine as obedience, service and work (*Sūdra varṇa*). This orientation of the *varṇas* around the Divine changes, in the Typal stage, to one oriented around the human. The focus is now upon the human psychological types and the ethical ideal for each. Religion in this era is mainly the sanction for *Dharma* (ethical ideals) except for a few who develop a more and more other-worldly religion.⁴ The finest flower of this stage is the social ideal set for each psychological type, each *varṇa*. These ideals remain as standards of social honor even in the Conventional Stage that succeeds the Typal.

The Conventional Stage

The Typal stage ends and the Conventional begins when the outward trappings of each *varṇa* become more important than the inner ethical ideal. A Brahman, for example, is no longer one through observance of the ethical ideal proper to his psychological type, but merely one by birth and honored for similar external circumstances. Religion in the Conventional stage becomes stereotyped, thought subjected to infallible authorities,

and education bound to unchangeable forms. The medieval age in Europe illustrates this stage, and in India what orthodox idealists fondly call the Golden Age. Aurobindo thinks that much of the East (including India) is still in a Conventional stage and needs to be awakened to an age of individualism before the fifth, the Subjective Stage, can be possible.

Aurobindo comments on the lack of sincere, profound spirituality in a Conventional epoch:

Thus at one time the modern litterateur, artist or thinker looked back often with admiration and with something like longing to the medieval age of Europe; he forgot in its distant appearance of poetry, nobility, spirituality the much folly, ignorance, iniquity, cruelty and oppression of those harsh ages, the suffering and revolt that simmered below these fine surfaces, the misery and squalor that was hidden behind that splendid facade. So too the Hindu orthodox idealist looks back to a perfectly regulated society devoutly obedient to the wise yoke of the Shastra, and that is his golden age, —a nobler one than the European in which the apparent gold was mostly hard burnished copper with a thin gold-leaf covering it, but still of an alloyed metal, not the true Satya Yuga.⁵

Aurobindo admits that there is 'much indeed that is really fine and sound and helpful to human progress'⁶ in such an age, but 'always the form prevails and the spirit recedes and diminishes.'⁷ This becomes most apparent in religion despite the efforts of a few saints and reformers. Ultimately the contradiction between convention and truth becomes so intolerable to men of perceptive intellects that they burst through the walls of convention and begin to use their own individual minds independently in the search for truth in the worlds of religion and nature. This development ushers in the Individualist stage of a civilization.

The Individualist Stage

Aurobindo describes this era as one of Reason, Revolt, Progress,

and Freedom. Reason is essential in freeing man from the sterility of the Conventional epoch. Reason is the stage of self-conscious mind, the human level of existence. In many ways atrophied in the Conventional era, it flourishes forth with its objectivity, its fearless search for truth in the Individualist Stage, and this—the search for truth—is its highest power. (It has, of course, been operative from the first stage, for it is the source of human creativity in the arts and sciences.)

In the Individualist stage, when Reason is dominant, the natural form of social organization is democracy; it stands for the freedom and equality of each member of society to use his individual reason in arranging his life. In practice, however, Aurobindo thinks that it has resulted in party strife, in social classes of rich and poor, and in a kind of competition, often ruthless, in which the most successful and not the best survive. Values deteriorate from the mental level and are mainly those related to man's infrarational nature, his material and vital needs. To satisfy these for the masses of men, socialism comes into being, and to make actual the equality of each member of society in the satisfaction of such material and vital needs, the individual is subjugated more and more to the State. Totalitarianism, either Fascist or Communist is born, the natural outcome of socialism. Only the Scandinavian socialist states, Aurobindo comments, have avoided this thus far and may continue to be successful in maintaining freedom, unless mankind collectively accepts some form of totalitarianism as the form of social organization. If this occurs, there will be an eclipse of Reason and Individualism until, in the human cycle, times grow more favorable for its return. Then the 'spiral of human social evolution' may again progress towards its goal, the Age of Spirit, the Subjective Age.

It is important to note here that Aurobindo posits a spiral pattern of progress in history, neither the traditional cyclical one of Indian thought, nor the one-cycle, linear form of the Western tradition. In recent Indian thought, however, Mahadevan argues for a spiral-progress pattern, and in the Western world Toynbee and Sorokin take the same view.

When another and final Individualist stage recurs and Reason

again is dominant, there is the obsession characteristic of Reason that all truth can be discovered by objective means, by looking at things from the outside, the 'dream that perfection can be determined by machinery,'⁸ by the computer. Then comes the realization that the deepest, most fundamental, and central truth whence all else springs can be realized only subjectively, through the discovery and recovery of the deeper self. This intuitive knowledge brings in the Subjective Stage of the human cycle of history, the Age of Spirit or Supermind.

The Subjective Stage: The Age of Supermind

The Symbolic stage, the first in the cycle of a civilization, is also a subjective stage, but at the infrarational level; the Supermind era is a subjective one at the suprarational level. At the stage of Supermind man feels strongly the pull of the Divine that inspired him to transcend Intellect itself. He now sees Intellect as mediator between the infrarational and suprarational (Supermind) aspects of his being as a microcosm; in the macrocosm Intellect has the same function. In his intuitive unity with the macrocosmic Supermind, he experiences its blissful knowledge as mediator and knower of both the Higher Hemisphere of Being (*Sacchidānanda*) and the Lower (Matter, Life, and Mind). When all men collectively, or at least a majority, attain this kind of subjective, intuitive knowledge-by-identity of the Divine, the everlasting epoch of Supermind, the Age of Spirit, will have arrived. This is the goal of history.

What are the conditions for the advent of this Divine age? Aurobindo names two that must be fulfilled simultaneously. The first is the appearance of individuals "who are able to see, to develop, to re-create themselves in the image of the Spirit and to communicate both their idea and its power to the mass."⁹ Such sage-saints, e.g. recently Gandhi, have already appeared. The second condition is the "readiness of the common mind of man" to receive the image. It is the latter condition that is so difficult to bring into being. Mankind at present is preoccupied with the lower self, the Inconscient (Matter) and the Subconscient (Vital) aspects of his being. "If mankind is to be spiri-

tualised," Aurobindo says, "it must first in the mass cease to be the material or the vital man and become the psychic and the true mental being."¹⁰ If this kind of progress is impossible, "then the spiritualisation of mankind as a whole is a chimera."¹¹ The common man may find an attraction in the spiritual teachings of those rare souls who have attained a supramental consciousness, but because he has not yet become the "psychic and true mental being"¹² he remains unready to receive the Divine image.

To prepare mankind as a whole to receive the Divine image, an age of mental subjectivism is the first condition.¹³ There must be a "growth of the subjective idea of life—the idea of the soul, the inner being, its powers, its possibilities, its growth, its expression and the creation of a true, beautiful and helpful environment for it is the one thing of first and last importance."¹⁴ The subjectivism of the mental self of man, a "psychic subjectivism," sees man as a soul developing an "everexpanding mental existence" that eventually can master all of nature—physical, vital and the mental itself.¹⁵ In art and beauty awesome achievements would be made, and in human relations greater harmony would prevail. Such a full exploration of the mental being to its highest reaches is necessary before mankind is ready for the Age of Spirit. Aurobindo maintains that past efforts to spiritualize mankind were unsuccessful because of the failure to realize that all the intervening levels (the material, the vital, and the mental) must first be completely mastered before the spiritual can find root.

In the age of mental subjectivism the climatic idea must develop that mind is only a secondary power of the Spirit which is the original, eternal, sole reality, *ayam ātmā brahma* (this self is Brahman).¹⁶ When this development occurs, the Era of Supermind comes into being.

The Age of Spirit (or Supermind, or the Supramental Being or the Gnostic Being) would begin with and aim to realize three essential truths of existence: God, freedom, and unity. These three must be realized together; unless God is realized neither can the other two. Possession of God is possession of one's highest self and the self of all, the foundation for freedom and unity.¹⁷

Real freedom can only be founded upon freedom from egoism, and possession of God as one with the self and the self of all others means freedom from one's ego. The Divine within each man discovered in self-knowledge is the inner source of freedom in a spiritual age; all external "laws" within societies and among nations will be based upon it. Without man's self-knowledge—without his identification with God and with the self of all—"he cannot escape from the law of external compulsion and all efforts to do so must be vain."¹⁸ As long as a man is the slave of his own ego, of his lower nature, he will remain the slave of others—his family, caste, church, society, and nation.¹⁹

The age of the spiritualized society is the age of the Life Divine, the era of finding God within ourselves. As in the Vedic age all knowledge and practice—art, philosophy, science, and the social structure—would be God-centered. The aim of ethics as a branch of philosophy would be the development of the divine nature in all men; the aim of art, to see the Divine symbolized in art-creations; of economics, to work for all according to one's own nature and attain the leisure to develop inwardly in a "simply rich and beautiful life"; of politics, the appreciation of each nation as a group-soul with the freedom to develop its own nature and thereby aid all mankind in the "common work of humanity". The noble work of humanity in this Age of Spirit "would be to find the divine Self in the individual and the collectivity and to realise spiritually, mentally, vitally, materially its greatest, largest, richest and deepest possibilities in the inner life of all and their outer action and nature."²⁰

In this era of Spirit the individual will not be swallowed up into a collectivity, but a spiritual anarchy will prevail. There will be no coercive institutions. Each individual will be free to develop his own unique talents and personality. Each will be "the law, the Divine law, because he will be a soul living in the Divine and not an ego living mainly if not entirely for its own interest and purpose. His life will be guided by the law of his own divine nature liberated from the ego,"²¹ and this is real, complete and ultimate freedom.

But there will be no *isolated* individuals because the era of the Life Divine is characterized also by Unity. The individual knows that the Divine in himself is equally in all others, the same Spirit in all. "The sign and condition of the perfect life" is when the growing inner unity with others becomes perfect unity.²² Then one seeks the perfection and liberation of all others. Yet this unity with all others does not mean a featureless oneness of all. "The spiritual life is the flower not of a featureless but a conscious and diversified oneness. Each man has to grow into the Divine within himself through his own individual being."²³ Each is a soul free to develop his unique talents, and because he sees God in all he serves men with love; he seeks their freedom and perfection along with his own, and spontaneously because his central allegiance is not to himself, or to the State and society, or to the individual ego or to the collective ego, but to God, the Divine in himself and in the universe.²⁴

The new age, then, dawns when the common mind of man begins to be moved by the three: God, Freedom, and Unity. Human history will then cease its "incomplete repetitions" and progress directly upwards towards the perfection of the divine life upon earth.²⁵ Aurobindo tersely summarizes the "human cycle" thus:

For having set out, according to our supposition with a symbolic age, an age in which man felt a great Reality behind all life which he sought through symbols, it will reach an age in which it will begin to live in that Reality, not through the symbol, not by the power of the type or of the convention or of the individual reason and intellectual will, but in our own highest nature which will be the nature of that Reality fulfilled in the conditions—not necessarily the same as now—of terrestrial existence.²⁶

This will be the actualization of the Kingdom of God on earth which the great religions have for the most part but dimly intuited.²⁷

Once the new age begins what will be the nature of this upward progress? Men will not have an other-worldly asceticism as the ideal, but will be integral beings; the material, the vital, and the mental aspects of the self will be integrated with the spiritual or

Gnostic self. The Spirit will, however, guide the lower levels of being and divinize them. The desires of the body, e.g., lust for food and for satisfaction of sexual desire, will be sublimated. In an essay published as a book, written at the end of his life with the title *The Mind of Light*, Aurobindo suggests some of the possibilities for divinizing the grosser physico-biological desires.²⁸ With the growing omniscience to be realized by Gnostic beings, such problems could easily be solved. Aurobindo in his book *On Yoga* observes that the occult powers such as clairvoyance that already belong to some yogis will become perfect omniscience in supramental beings, so the kind of knowledge necessary for divinizing the grosser desires of man should pose no problem.²⁹ The spiritual life in this world in the final age of human history, the Age of Spirit, will fulfil the noblest dreams of the greatest sage-saints for a Kingdom of God on earth.

COMMENTS AND EVALUATION

Aurobindo's argument that cosmic and human history will ultimately achieve the goal of an Age of Spirit, a Kingdom of God on earth, seems pure fantasy, no doubt, to many in the intellectual world both in India and the West. In India where intuitive experience of the Divine is acceptable evidence, perhaps more thinkers are sympathetic with such a philosophy of history than in the scientifically-minded Western intellectual world. Yet there are areas in twentieth century Western thought where we find much that parallels the more significant aspects of Aurobindo's philosophy of history. We shall select examples from Western psychology, from philosophical theology, from scientific thought, and from philosophy of history that support Aurobindo's views or aspects of his system.

In Western psychology there is much resemblance to Aurobindo's thought in Carl Jung's view that man's goal is "individuation," a reintegration of the personality around its two poles, the "shadow" (the material and vital aspects of Aurobindo's philosophy) and the "central archetype meaning" (the spiritual pole, the Supermind of Aurobindo's thought). Jung's concept of the individuation process is similar to Aurobindo's description of

the yogic experience on the microcosmic scale of the involution-evolution process which takes place on the grand macrocosmic scale in the vastnesses of time and space that is cosmic and human history. The microcosmic experience of this process is portrayed most graphically in the practice of the Tantric yoga. Involution is represented by the Divine force, *Kuṇḍalini*, asleep in the earth-centre, the lowest level of being, the level that corresponds with Matter, the Inconscient. Then Evolution begins. *Kuṇḍalini* is "struck by the freely coursing breath, by the current of Life," the subconscious and "rises flaming up the ladder of the spinal cord and forces open centre after centre of the involved dynamic secrets of consciousness (the conscious and mental) till at the summit she finds, joins and becomes one with the spirit,"³⁰ the ultimate goal. In this experience the yogin has a foretaste and confirmation of the macrocosmic pattern of history. The yogin's reintegration with the Divine resembles, as we said, Jung's individuation process. The essential elements in this process are first the conscious recognition by the individual of his "shadow," his materio-biological self or inconscient and subconscious aspects. Then it is essential that he intuit the spiritual pole of being, "the central archetype meaning," the spiritual experience that transforms him and annihilates his egocentrism. He is now able to control his lower nature, for he sees himself in true perspective in relation to this lower pole of being and the spiritual pole, the ultimate divine meaning which pervades and integrates all selves and the cosmos. This is reintegration, the goal of the individuation process in Jung's psychology. Jung thought that Eastern yogic experience exemplified it. We have seen above in Aurobindo's interpretation of yogic experience that it is a reintegration process on the microcosmic scale that manifests the pattern of cosmic and human history in the macrocosm.

In Western philosophical religion the goal of man in Paul Tillich's theology, the New Being, is similar to man's goal in Aurobindo's thought, the Gnostic Being. Tillich's New Being manifests a unity between self and God, between self and humanity and the world, and between self and Self. All elements of egoism, of alienation from man and God are extinguished and

replaced with altruistic love. In unity with God the New Being is in unity with the creative ground of being (this corresponds with Aurobindo's Supermind) characterized by Love, Truth, and Beauty, and Love is primary. In participation in the Divine, the New Being is a resurrected soul with the power to create a new life and a new world for himself and all mankind.³¹ But Tillich differs from Aurobindo on the question of the perfection of mankind. He does not think that the human individual or human society can ever reach a divine perfection. He maintains that "the Creation and the Fall are one"; therefore "there will never be a state of existence without tragedy."³² Although the New Being may be united with the Unconditioned, the Infinite God, he is not one with the Divine. He remains a finite co-creator of a new divinized world that can never attain perfection. This hiatus between God and man, the Infinite and the finite, has been characteristic of the Western tradition in theology from early times. On the other hand, the perfection, the full divinization of man has been a dominant view in Indian thought from the days of the early Upanishads. If Westerners could experience the divine in yogic meditation as practised in the East by Hindus and Buddhists they would be more prone to believe in the probability or even certainty of man's perfection in godlikeness, the view of Aurobindo.

Not only in Western psychology and religion do we find philosophies of history like that of Aurobindo. We find a striking resemblance to Aurobindo's evolutionary description of man's past and future history in the work of a scientist, a paleontologist, Père Teilhard de Chardin.³³ Père Teilhard sees the history of this planet as a cosmogenesis, a progressive evolutionary process from inorganic matter to the biological (the Biosphere) and then to the mental (the Noosphere). These stages obviously parallel Aurobindo's Matter, Life, and Mind spheres. Resembling Aurobindo's thesis of the Supermind pervading all, even Matter, is Teilhard's Within that pervades all things. All entities, even the atom has both a Within and a Without aspect. The Within is the psychic energy aspect; the Without is the physical energy or material aspect. In the evolutionary process as entities

become more and more complex at the biological level the Within aspect slowly becomes dominant over the Without until at the human level the psychic energy can control much of the physical. The next and culminating step will be the maximum control of the physical by the psychic energy. This is the Omega point.

Again we notice the likeness to Aurobindo's interpretation of the evolutionary process and its goal. Like Aurobindo's Gnostic Beings, Teilhard's "super-man" will have transcended the present human species of man. In these new ultra-hominized beings there will be complete control over the physical and biological spheres and thus the realization of Divinity and immortality. These new beings will be immortal individual personalities although parts of a hyperpersonal psycho-social spiritual totality, Omega; and each being will be in a completely integrated and harmonious relationship with all his fellow beings. Consciousness will be co-extensive with the universe and space and time will have been transcended for this omniscient ultra-hominised species. This divinization of man into a new species creating a new divinized world is precisely Aurobindo's evolutionary goal. Also, Teilhard agrees that egoless, universal love is a prior condition in reaching point Omega. The evolutionary philosophy of history of Teilhard and of Aurobindo are so much alike that Teilhard may possibly have been influenced by the ideas of his great Indian contemporary. Teilhard has devoted more of his time and writing to the scientific data that, he thinks, strongly support his theories. Aurobindo would have been happy for this kind of evidence that points to the divinizing of man and his world.

In the area of Western philosophies of history two of the most prominent thinkers, Arnold J. Toynbee and Pitirim A. Sorokin, follow Aurobindo's thesis that man's goal and ultimate salvation is the realization in this world of a global society in which egoless love will be the bond among men, or at least a world that would accept the leadership of such saints in the creation of a new society. Toynbee sees the rise and fall of civilizations as the spiral progress of "the chariot of religion"³⁴ towards the goal of a community of saints on earth—men who will pattern their lives

after men like St. Francis of Assisi or the *bodhisattva* ideal of Buddhism.³⁵ Sorokin, too, sees history as a spiral progress towards this goal. He mentions particularly the intuitive suprarational experience of the great mystics of East and West as evidence that man is capable of attaining the highest kind of spiritual life. When a sufficient number of men can have this kind of experience of intuitive identity with the Divine a new world of altruistic love among men will come into being.³⁶

Opposing these glorious views of man's destiny are those historians and philosophers who think that a realistic, scientific, and objective approach to human history inhibits belief in a future age dominated by spiritual values. Besides, say these men, fairly precise predictions about the pattern of future events can be made only in the more exact sciences, those in which experiments can be performed with repeatable phenomena. In the social sciences, and particularly in the area of history, experiments like those common in the physical and biological sciences cannot be performed to verify whether or not a hypothetical pattern is a reality. The best the objective, scientific historian can do is examine segments of past history by collecting documentary evidence; also he must remember that in many studies he has to be selective; he cannot know all the myriad past events that might be related to the area he has chosen for study. Other more subjective factors also enter into his selection. For example, in attempting to ascertain the cause or causes of a significant past event such as the fall of Rome, he can scarcely avoid being influenced in his selection of the most relevant factors by his own personal cultural background and by the general "climate of opinion" of his time.³⁷

Granting that a thinker's philosophy, around which he builds his theory of the meaning of history, may have this kind of relativity, there remains as a perennial truth the direct experience of the great Eastern and Western mystics as evidence of humanity's contact with an eternal spiritual reality—a contact which has resulted in a new kind of divine egoless living in this world. Aurobindo, the mystic philosopher of cosmic and human history, Tillich, the renowned theologian, Teilhard de Chardin, the

scientist-philosopher, and Toynbee and Sorokin, attempting encyclopaedic empirical philosophies of history—all are convinced that the great mystic saints are forerunners of a new age in history similar to that described by Aurobindo. The very failure of past and present civilizations will, as Toynbee declares, drive humanity forward to the only kind of society that can satisfy his deepest needs and aspirations.

It is true that our world is in a transition stage of global history. The transition may be to a Communist world founded upon a materialist philosophy; or to a spiritual society in which egoless love will be the highest value and a new rich creative integral life for all mankind will flourish. If Communism prevails, perhaps an easier alternative for collective humanity at present, the spiral of history, as Aurobindo thinks, may nevertheless lead eventually to the final epoch, the Age of Spirit. This is the intuitive knowledge of those who have already been infused with the Light Divine, the forerunners of the new species of Gnostic Beings.

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- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 323.
- 28 Sri Aurobindo, *The Mind of Light* (New York: Dutton, 1953). Paper-bound edition, Introduction by Robert A. McDermott (Dutton, 1971). See chap. 2: "The Divine Body."
- 29 Sri Aurobindo, *On Yoga : The Synthesis of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1955). In Part Four, chapter XXIV, "The Supramental Sense," Aurobindo describes the omniscience of the supramental being. He writes: "The supramental being will transform at the same time and take up into itself the present thinking of the mind transfigured into an immensely larger knowledge by identity. . ."
- 30 Sri Aurobindo, *The Problem of Rebirth* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1952), p. 76.
- 31 Paul Tillich, *The New Being* (New York: Scribner's, 1955), p. 24.
- 32 Walter Leibrecht, "The Life and Mind of Paul Tillich," *Religion and Culture : Essays in Honour of Paul Tillich*, ed. by Walter Leibrecht (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 16.
- 33 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Introduction by Sir Julian Huxley (New York: Harper, 1959) is the best account of his system of evolutionary thought. See the article of B. Bruteau in this Symposium.
- 34 Arnold J. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, pp. 235 f. See also vols. VII-XII of his *A Study of History* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1934-61) for an elaborate account of his thesis that redemptive religion is the real purpose of human history.
- 35 Toynbee, *A Study of History*, VII, 501-507; IX, 644.
- 36 Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954). See also his encyclopaedic 4-volume *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (New York: American Book Company, 1937), the argument of which is telescoped into the one-volume *The Crisis of Our Age* (New York: Dutton, 1941), for a full account of his patterning of the cycle of a civilization, and his diagnosis of our present ills.
- 37 Carl Becker, *Everyman His Own Historian : Essays on History and Politics* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1935).

ON SRI AUROBINDO'S FOUNDATIONS OF INDIAN CULTURE

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MY aim in this paper is to explain Sri Aurobindo's view of the foundations of Indian Culture in the light of his idea of Integral Reality as it manifests itself through the development of Indian mind. It is natural, therefore, that the *context* of my discussion in these pages is not the same as that of Sri Aurobindo's own exposition, the latter being an account as to how different basic forms of Indian Culture (such as, literature, music, etc.) reveal from within themselves the foundations as the very basis of their structure. The view developed in this paper may be construed as an interpretation, supported by Sri Aurobindo's general philosophical ideas, put on his notion of the foundations of Indian Culture.

Much of Sri Aurobindo's reflection on the foundations of Indian Culture has been occasioned by adverse comments on Indian Culture and Civilization by Western writers like William Archer. These writers maintain that Hinduism is manifestly 'barbaric' and that in its essence it is nothing but a 'mass of folk-lore with an ineffective coating of metaphysical daubing'.¹ Sri Aurobindo takes this to be a typical reaction of the materialistic-rationalistic mind which underlies the modern European Culture and Civilization as its core principle. It gives Christianity the highest place of honour amongst world-religions because of the patently paradoxical reason that it permits the Christians in the modern Europe to be the least religiously committed people. This analysis of the modern European situation by Sri Aurobindo is surprisingly close to that of S. Kierkegaard—one of the most original Western thinkers of all times. S. Kierkegaard characterizes the modern church-Christianity as basically unchristian, and like Sri Aurobindo recognises that this negative irreligious outlook of the modern Western Culture is the direct consequence of the predominant aesthetic-intellectualist trend in that Culture.²

The aesthetic-intellectual outlook (the materialistic-rationalistic Mind) effectively secularizes religion and thereby makes it consistent with almost anything under the Sun, even with the negation of religion itself.

Rationalism, originally the core principle of Greeko-Roman civilization, constitutes the basic intuitions of European Mind. This rationalism, because of its natural tendency to universalise and de-humanise, has gradually transformed itself into materialism which now dominates the Western scene. Materially oriented rationalism is marked with a tendency to run down and subjugate everything that does not conform to its norms and principles. Reality in any form—human, material, ideal—conceived in any other way is simply absurd or primitive, which must therefore be removed or modified finally and completely. Accordingly, it is only natural that the Europeans during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, possessed as they were with this kicking tendency, took upon themselves to 'civilize' the rest of the world, then considered to be 'the white men's burden'. They launched a vigorous political and cultural assault on the rest of the people, the vibrations of which are still being felt at many places. When Rudyard Kipling observed that the East and the West are basically different and the twain shall never meet, he was in effect giving recognition to the fact that the sociopolitical or cultural aggression of the West on the East has been largely unsuccessful. And the reason of this failure lies not so much in some inherent weakness of the Western Culture; its real cause is that the Eastern Culture itself is as much an expression of the positive historical force sustaining that culture, as is the Western culture in respect of that positive historical force which sustains it. A positive historical force, called 'Śakti' by Sri Aurobindo, has its own motive and grounding wherein the corresponding culture takes its definite shape and retains it through successive generations. And it is natural, therefore, that any culture, as an expression of such a 'Śakti', may on proper occasions be defensive as well as aggressive. Hence, 'war of cultures'³ is an inevitable phenomenon obtaining as a result of the aggression on one culture by another. In this 'war', as in any other, the parties involved are

equally defensive and aggressive. In other words, each culture is capable of both positive and negative attitudes which in the face of opposition transform into aggressive and defensive postures. Thus, says Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda's speech at the World Assembly of Religions in Chicago amounted to such aggressive-defensive postures taken on behalf of Indian culture. Hence the view that the Indian mind or culture is basically passive, negative, lacking in initiative and drive, and full of endless repetitions can be attributed only to a very crude form of partiality and blindness.

From Sri Aurobindo's characterization of Culture as the expression of 'Śakti'—which therefore should better be called 'national culture'—it is clear that it is a terrestrial category which admits of different forms: different national cultures being distinct expressions of different national forces. Now, in Sri Aurobindo's thinking, the terrestrial signifies the region of infrarational activity which continues itself, through its creative self-evolution, into the region of the Supermind. This continuity of the former into the latter, achieved through a particular process of evolution, must therefore be real. Seen from the opposite angle, the reality itself must be essentially historical in its manifestation. Further, since the historical movement, as the very self-manifesting reality, is conceived in the manner of creative self-evolution, and since at the terrestrial level only a human being can be creative and only a concrete human consciousness can be self-evolutionary, 'history' discloses itself as that which guarantees the irreducible reality of the individual human being, i.e., his freedom of creative activity, in the face of that ideal reality which forms the right goal or aim in respect of that freedom of creativity. This means that the ideal dwells within the historical movement, which at any particular time manifests itself at the terrestrial level as the actual, i.e. as the actually evolved real which at every stage suffers from the binding effects of the terrestrial. Hence the indwelling ideal does not allow the actually evolved real to rest till it has evolved itself into a higher form of reality. And similarly with this comparatively higher form of reality and with still other higher form of reality following it. In other words, actuality

always remains united with the ideal: The latter is the principle which accounts for the systematically developing life of the actual; on the other hand, the actual acquires reality by virtue of its creativity which leads it towards that ideal. Sri Aurobindo's view that the historical progress is real, marked with retrograde states, is in fact based on the above account of the interprojective relations between the actual and the ideal. Accordingly, every culture, taken as such actual, obtaining at a specific terrestrial spatiotemporal plane, is constantly involved in a movement in which the ideal as its core principle can always be apprehended.

The historical progress by a culture consists in its endeavor to overcome its actually realised states and thereby to evolve itself into the ideal. The endeavor to overcome the actual at the terrestrial level involves, according to Sri Aurobindo, the 'principle of struggle'. This principle in its operational aspect is marked by three successive stages—all of which can be clearly seen in the movement of Indian Culture. These successive stages are: (i) the stage of conflict and competition, (ii) the stage of concert or harmony with right differentiation, and (iii) the stage of the spirit of self-sacrifice, in which all is known as one and therefore each gives himself for the sake of the other. It is clear that these stages in the operational 'principle of struggle' signify in their ordered evolution the very transition from the terrestrial to the supra-rational—this transition being, therefore, as real as the terrestrial or the supra-rational. Thus Sri Aurobindo's view of the reality of the historical movement and progress is a direct outcome of his notion of Reality as necessarily integral, as essentially integrating the terrestrial (the actual) and the supra-rational (the ideal). The reality of History and historical progress, by itself included within the terrestrial, signifies the reality of the individual who alone by his freedom of creativity can give that significance and direction to historical movement which Sri Aurobindo attributes to it. It is for this reason that Advaita Vedāntin's absolutism is not entirely acceptable to Sri Aurobindo. Nor, for the same reason, can he accept the mechanistic, dialectical or vitalistic view of History and historical movement.

In fact, the evolving terrestrial, the actual conceived in creativity, must involve a consideration of 'goal' and the consciousness that the goal is right. Now this consciousness which discriminates between the right and the wrong in respect of its goal belongs only to the individual man at the terrestrial level. And at this level the right goal of man is his happiness. But it is right not only because it signifies his material satisfaction; but more comprehensively and fundamentally it is so because it reflects in its essence the Supra-rational or the ideal itself as 'ānanda' or Delight-in-Existence. So in aiming at the terrestrial happiness man's consciousness is essentially transcending that very goal so as to achieve the highest goal as 'ānanda'—*provided* it has the right perspective of the Reality as the actual (the terrestrial) evolving itself into the ideal (the Supra-rational). The third stage in the operative principle of struggle indicates this awareness: The spirit of self-sacrifice, as exhibited in this expression of *Īśāvāsyaopaniṣada*—'tyakten bhunjīthā', is in fact the awareness that the Real underlies everything and all and into that man must evolve himself by sacrificing his petty exclusiveness and yet retaining at the same time the right attitude of satisfaction.

But, further, in order so that the ideal state of ānanda is realised in the above manner, it must express itself in Existence: hence its description as Delight-in-Existence. This Existence, conceived in its purity as the primordial material principle, is called 'sat'. It serves as the substratum for the state of ānanda. It is clear that the reality of the individual's freedom of creativity and that of the corresponding historical movement and progress already presuppose the ideality of the Matter as the primal principle within the significance of Reality as essentially integral—because real change or movement is possible only if *that* which changes or moves is granted some kind of potential being in strict correspondence with the Real. Now, since this primal material principle operative at the terrestrial level is necessarily bound with the limitations of the gross particulars, it naturally gives rise to many conflicts, negations and oppositions in its various manifestations at that level—this being the very first stage of the struggle. But, then, as already pointed out, the primal

material principle, even at the terrestrial level, cannot be an autonomous or absolute principle, because it is always balanced by the life-force or the purposeful life seeking for itself happiness and therefore refusing to yield to mere mechanical changes. Hence, at the terrestrial level itself attempts are made to overcome the conflicts, negations and oppositions, which serve as distractions and deviations: when man actually does overcome the conflicts etc. at the first stage of the struggle, he naturally moves on to its second stage where conflicts and oppositions are satisfactorily resolved into a right differentiation between conflicting and mutually opposing elements.

Now, as observed earlier, the presence of a purposeful life involves in its significance the presence of the awareness of a goal in respect of its creativity and movement. Without this awareness of goal—goal which in itself is of the nature of the ideal—and without the possibility of its attainment in and through the creativity and movement of consciousness, the terrestrial satisfaction in the form of happiness cannot be explained. Hence obviously the ideal endeavouring to realising itself must signify, besides pure Existence (sat) and Delight-in-Existence (ānanda), the primal, Consciousness-force or Pure Consciousness (cit). The ideal-realisation as a whole has been characterized, therefore, as 'sat-cit-ānanda'. At the terrestrial level this same ideal manifests itself, though imperfectly, as the reality of the actual-in-movement; whereas this actual-in-movement is real at all because it can reflect from within itself that ideal as striving to realise itself. Thus at the terrestrial level we already find, according to Sri Aurobindo, the primordial significance of integrality in the form of mutual involvement of body, psyche and consciousness, revealed in the movement of human life which is essentially historical in character. Accordingly, also, the historical progress consists in achieving and maintaining the harmony of body, psyche and consciousness in such a way that it does not turn into a retrograde state of rigid typical exclusiveness or that of blinding conventionalism which impairs man's original freedom of creativity. Man's freedom of creativity finds its finest expression in such fields as permit full play of that initial freedom. Hence

naturally his purposeful and spontaneous creations in the fields of arts and literature—expressing simultaneously his freedom, creation and fulfilment—constitute the very authentic manifestation of man's culture and civilization.

Now, the understanding of the ideal which is thus operative at the very heart of the actual-in-movement signifies, according to Sri Aurobindo, the very original insight of the Indian mind in its understanding of the Real. This original insight is 'spirituality', which forms the foundations of Indian Culture. The traditional notions of *Lilā* and *Māyā*, accordingly, represent the symbolic description of the Real as the actual-in-movement within which the ideal is endeavoring to realise itself. *Lilā* or *Māyā* is nothing but that creative activity at the terrestrial level which binds essentially the actual with the ideal. Hence its meaning as the play of the Divine. The view of 'reality' thus conceived in the context of *Lilā* or *Māyā*, therefore, not only supports and spontaneously discloses itself as the One-in-itself, but also at the same time it guarantees the reality of the individual and his terrestrial habitat. From the side of the Individual and his initial freedom, on the other hand, the realisation of the ideal amounts to self-finding and self-disclosing, which involving real personal capacity and activity accounts for his real historicity.

From the above it is clear that the 'spirituality', which in Sri Aurobindo's opinion forms the foundations of Indian Culture, cannot be conceived as a mere religious category: In fact it is too rational to be founded on mere religious faith or revelation. Sri Aurobindo seems to draw its significance from two Vedic concepts. These concepts are—the earlier Vedic concept of *Ṛta* and the later Vedic concept of *Brahman*. *Ṛta* is the immanent and the transcendent regulative principle of the whole creation and as such constitutes the reality of the historical movement in respect a goal (the ideal). In this sense it has been used as the equivalent of *Satya*—the reality-that-is-to-be (*sat + ya*), i.e. the ideal-immanent-in-the-actual-in-movement. In the post-Vedic literature this same category of *Ṛta* is called 'dharma', especially in the human context. In this very sense it is incorporated in the characterization of Hinduism as 'sanātana dharma'.

The Upaniṣadic category of *Brahman*, on the other hand, signifies the very reality as one-in-itself, as undifferentiated in its own nature, pervading the whole field regulated by the principle of *Ṛta*. In its own nature, therefore, it cannot be properly described as either transcendental or immanent, though in our understanding of the reality of anything whatever what is essentially referred to is this One-in-itself: Everything is what it is, it cannot be anything else. As being absolutely indescribable in itself it stands guarantee to the reality of all descriptions; it itself does not move but provides the grounds for the reality of the historical movement. In other words, it discloses itself as the ideal dwelling in the very heart of the actual-in-movement.

Now, in the Vedic literature the two categories of *Ṛta* and *Brahman* are not always so conceived as to exclude each other. There we find many passages in which a synthesis between the two is indicated, though not fully developed as in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Thus, *Ṛtasya dhitim Brahmaṇo Maniṣām* (*Ṛgveda*: 9.97.34b) is clearly expressive of a synthesis between the two in the form of the right understanding of the two. More significantly, it is in the important Vedic concept of *Yajña* that we see the two uniting—this being very close to Sri Aurobindo's own formulation of the synthesis. He takes self-sacrifice, the spirit of *Yajña*, as the final stage in the principle of struggle—this marking the final breakthrough in our appropriative understanding of the ideal within the limitations of the terrestrial. At the terrestrial level itself, however, the same spirit of *Yajña* is operative as the regulative principle of the human desires and activities—as described elaborately, for example, in *Gītā*. But in its capacity as such a regulative principle it is said to be equi-primordial with the Creation itself: *Sahayajñāh prajāh sṛṣtvā purovāca prajāpatih*, etc. (*Gītā*, III.10). Here the universal regulative principle in the form of *Yajña* is clearly identified with the Vedic *Ṛta*. In fact, in *Ṛgveda* *Ṛta* as the right way is clearly described as the determinant of *Yajña*: *Ṛtasya pathā namaṣā haviṣmatā* (10.70.2)—the right way which reaches the follower to higher regions described as *sukṛtasya loke* (*ibid*, 10.85.24). *Ṛta* conceived as such a right way is said to have

its source in the eternal or the ancient—*Ṛtasya dhāma vi mime purāṇi* (*ibid.*, 4.7.7^b). And as such it is the very sustaining ground of everything that has been and that will be, i.e. the whole creation: *Ṛtasya yonayo mṛtasya dhāma* (*ibid.*, 9.67.15^a).

But even as *Yajña* is thus identified with *Ṛta* in the form of the universal regulative principle, it at the same time is said to have its source in the mysterious reality—the ideal itself: *Yajñasya dhāma param guhā yat* (*ibid.*, 10.181.2^b). Perhaps for this reason *Yajña* is often referred to as *Brahma*—the One-in-itself. Even in case of *Ṛta*, conceived as identified with *Yajña*, in virtue of its being the supreme regulative principle at the terrestrial level, it is said that in it lies the source of the knowledge of the eternal (the Real itself): *Ṛtasya yonr-amṛtasya vijāyate* (*Kāṭaka Saṁhitā*, 35.6^b). And this understanding of *Ṛta* has become possible because it, along with its whole range of operation, is said to be grounded in the very eternal—*Ṛtasya dhamano amṛtasya yonah* (*Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, 4.2.7.2^b). Now this Vedic *Amṛta* is the same as *Brahman*. From the standpoint of the terrestrial, *Brahman* is the ideal yet to fully realise itself, but as constituting the very ground of the supreme regulative principle at the terrestrial level it in fact pervades everything and all—*Brahmedam ūrdham tiryak ca* (*Atharveda*, 3.53.12^a). Hence the possibility of its realisation as the Real is in and through its reflection at the terrestrial level itself. The passage from *Atharveda*, *Brahma brahmacāribhir utakrāmat* (19.19.8^a) gives recognition in effect to that fact. It is clear, then, that in this Vedic view of the integration between *Ṛta* and *Brahman* and its self-evolution as the Real we are very close to Sri Aurobindo's own view of integral reality and its self-evolution.

Now the Vedic view of the integral reality, as stated above, is almost completely lost in the post-Vedic development of Indian thought. In fact, in its later development it is altered beyond recognition. And therefore it is surely to the credit of Sri Aurobindo that he resurrected it so as to restore it to its original place of importance. Not only that. Sri Aurobindo interprets it to form the very essence of spirituality which, according to him, is the very core principle of Indian Culture and

civilization. In the remaining pages we shall briefly show how the Vedic view of the integral reality continues to affect the post-Vedic development of the Indian Culture and Mind.

The post-Vedic Indian Mind moves in a direction which is just the opposite of the Vedic view of the integration of the principle of *Ṛta* and that of *Brahman*. This post-Vedic situation is clearly apprehended by the early Jaina thinkers who talk of two opposite and exclusive standpoints dominating the then Indian philosophical scene—*Kṣhanikaikāntavāda* and *Brahmaikāntavāda*. The former is really a metaphysical culmination of the exclusive emphasis put on the terrestrial human action or *karma*, which in its turn has come about as a result of the exclusive emphasis put on the early Vedic category of *Ṛta* as the supreme regulative principle at the terrestrial level. This finds its early expression in the *Karmakānda* of the *Brāhmaṇa* philosophy. In the form of elaborate rituals operative within the confines of the terrestrial, the said *Karmakānda* gets uprooted from its underlying ideal as the One-in-itself. The principle of *Ṛta* now turns into a causal principle of the relation between a particular act and its consequence. But, since the unifying principle of unity, the One-in-itself, stands already lost in the mere *Karmakānda*, the very possibility of the justification of a relation between an act and its consequence or between two acts becomes groundless. And the only natural consequence of this groundlessness is the Buddhist metaphysical principle of *Kṣanikavāda*. In asserting its own validity this principle of *Kṣanikavāda* not only shuns all talk of reality as the One-in-itself or as the universal regulation but also at the same time it refutes the very *Karmakānda* which in fact prepares the historical ground for its emergence. Thus in its positive character the principle of *Kṣanikavāda* remains ontically and ontologically ungrounded: It is for this reason that the Buddhist 'dharma' reduces itself to mere morality.

The *Brahmaikāntavāda*, on the other hand, developed as it is in the total exclusion of *Ṛta*, evolves itself into an exclusive view of reality as the One-in-itself. Here the attempt is made to posit the ideal itself as the Real. This obviously leaves no room

for the reality of the terrestrial, in respect of which alone the multiplicity, movement and therefore creative individuality is possible. It is, therefore, clearly conceived in opposition to the Vedic view of creation which is said to follow directly from the Supreme Reality as the spontaneous evolution out of His free will and capacity. Accordingly this creation—the terrestrial—cannot be anything but real as following from Reality itself. In the Brahmaikāntavāda, however, it is precisely the category of the Creation, the terrestrial, that is conceived in exact opposition to the Real, such that any essential integration between the two is entirely out of question.

Now, though the Jaina thinkers recognize the two mutually exclusive views (Kṣaṇikaikāntavāda and Brahmaikāntavāda) as dominating the post-Vedic Indian thinking, they themselves do not move to integrate them. On the other hand, they try to devise a still higher principle of synthesis, called *Anekāntavāda*, in which many exclusive standpoints are held together in a dialectical process (which in its logical significance is characterized as *Nayavāda*). Within this dialectical process the mutually exclusive standpoints are shown as logically involving each other; but they never truly integrate. Thus, this Jain Anekāntavāda is surely more rational in its significance; but it is basically different from Vedic view of the Real as essentially integral.

A genuine attempt to understand and interpret the Vedic view is, however, made by the author of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. He clearly recognises the perplexity caused by the two opposing principles in the human mind—in the form of the opposition between *Karma* and *Jñāna*. But, then, it is demonstrated that this opposition is not ultimate: not only that it can be seen as resolved at various levels of integration—Karmayoga, Jñānayoga, Bhaktiyoga, and even at the purely mundane level of social and individual responsibilities; but also that these various levels of integration, by virtue of being such integration (yoga), unite ultimately in one and the same Integration which signifies the Real, the Ultimate itself. This makes clear the reason why Sri Aurobindo, who himself interprets the integral Reality in

the context of varied psychological and historical modes of human existence, is so prone to refer to *Bhagavad-Gītā* in his support.

In the period of *Dharma Śāstras* we once again notice the Vedic view of integral reality operating, though confined now to the sphere of human existence and action. In this period the Indian Mind is clearly settled on the idea that the ultimate significance of human-existence lies in the pursuit and achievement of certain goals. Hence the characterization of these goals as 'Puruṣārtha' or the ultimate fulfilments of man. They are four in number—Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa. The four fulfilments taken together signify the total range of human satisfaction—material, mental and spiritual. It is true that we come across instances of emphasis on only one or two of these four fulfilments: such as Kautilya's emphasis on Artha or Vātsyāyana's emphasis on Kāma. But even in these cases the significance of other fulfilments is not entirely denied. In fact, the generally held view is that only as united together the four yield the understanding of the real significance and purposefulness of human-existence, which at the same time is seen, in the light of its fulfilments, as necessarily integrated in the total scheme of the Real—the human-existence as immanent in the world (in view of *Artha* and *Kāma*) and also as transcendent in the world (in view of *Mokṣa*), the latter realisable only because man's immanence in the world can be harnessed through the authentic exercise of *Dharma*. The dharma-fulfilment, therefore, provides the necessary ground of the transition from the immanence of man to his transcendence; without the exercise of Dharma man is said to be simply lost in the world, incapable of realising himself in his fullness.

Out of the four fulfilments, *Puruṣārthas*, *Kāma* and *Artha*, the primal desire and the objective meaning, are clearly the pure terrestrial categories, signifying broadly the Psychological (subjectivity) and the Objectivity in their mutual relation. Hence, in its primary significance Kāma or primal desire is not just a craving-towards, something negative-in-itself; rather it is the positive state of happiness accompanying our mental acts.

Kāmān asmākam pūray—reads an invocation in *Atharvaveda* (3.10.13^c) which clearly shows the positive character of *Kāma*. Having such a positive character *Kāma* on its own can appropriate the *Artha* by providing it with qualities of desirability, utility etc., in virtue of which alone the *Artha* emerges as a basic kind of human fulfilment. *Artha* therefore signifies 'meaning' as well as 'means', and in both cases it involves the necessary reference to the subjective *Kāma*; even as the latter itself, being necessarily positive, involves itself in the total significance of the objective. In short, *Kāma* and *Artha*, signifying terrestrial fulfilment of man, are always copresent. But, as noted earlier, at the terrestrial level of existence a pure positive state of subjectivity or objectivity—happiness without its negative correlate of unhappiness and meaningfulness without its negative correlate of the absurd—does not obtain: this being the reason why *Kāma* and *Artha* considered to have terrestrial or empirical significance only, as in Buddhism, must ultimately signify nothing, as involving their own negation at that level. A pure logical formulation of this same statement we find in the Principle of Four-cornered Negation of Nāgārjuna. In this sense, therefore, *Kāma* and *Artha* cannot be counted as ultimate fulfilments, *Puruṣārthas*. Hence an ideal state of *Mokṣa*, in respect of them, must be taken as posited—releasing them from their limiting adjuncts and positing them in their pure positive character. But then the problem is: how the ideal can in any significant way affect the actual (*Kāma* and *Artha*)? A clue to this problem lies perhaps in the fact that *Mokṣa* is not an ultimate human fulfilment in and through itself: it is only one of the four ultimate fulfilments. This means that *Mokṣa* as the ultimate spiritual fulfilment must have some relation with the terrestrial fulfilments (*Kāma* and *Artha*). And this relation must have a temporal character, because all human evolutions culminating in fulfilments are necessarily historical—as made clear earlier. Now since the actual, the terrestrial, is the inevitable *first* in any temporal order in respect of an ontic, individual being, the ideal in this temporal order must follow the actual. But, in order so that an evolution exhibiting this temporal order is real, and not just a

possibility, it is necessary that the ideal already saturates the actual from within and therefore so develops the actual from within itself that the ideal can be realised through that development. Accordingly, the ideal, *Mokṣa*, is already immanent in the actual in the form of complete human fulfilments as *Kāma* and *Artha*. As being thus immanent and guiding the course of the development of the actual, it serves as the perfect stabilising principle within the terrestrial—the principle of *Śānti* as revealed in the Vedic *Śāntipāthas*—whereby its own nature as the fulfilment in the form of undisturbed state of perfect calmness and harmony is indicated. In this state of perfect calmness and harmony the terrestrial happiness turns into the ideal state of pure bliss or *Ānanda*, the terrestrial meaning (*Artha*) emerges as the ideal state of Pure Existence or *Sat*, the terrestrial Mind as *Kāma* shows forth itself as the ideal Pure consciousness or *Cit* disclosing the perfect harmony between the three.

The fulfilment as *Dharma*, however, is conceived on a different plane. Its positive character does not consist in specifying any particular region of human existence—as is the case with other three fulfilments. Rather it permeates all regions of human-existence in its historical significance i.e. in the movement of the terrestrial with a gradual realisation of the ideal. A passage in *Mahābhārata* reads '*dharmāt arthaśca kāmāśca*', where *dharma* is clearly described as the way whereby *kāma* and *artha* become the *puruṣārthas* (fulfilments). The implication here is that without this way the terrestrial would simply be a lot of confusion and craving: Unless the movement of the terrestrial is guided by the principle (norms) of *dharma*, they simply would not convert into perfect fulfilment. The only way then left before man to realise the ideal is to shun them altogether, reducing their significance to zero—as in Buddhism, where *Mokṣa* (perfect calmness) is understood appropriately as *Nirvāṇa*. But, then, clearly this is not the way to achieve the said harmony: The Vedic thinking which aims at achieving the harmony believes in developing the terrestrial (rather than reducing it to zero). Accordingly, the *dharma* is the very principle of the self-develop-

ment of the Real. It is an ontological principle, the significance of which extends far beyond righteous human action. In this sense it comes very close to the Vedic category of *Ṛta*, an universal regulative principle. In the human context, however, it emerges as the self-conscious principle—a regulative discipline of the Self imposed on and through itself for the purpose of realising the ideal. The dharma is clearly conceived in the context of the ideal (satya = sat + ya = that which should be the Real) in this well-known Vedic passage:

hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasya apithitaṁ mukhaṁ, tat-
tvam pūṣaṇa apāvṛṇu satya dharmāya dṛṣṭye (*Bṛihadārṇ-*
yaka, 5.15.1).

Now, during the last several centuries the Indian Mind has been forced to take a primarily defensive posture in the face of successive aggressions from foreign cultures. One important result of this has been that it has, during this time, devoted its entire energy in defending the *dharmā* for its own identity and continuity. But this in effect has changed the very significance of *dharmā* as integrating the other three *puruṣārthas*. Now *dharmā* pursued for its own sake has given rise to rigid conventionalism—marking a retrograde stage in the development of Indian Mind. As devoid of its root (the terrestrial) and as forgetful of its goal (the ideal) *dharmā* in the form of rigid conventionalism has succeeded only in confusing the basic issues of human existence and action. This is how the matter stands today. The continuation of the progress of Indian Mind, Culture and Nation is simply arrested: either misguided under the influence of the predominant rationalist-materialist culture of the West or recoiling within its self-created rigid conventionalism, not knowing which alternative to choose.

At this juncture of crisis in determining our historical being and in properly understanding our national destiny, Sri Aurobindo's notion of spirituality, the integral reality, as constituting the very foundations of Indian Culture, provides an opportunity for a thorough review of our total individual and national situation: Its singular contribution lies in this fact, irrespective of

whether or not his view is wholly correct. It very well serves its historical purpose in breathing a new purpose and insight in the endeavour of the Indian Mind to re-discover and establish itself as a progressive and creative force.

NOTES AND REFERENCE

- ¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, p. 140.
- ² S. Kierkegaard: *The Point of View*, Part II.
- ³ *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, p. 3.

SRI AUROBINDO AND THE SUBJECTIVE AND THE OBJECTIVE IN HISTORY

D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA

I

Prefatory. History may be interpreted, and in fact has been, in very many ways. Broadly speaking, these interpretations may be classified under two heads, the subjective and the objective. The common man, in some cases even the professional man, is in favour of the objective interpretation of history, by which he means factual and verifiable account of history. And his main criticism against the subjective interpretation is that it is influenced by pre-conceived ideas or coloured by imagination, or both. But there is a professional and serious view which is very much critical of what they call the myth of objectivity. Some contemporary philosophers of science like Polyani, Popper, Hanson and Feyerabend have tried to show that all factual accounts, including the scientific ones, are very much theory-oriented, subjective or even 'personal'. Scientific verification, standardisation and formulation cannot completely eliminate the subjective element of *human* knowledge. Subjectivity of knowledge, they argue, is irremediable. Some existential philosophers have also attacked the 'myth' of objectivity. However, it has to be admitted today that the objective interpretation of knowledge, including that of historical knowledge, is more popular than the subjective one. Popularity or otherwise of a view has of course nothing to do with its truth or validity.

II

Possible Criticism of Sri Aurobindo's Theory of History. The whole account of Sri Aurobindo's theory of the process and *meaning* of social evolution is open to question on several grounds. It may be questioned, to start with, on the ground that is not clear enough and its foundation is unverifiable and weak. More-

over, one may challenge the very basic assumption of Sri Aurobindo, namely, the social evolution, the human cycle, is proceeding towards an ideal state of society based on spiritual unity of mankind. In this connection, his notion of the Natural dynamic of the social evolution may also be criticised as purely speculative. Sri Aurobindo is not unaware of the objections which may possibly be raised against his view. But he thinks that these objections rest on the incomplete understanding of the process of evolution which is 'stijl half-way on its journey'. Our mental part recognises the incompleteness, there is a psychic part which rejects it, and it is the spiritual part which accepts it and then tries to transform it into its spiritual completion. Incompletion and imperfection are all said to be pre-conditions of a greater perfection to which this evolution is an approximation. There is an inexorable necessity in the law of evolution.

Man is a part of natural evolution and bound by its necessity. His responsibility and capacity for influencing the course of evolution depends upon the depth of his own self-consciousness. Human freedom is defined by natural necessity, and that in turn is determined by the divine design. The truth of the divine design and the mysterious mechanism and its execution in the course of human history are not revealed to the positivist historiographer. It is said that fascinated by the surface phenomena of history he fails to follow the psychological laws of history and misses its inner truth. Sri Aurobindo is more interested in the *psychology* of history than in the *sociology* of it.

Sri Aurobindo's spiritual and teleological theory of history is likely to be criticised for its alleged and unnecessary mystification of some plain facts and phenomena of history which, the critic thinks, could well be explained in the plain way without using any transcendental hypothesis. Sri Aurobindo anticipates the criticism and his reply is clear:

The mystery of things is the truth of things; the intellectual presentation is only truth in representation, in abstract symbols, as if in a cubist art of thought-speech, in geometric figure.

Secondly, Sri Aurobindo's theory of history may be criticised also on the ground that it is over-ambitious. It wants to bring everything that has happened in the past under a very neat order. This search for orderliness is perfectly all right and it is there perhaps in the very nature of man. But the question is whether there is *really* an all-comprehensive order in human history or whether it is an achievement of the inspired scholar's historical imagination. Sri Aurobindo frequently speaks of the *meaning*, the *inner meaning* of history. It is not quite clear what he precisely means by these terms. It has often been doubted whether there is at all anything like a *general* history of mankind as a whole. The intrinsic meaningfulness of a general history of mankind has also been questioned. Some philosophers of history have very definite and contrary opinions on these points. They think that there is no general history of mankind at all. And the meaning which we often claim to have discovered in history is more an ascription or attribution of our mind than an objective thing discovered by us. Popper writes:

There is no history of mankind, there is only an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life . . . a concrete history of mankind, if there were any, would have to be the history of all men. It would have to be the history of all human hopes, struggles, and sufferings. For there is no one man more important than any other. Clearly this concrete history cannot be written. We must make abstractions, we must neglect and select. But with this we arrive at . . . many histories. [Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Vol. II, London, 1962, p. 270.]

The question of historical meaning is also full of difficulties. Different thinkers find different meanings in history. Different thinkers offer different interpretations of history according to their own theoretical or practical pre-suppositions. [Isiah Berlin, 'The Concept of Scientific History' in *History and Theory*, Vol. I, No. 1.] History is often used also for didactic or educative purpose. There are thinkers who regard history as the

supreme dispenser of Justice. These views and claims are not always consistent or defensible. The whig interpretation of history (of Herbert Butterfield), for instance, differs from the Marxist interpretation of the same. Some theoreticians of history like Toynbee think that history is moving towards the goal of realising the supreme significance of the crucifixion of Christ. Sri Aurobindo tells us that the goal of history is the descent of the Supermind on the earth. Popper warns us: "History has no ends, we can impose these ends of ours upon it; and *although history has no meaning, we can give it a meaning.*" [*The Open Society etc.*, p. 278.]

III

The Marxist Criticism and Sri Aurobindo's Answer. The problem of meaning bedevils not only the teleological historiography of Sri Aurobindo, but it is there also in the Marxist historiography which totally rejects the idea of teleology. Marx puts the idealistic historiography of Hegel upside down. [Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, Moscow, 1969, p. 98.] As is well known he wants to show that it is neither God's idea nor human idea which shapes the course of history. On the contrary, he claims that it is the material factors, including the economic ones of history, which directly or indirectly determine the forms, formations and transformations of human ideas. The Marxist thinks that the best way to attack and demolish a subjective interpretation of history is to point out the parasitical or derivative character of human ideas themselves. The Marxist rejects the idealistic view that God-guided Nature provides the inner dynamics of historical movement. Movement of history, according to him, is due to class-contradiction and class-struggle. The concepts of teleological Nature and Divine Design are said to be mere 'pious wishes' which are conveniently 'smuggled' into the so-called conscious plane of Nature. Thus, the Marxist alleges, the clear law-governed Nature is first mystified and then that mystified Nature is supposed to mirror itself in human consciousness. This teleological-cum-spiritual interpretation of history projects a passive picture of man; man is a passive mirror

in which Nature comes to consciousness on its own. Marx does not deny that man is natural. But by 'natural' he means something else, not something mystical or teleological. Nature has no consciousness of its own, nor does it become conscious of itself in man; it is man who through his *acts* (not passively) becomes conscious of Nature and *through it of himself*. [Engels, *Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, sec. IV.] Man's consciousness of Nature is determined and measured by his understanding of the laws of Nature governing the process of Nature. Man is always subjected to the necessity of 'objective nature' which includes everything from the physical-geographical environment to socio-economic relations. The physical-geographical conditions of a society constitute only the *natural* basis of its history; the *real* basis consists of the modes of production and the resulting economic relationships. Plekhanov writes:

Marx says in explaining the *subject*, let us see into what mutual relationship people enter under the influence of *objective* necessity. Once these relations are known, it will be possible to ascertain how human self-consciousness develops under their influence. *Objective necessity* will help us to clarify the *subjective* of history. [*The Monist View of History*, Moscow, p. 249.]

Every age of history has a definite social structure of its own; the productive system of the time provides the necessary basis or anatomy of it. The character and necessities of the social structure are mirrored in the psychology of the people, in all their habits, manners, feelings, views, aspirations and ideals. "The psychology of society is always expedient in relation to its economics, always corresponds to it, and is always determined by it." [Plekhanov, *The Monist View of History*, pp. 205-206.]

Thirdly, if the psychological forces of society are subordinate to its economic forces, then it is difficult to defend Sri Aurobindo's comprehensive theory of psychological historiography. In fact, we have to study in depth and assess critically the claims of two theories, *autonomy of psychology* propounded by thinkers like Sri Aurobindo, and *autonomy of sociology* propounded by

thinkers like Karl Marx. The former are of the opinion that the psychological forces of history are more potent in their operation, basic in character, relatively independent of the sociological forces of history, which are more influenced by than they themselves can influence the psychological forces. Like other objectivists the Marxist refuses to accept this view unless he is allowed to put it upside down, i.e. transform and modify it basically. According to him, the psychological forces are mere 'efflux' of the sociological ones. Following Hegel, he says, the 'less essential' is to be interpreted in terms of the 'more essential'. While for Hegel and Sri Aurobindo the psychological-spiritual forces are more essential, for the Marxists the more essential forces are sociological or, more accurately speaking, economic.

I think Sri Aurobindo will refuse to accept what we call *autonomy of psychology* and *autonomy of sociology* as two distinct and unrelated concepts. Consistently with his *integral* outlook, he would rather characterise them as two halves of one and the same indivisible truth. He does not draw any fundamental line of demarcation between our mental existence and social existence. He writes "... the essential law (of the) movement (of Existence) ... is that all things are one in their being and origin, one in their general law of Existence, one in their interdependence and the universal pattern of the relations; but each realises this unity of purpose and being on its own line and has its own law of variation by which it enriches the universal existence." Not only between the subjective and the objective, but also between the key factors of social evolution, namely, *individual*, *community* and *mankind*, integral relation is already at work there.

The defender of the *dialectical* view asserts in self-defence that his approach is in no way less comprehensive than the approach of the *integral* thinker. He takes pains to point out that he is not a reductionist and does not propose to level down all psychological factors to their economic basis. He speaks of the qualitative distinction between the psychological factors as expressed in highly developed ideas and ideals, on the one hand, and their economic roots, on the other.

Before one proposes to criticise Sri Aurobindo's notion of the autonomy of psychology one is advised to be clear about his notion of psychology itself. We had already an occasion before to remark that by *psychology* Sri Aurobindo does not mean the sort of empirical psychology that we have in the back of our mind when we use the term. He is a believer in what one might call *depth psychology*. Excessive reliance on empirical psychology accounts for the origin of such views as 'the essence of a thing consists in its being perceived' (Berkeley) and 'Understanding makes Nature possible' (Kant). The pre-critical and pre-reflective response of the man, who is mostly guided by his physical sense of reality, generally assumes the following two forms. First, stimulated by different forms and motions of the material world, he thinks that Mind is 'a subjective result of Matter and Self and Spirit as unreal'. At this stage our pre-critical assumption is that Matter and Energy are out there in space, existing quite independently of, and unaffected by, Mind. Secondly and subsequently on further probe into his own mind, Man realises that there is 'another domain of realities (within him), subjective in its character (and) which has its own law and process'. At this stage, having experienced a sort of restricted autonomy of psychology, he hastily concludes that "Mind (is) . . . the key of the real, (and that) matter (is) only a field for Mind." He even goes to the length of asserting that 'Spirit apart from Mind (is) something unreal'. But Sri Aurobindo points out that both these pre-reflective responses of our physical sense of reality are inadequate and do not clearly express the true nature of things and mental realities. He writes: ". . . there is a further probing which brings up the truth of self and spirit and establishes a greater order of the real in which there is a reversal of our view both of the subjective-mind realities and objective-physical realities so that they are seen as things phenomenal, secondary, depending upon the truth of self and the realities of the Spirit." [*Life Divine*, p. 423.]

The economic determinants of history to which the Marxist frequently refers are, according to Sri Aurobindo, superficial but not altogether unimportant factors of history. If we think

that they are ultimate forces shaping our historical destiny, then our role in shaping the course of history becomes itself very unimportant and of secondary in character. The Aurobindite might argue that it is very curious to note that Marx, who tried so much in theory and practice to save human freedom from the totalitarian and teleological rational necessity of Hegel, is himself offering an economic interpretation of history which may well be cited in justification of abridgement and curtailment of individual liberty. [cf. K. R. Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, London, 1961.] Another unfortunate consequence of the Marxist's view is the relatively unimportant role assigned to man to shape his own destiny. The Aurobindite may further point out that, like Hegel, Marx also defines freedom in terms of objective necessity. Marx's *economic necessity* takes the place of Hegel's *rational necessity*, change of phraseology does not improve the situation in so far as it relates to human freedom. As for himself, Sri Aurobindo does not deny that human freedom, the freedom of the mental being, because of its very nature, is bound to be limited, derivative and secondary. The necessity which really defines human freedom is spiritual—neither economic nor rational. Physical and empirical propensities of the mental being stand on his way of realising the highest form of freedom. In so far as man is guided by his physical sense of reality or confuses the restricted psychological autonomy with the sovereignty of the Spirit, he postulates a non-existent antithesis between *liberty* and *necessity* and does not know what true freedom is like.

"The two principles of freedom and order, which in mind and life are constantly representing themselves as contraries or incompatibles, though they have no need to be that if freedom is guarded by knowledge and order based upon truth of being, are in the supermind consciousness native to each other and even fundamentally one." [*Life Divine*, p. 890] In other words, freedom is native to spiritual consciousness. The sort of freedom we may and do enjoy in the process of history is bound to be more or less limited. But this limitation is not externally fixed. By inwardising our consciousness,

going deep into our *being* we may *be* more free than we ordinarily are.

IV

Law Order and Liberty in History. Some zealous champions of *liberty* and *progress* overemphasise the principle of *orderliness* in history. To defend a theory, individual liberty with social progress, they speak of the law-governed character of history, i.e., *historicism* as Popper calls it, as if the freedom of the individual and the uninterrupted progress of mankind are guaranteed by some *laws of history*. This didactic overtone of historiography has been seriously questioned by some professional historians and thinkers in recent times. [Sidney Hook (ed.), *Philosophy and History*, New York University Press, 1970.] In a famous passage H.A.L. Fisher writes:

Men wiser and more learned than I have discerned in history a plot, a rhythm, a pre-determined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me. I can see only one emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave, only one great fact with respect to which, since it is unique, there can be no generalisations, only one safe route for the historians: that he should recognise in the development of human destinies the play of the contingent and the unforeseen. This is not a doctrine of cynicism and despair. The fact of progress is written plain and large on the page of history; but progress is not a law of nature. [*A History of Europe*, London, 1946, p. v]

Whether the nature of history permits the historians to indulge in *generalisation* is very old and controversial question. But it seems pretty clear that the questions of individual freedom and social progress have no necessary relation with the belief in, or denial of, laws in history. The questions are separable and should be discussed separately. Simply by denying the law-governed character of history one does not successfully

defend the cause of human freedom. In this respect one wonders whether Fisher's well-meaning attack on historicism serves the purpose. Many of us will agree with Fisher that history is not a generalising science but it is difficult to 'recognise' with him that the development of human destiny is the random play of the contingent and the unforeseen. There are thinkers like Sri Aurobindo who discern in history plot, rhythm and harmony, and yet stoutly defend the cause of individual freedom against every form of collectivism.

Prophecy may be impermissible in history, but there is no valid argument against rational attempts to *predict* the future course of history. By overemphasising 'the role of the contingent and the unforeseen' the historian should not give the impression that even in terms of modifiable and revisable concepts we should not try to connect and organise historical details. [E.H. Carr, *What is History?* Penguin Book.] To make the details of history intelligible we do need and use concepts, without which history would degenerate either into shapeless heap of facts or, at best, chronology. The historian is advised to avoid two extremes, crass positivism or *fact-fetish* and blind historicism or *law-craze*. In fact the professional historian, unless he is very much influenced by some set pre-supposition or predilection, generally avoids these extremes. History does not either drown us under its boundless and numberless particles of water (i.e. sea of facts) or wash away by its waves (i.e. laws). If Ranke is accused of fact-fetish, Lamprecht is to be criticised on account of his law-craze. "Lamprecht demanded that all historical study should lead to the formulation of general concepts in which the knowledge of the specific facts was assimilated and lost all independent significance." [Johan Huizinga, *Men and Ideas*, tr. Holmes & Marle, London, 1960, pp. 51-52] The necessity of general concepts for organisation of historical details is quite understandable, but Lamprecht's attitude of 'away-with-the-rubbish-of-details' is unfortunate and uncritical. If the individuality of facts is ignored or even underestimated, historical criticism or corroboration becomes useless. If details are forced to fit apriori in general concepts, history loses both its charm and value.

V

Different Forms of Subjective Interpretations of History. Subjective interpretation of history has its very many forms—*psychological, phenomenological and spiritual*. These forms are not necessarily exclusive. Mill, Dilthey, Nietzsche, Bergson, Lamprecht, Barth, Ravaisson and Spengler are all believers in the subjective interpretation of history. But certainly they are not of the same philosophic fraternity. Karl Lamprecht who influenced Sri Aurobindo most in his general psychological approach to history was himself influenced partly by the psychological ideas of Wundt and the economic theories of Marx. The generalising tendency of Lamprecht is clearly evident in Sri Aurobindo's thought. But he cannot be 'accused' of being influenced by Wundt's experimental approach to psychology. Sri Aurobindo's 'psychological approach', as we have said before, is quite different from that of the rest. His approach should better be characterised as *integral and spiritual*. He thinks that there is a sort of structural similarity between the modes of mentality and those of society. In other words, there is an isomorphic relation between the development of human mind, on the one hand, and that of human society, on the other. One influences and in turn is influenced by the other. This *integral interaction between mind and society* marks the gradual release and liberation of the mental powers, including *freedom*, of man and more and more *orderliness and harmony* of society. [cf. Vilfredo Pareto, *Mind and Society*, Vol. 4, London, 1935.]

Although I do not propose to deny the originality and insight of Sri Aurobindo's subjective interpretation of Indian History and its different cultural facets, one can hardly miss the pro-idealist character of his approach. To the integral monists like Sri Aurobindo the traditional distinction between idealism and realism is not of much consequence. Using standard philosophical jargons one might say that Sri Aurobindo is empirically realist and transcendently idealist. True that he will insist that in the mind-society dialectic mind supervenes on society, but for that he will not deny that society also shapes human mind.

Then the question is: which of these two factors is more influential and what is its relative status?

To understand Sri Aurobindo's subjective interpretation of history more clearly we may profitably look into other theoretically comparable psychological interpretations of history.

(i) Mill thinks that 'all phenomena of society are phenomena of human nature' and that 'the laws of the phenomena of society are, and can be, nothing but the laws of the actions and passions of human beings'. [*A System of Logic*, VI, VII, p. 2.] This is a simple and attractive view. What we call society is no doubt a net-work of human relationships. Naturally what we think and do play a big role in shaping our social environment and changing its character. But from this proposition it would be wrong to conclude rather hastily that all social phenomena can be explained without residue in terms of psychological phenomena or the phenomena of human nature. We are all born in a society which was already there before our birth and which will not disappear after our death. The roles which we play and the statuses which we hold are all relatively more permanent than we ourselves are. Society is a sort of interconnected system of *human* roles and statuses. This does not mean that social phenomena and institutions can be adequately explained without any reference, direct or indirect, to concrete human beings. The sort of psychological interpretations of history and society which Mill proposes to defend is purely reductionist in character and seems indefensible on that ground. [K. R. Popper, *Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. 2, ch. 14.]

The psychological interpretation of history is often criticised also on another ground. The laws of psychology which are proposed to be used for explaining social phenomena are empirical in nature and, therefore, refutable and modifiable. The laws of psychology which are accepted today may well be rejected tomorrow. So it would be unwise on our part to defend that sort of historiography which is thoroughly dependent on the theoretical or experimental fortune of psychology.

(ii) Another form of psychological historiography has been advocated by Dilthey. Dilthey's conception of psychology is

quite different from the phenomenalist conception of psychology as defended by Mill for instance. One might say that Dilthey's is a sort of depth psychology. Phenomenalists think that psychological phenomena are one-dimensional. The proponents of depth psychology or phenomenology are of the view that mental phenomena are multi-dimensional. There are others like Husserl who go the length of saying that mental phenomena are in fact bottomless in their depth and have structural correlation with the objective world. Dilthey may be bracketed with the last group of thinkers. If the mental or 'subjective' phenomena are really found to have structural correlation with the 'objective' (world) phenomena, the traditional subjective-objective distinction loses much of its traditional significance. If the subjective phenomena are intrinsically object-oriented, then the charge of psychologism which is often raised against the subjective interpretation is hardly tenable.

Dilthey thinks that history is the expression of our psychical life. But it takes 'psychic life' in a very comprehensive sense. Our psychical or psychological phenomena *in themselves* are not clearly *meaningful*. To understand their meaning we have to *review* them in their proper and comprehensive context. He thinks that historical life is a part of the whole of life which is given in experience and understanding. "Life in this sense . . . extends over the whole range of objective mind accessible to experience." Starting from the 'subjective' pole of life, we may pass over to the objective one because of the *meaningful* or, to use a phenomenological jargon, *intentional* correlation between the two. It is in terms of *meaning* and *interpretation* that mind breaks through its psychological privacy and gets into other minds, and recaptures objects of other times and places. Dilthey says:

The development of the human (and historical) studies depends on the deepening of experience and on the increasing tendency to bring their content to the surface; at the same time, it is dependent on the spread of understanding over all the objectifications of mind (viz. books,

laws and institutions) and on the increasingly complete and methodical extraction of the mental content from the different expressions of life. [*Pattern and Meaning in History*, edited by H. P. Rickman, Harper Torch Books, 1962, p. 72.]

It is undeniable that Dilthey's concept of history is psychological in a special sense. The speciality is due to his characteristic phenomenological approach to psychology. As a phenomenologist he finds no good reason for drawing a hard and fast line of distinction between what is internal and what is external, between the subjective and the objective. To him the mind-affected world is a system of interactions. The systematic character of the interactions is due to an invisible meaningful relation between the actions and affections of different individuals. It is in this context that one has to understand the importance of the category of meaning in history. It is in terms of meaning that the autobiographical details of an otherwise obscure individual assume historical significance. In terms of the concepts of *structure*, *meaning* and *interpretation*, Dilthey has made a very serious (but not necessarily logical) attempt to do away with the defects of the phenomenalist type of psychological or subjective interpretation of history. [H. A. Hodges, *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey*, London, 1952.] Because of the lack of logical rigour of his writing his ideas have not been well received in many quarters. One might even feel that what Dilthey writes using a lot of Philosophical jargon is plain common sense.

I find nothing wrong if one tries to defend and argue in support of what is plain common sense. The only question is, if that is philosophically defensible and valid. It is not quite clear to me what Dilthey means by *structural correlation* between the mental world and what he calls the objectifications of mind like books and institutions. It is obvious that institutions or books written by human beings would bear the imprint of the concerned human experience and understanding. Human institutions are cumulative results or silted forms of human experience.

and action. What I am now saying appears to me plain common sense. And this view, I believe, may be defended without invoking what is called objective idealism in professional philosophical quarters or even without using such philosophical concepts as meaning, intention, and interpretation.

VI

Croce's Subjective Interpretation of History. One may easily trace the influence of the Hegelian notion of Objective Mind on Dilthey's historiography. But Dilthey's style of exposition is not certainly comparable to the systematic style of Hegel. Much of what Hegel and Dilthey said could be found, for instance, in Croce's philosophy of history. Following Hegel and Dilthey Croce also maintains that nothing exists outside mind. History is also mental or act of thought. It is a matter of appreciation, imagination and construction *analogous* to the creation of the artist. Historical truths are not really historical if they do not arise out of intimate human experience. It is a *peculiar* sort of experience in which the individuality of the past events is revived and recaptured. Historical experience is analogous to, but not to be confused with, art experience. In the case of art we *intuit* the individual object or event. But in the case of history we *Judge* it. Judgement involves thought and therefore universality—an *apriori* component. The historian recaptures the *real* individual. The artist is contented with the possible individual. The latter is a dealer in the realm of possibilities which may or may not be actually individuated in space and time, in society and history. The subject-term of historical judgement is individual and its predicate-term universal. The historian is always a philosopher, for he thinks and by thinking finds out the *universal meaning* of the predicative concept. Reality, according to Croce, consists of universal concepts expressed in particular events or objects. History is reality incarnated. Croce writes:

What constitutes history . . . is the act of comprehending and understanding induced by the requirements of practical life. The requirements cannot be satisfied by

recourse to action unless first of all the phantoms, doubts and shadows have been dispelled . . . by an act of thought.

History is a type of spiritual, i.e., thought, activity. This activity has its own peculiar enrichment and that is due to its perpetual growth. Historical truth owes its origin to its thought character on spiritual activity and growth, and not to external facts, figures and documents. History is the historian's (and yet universal) thought. It is in and by his thought that the historian goes beyond his individuality, re-enacts in his own mind thoughts and ideas of other individuals 'separated' from him by time and place, and thus re-discovers the past, converting it into history. Croce takes pains to point out that history of history is a sort of spiritual activity and that historical criticism, therefore, is always internal. Any gap, lacunae or inconsistency that the historian discovers in his work is to be removed by thought, reflective thought, and more thought. The 'phantoms', 'doubts', and 'shadows' of practical life are to be dispelled by acts of thought.

The practical requirements which underlie every historical judgement give to all history the character of 'contemporary history' because, however remote in time events there recounted may seem to be, the history in reality refers to present needs and present situations wherein those events vibrate. [Benedetto Croce, *History As the Story of Liberty*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1941, p. 19.]

Corrective character and procedure of thought, broadly speaking, takes two forms, *historical* and naturalistic or *scientific*. While scientific thought for its correction is dependent upon some external methods and criteria, historical thought in its true form is said to be self-corrective and self-critical. By its activity and ceaseless growth, the Spirit perfects and improves upon whatever it achieves. "Criticism of history consists in recognising whether an historical narrative is full or empty." Criticism

of science consists in practical success. Scientific truths are abstract, i.e. more or less 'empty' and never 'full'.

Croce is not prepared to accept that science embodies true and proper knowledge. As the scientist resorts to abstractions, constructs classes, 'stabilises' relation between the classes and calls them laws, expresses them in mathematical formula, and so on, science develops a sort of 'deadly rigidity' which takes away from it the possibility of self-corrective growth. Both science and history are influenced by practical life. But while the scientist tries to verify or falsify the scientific statements mainly in terms of practical success or pragmatic application, the historian combats the problem of historical scepticism mainly within his own mind, in pure thought. Curiously enough Croce defends the *instrumentalist theory of science*, on the one hand, and the *autonomy of history*, on the other.

The spirit is credited with the power to resolve its own problems. It is only natural that man will try to tackle and solve the problems which he encounters on his way to progress. Croce is never tired of emphasising that the journey of history is a spiritual journey and that it takes place (however odd it might sound in the ear of a layman) in the realm of thought—in the minds of human beings. It is obvious that problems of thought-world have to be resolved by thinking, by reflective thinking, and within the thought-world itself. But it is not an easy problem to sort out how precisely *the world of thought* is related to *the world thought of*. Where to draw the line of demarcation?

To Croce thought is spiritual action. To think is to act. It is because of its reflective character that history liberates us from life as it is lived. The principle of liberty animates and sustains the spiritual action called history. [A. R. Caponigri, *History and Liberty*, London, 1955.] In the world of history life is being continuously created anew. It is re-lived and in this process of creation mind has to be free from the mechanical influence of Nature. Otherwise history loses its autonomy. And in that case the historian fails to combat scepticism and does not know how to resolve the doubts and problems which he encounters in his spiritual quest or historical journey.

VII

Historical Scepticism and the Marxist Answer. Those who reject the pro-idealist view that thought is a mode of spiritual activity are also critical of the thesis of historical autonomy and Croce's method of combating historical scepticism. The Marxist, for example, thinks that the 'phantoms' and 'doubts' and 'shadows' of history are due to a sort of abstractionist strategy unnecessarily resorted to by the subjectivist. When the world of thought is deemed to be quite independent of the world of action and we often speak in terms of pure thought, we unwittingly expose ourselves to historical scepticism. History is shaped both by the forces of physical nature and social environment. Historical truth is the character of things and of the social processes and not of thought. According to Marx, the relation between thought and thing is mediated and defined by human action. The relation between Mind and Nature is not defined by any common purpose underlying them. It is to be understood in terms of laws of the physical universe and the social universe. It is in this way, the dialectical way, that the Marxist tries to do away with the problems of defending the idea of structural correlation between the subjective and the objective, between Mind and Nature. To him there is nothing spiritual in human action. To him action is something material or, at best, complex physiological movement. [Gustav A. Welter, *Soviet Ideology Today*, London, 1966, Part Two.]

In his well-known XIth thesis on Feuerbach Marx says: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in different ways; the point is to *change* it." Different theories of history are only different interpretations of history. Croce's is no exception. Marx finds nothing spiritual or mysterious in the process of history. Doubts about it have to be removed by what he calls human *practice* and by the *comprehension* of this practice (VIIIth thesis). Of practice and comprehension Marx lays more stress on the former. And history, according to him, 'is nothing but the activity of the men in pursuit of their ends'. This end-oriented movement of history is not to be confused with the teleological

interpretations of history often defenced by the pro-idealist thinkers. It is to be admitted in fairness to Croce that he never tries to defend teleological view of history as it is ordinarily understood. Man is aware of his limits, and Croce points out that by this awareness he partly rises above his limitations and participates in a universal life. "The wholeness of humanity is not present to itself, and has no being except in the making of it, and the making is never a making in general, but a determinate and historical task." [*History As The Story of Liberty*, p. 280.] The historian by his reflective awareness and imagination becomes an imperfect (but growing) participant in the wholeness of humanity. "History is about the past-which-is-present, action is of the present, and imagination of the future." [*Ibid.*, p. 286.]

The favourite idealist thesis of the *contemporaneity of history* hinges upon two other related thesis, viz. 'Time is ultimately unreal', and 'the human Spirit in its essential form (i.e. in isolation from its temporary mental and sensory associations) is universal'. The plausibility of the claim that history is about the past-which-is-present depends upon the tenability or otherwise of the view that Time on ultimate analysis turns out to be unreal and, therefore, the question of its being able or unable to isolate or separate the present from the past or from the future does not arise at all. In the life of Spirit there is no barrier between the past and the present, and that is why, Croce claims, in and by thought the individual can rise above his time-bound individuality and re-live or re-capture the past and also successfully imagine the future.

It is somewhat in a similar vein Sri Aurobindo claims that "our individualisation is only a superficial formation, a practical selection and limited conscious synthesis for the temporary utility of life in a particular body." [*Life Divine*, p. 332.] In the spiritual depth of our being there are three inter-related aspects—individual, universal and transcendental. The individual historian, without ceasing to be what he is at a particular time and place, by his thought (or spiritual) activity can participate in a sort of universal life. But even then there is always a life beyond. Time-bound history cannot be the true story of

the spiritual journey of our thought-life. For it is almost exclusively dependent upon what we observe and what we get deciphering our observational findings in terms of some readily available formulas. Since 'Time' as Sri Aurobindo puts it, 'is only our means of realising things in succession . . . a condition and cause of conditions, (and) varies on different planes of existence, varies even for beings on one and the same plane', time-bound history cannot be absolutely free from 'phantoms and problems and doubts'. It is on this and related grounds that Sri Aurobindo concludes: 'history teaches us nothing'.

Like Sri Aurobindo, Bergson also subscribes to a radical form of historical scepticism. Quite unlike Sri Aurobindo, he thinks that Time is very much real and yet he thinks that what passes by the name of history is a mere story constructed by our intellect to help us in action or practice. [*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, London, 1935.] Thinkers like Sri Aurobindo and Bergson highlight the point that whenever a particular mode of human knowledge, the historical mode in this case, is tied down to practical needs and influenced by the discursive operation of the intellect, its results are bound to be doubtful. This critical or negative side of their doctrines is, to some extent, inconsistent with what Croce says about history. I say 'to some extent' deliberately because I think that the difference between Sri Aurobindo's view of history and Croce's is one of emphasis. Croce does not reject the considerations offered by Sri Aurobindo in support of historical scepticism, but emphasises how by our thought, reflective activity of the Spirit, we can get rid of historical scepticism. On the positive side their view seems somewhat similar. It is by deepening our consciousness that we may get to a level of thought where we can successfully re-discover the past and re-live it in the present.

VIII

The Role of Heroes and Common Men in History. Closely related to the subjective interpretation of history is the role of heroes in history. It is often claimed by the subjectivists that there are some extraordinarily gifted people who in their depth of

consciousness can rightly and readily realise the spirit and requirement of the time and can also get the glimpses of the future history, and that on the basis of this surer form of knowledge they can play a more effective and influential role in history. The great men or the heroes are said to be the path-finder and the pathmaker of history.

There are some thinkers like Carlyle [B.H. Lehmann, *Carlyle's Theory of Hero*, Durham, 1928] and Davis who reject those interpretations of history which try to highlight the role of common man in history. Obviously in a vein of indignation Davis says that the worst of all modern historiographers are those self-styled social historians who think that they find the quintessence of our own humanity in the life of the common man. He has neither the sympathy for nor the patience to listen to the view that what we most need to know about the past is what the poorer and more illiterate people thought and did. It is true that new ideas do not fall like rain from the heaven. On scrutiny most of their authors are found to be coming down from the summit of the social life, percolating downwards, not infrequently suffering from adulteration or corruption in the process. The best way of understanding human history is to study the most eminent examples that it has produced of every type of human excellence. Davis finds that there is much truth in Carlyle's doctrine of hero-worship. [H. W. C. Davis, *A Study of History*, p. 18.]

Whether the heroes or the common people are the real authors of history is a very vague and general question. And, therefore, it is very difficult to answer it in an acceptable form. [Sidney Hook, *The Hero in History*, New York, 1943.] The question does not seem to be one of 'either-or', i.e. disjunctive, it is one of 'and', i.e. conjunctive. The story of history is full of ideas and actions of all sorts of human beings, heroes and common men, without (necessarily) identifying them by name or address. If the names of great men are frequently mentioned in history, the reason is simple and obvious. They are foci of intelligibility. Because of their influence and impact, either as thinker or ruler or both, the great men are given prominent place in history.

This does not necessarily mean that they are the real or the only author of history. Sometime some people are given prominent place in history not because they in fact did occupy position of importance or prove very influential in their own time but simply because the concerned historian for some reason or unreason think that they did.

As we all know common people are mostly guided by custom, tradition and conventions. Unless these are changed or transformed, we do not see any significant or creative turn in history. Only a few people, who are quite alive to what happened in the past and also to the demands of the time and place, can build up a new future. It is these great men, combining the spirit of the time (*Yugadharma*) with their own spiritual realisation (*Swadharma*), who prove themselves to be the main architects of history. Sri Aurobindo calls them the 'swallowers of formulas' [*The Human Cycle*, p. 13]. They are not guided by stereotyped ideas and conventions. They are found to possess a deeper understanding of the mind and aspirations of the people, a rare power of anticipation of the future and an unflinching determination to act accordingly. Sri Aurobindo thinks that Manu, Moses, Lycargus and Mohammed, for example, are persons of these rare and elite type. Because of their spiritual insight they can easily follow the spiritual, deeper and subtler forces operative in history.

The common man works with the help of the sense-based intellect, can hardly raise above the influence of contemporary thinking and conventions and, therefore, is unable to see the movement of history in its integral perspective. [cf. Charles Oman, *On the Writing of History*, New York, 1939.] He takes a piecemeal view of his time and place. He cannot see the spiritual connection between the individual and the universal, what unites 'the logic of the situation' with 'the logic of the infinite', and 'epochal necessity' with 'eternal freedom'. Sri Aurobindo points out that only the rare individual, Manu, *avatar* or prophet, who comes on earth perhaps once in a millennium, can speak truly how should a group of men organise itself, and that the secret of this sort of men is not political but spiritual. It may

be mentioned in this connection that for Sri Aurobindo Manu or Moses is *not* a historical individual. He is more a symbol than anything else. "His (Manu's) name means man, the mental being . . . who fixes the lines upon which the race or people has to govern its evolution." He can fix the lines because he has gasped correctly the necessary principles for fixation. He possesses both spiritual insight and empirical oversight. Referring to Mohammed Sri Aurobindo observes that "he developed the existing social, religious and administrative customs of the Arab people into a new system dictated to him often in a state of trance, in which he passed from his conscient into his superconscient Self, by the Divinity to his secret intuitive mind." [*The Ideal of Human Unity*, p. 213.] The secret of the success of the heroes is claimed to be spiritual and intuitive.

The Marxist is generally credited with the view that the real author of history is ordinary men, working people. Those who attach too much of importance to outstanding personalities offer in fact an elitistic conception of history. Whether Marxism itself is inconsistent with the elitistic conception of history is not beyond controversy. Stalin, for example, tells Emil Ludwig that "Marxism has never denied the role of heroes. On the contrary, it admits that they play a considerable role." [*Collected Works*, Vol. 13.] Human beings, whether they are the heroes or not, are obliged to think and act in a social milieu and within some definite constraints or conditions. The Marxist points out that "great people are worth anything at all only to the extent they are able correctly to understand these conditions, to understand how to change them."

This view is not incompatible with what Sri Aurobindo or for that any objective idealist would say on the matter. Sri Aurobindo would not hesitate to endorse the view that the greatness of a man consists in his ability to understand his contemporary conditions, and anticipate the future ones. He also believes that there is an intimate relation between action and knowledge. Clear knowledge of a given situation is of course an aid to the correct mode of action called for in that situation. But it has to be mentioned in this connection that Sri Aurobindo is not a

pragmatist in any ordinary sense. He for one will never insist that the validity of knowledge has to be established in terms of some definite practical success. Knowledge is truth-seeking and not success-seeking. Although the materialist and the spiritualist fundamentally differ on the nature of knowledge, they agree on a very important point, viz. the great men of history, because of their deeper understanding of the process of history, can more effectively mould its course. But on the question, how they do it, the difference between them becomes very clear. While the Marxist tries to show that the objective conditions, particularly the economic ones, are supremely important in shaping the course of history and that the subjective side is more or less derivative in character, Sri Aurobindo, without trying to reduce the former into the latter, seeks to show the more developed form of the latter as the end of the former. The spiritualist believes that whatever we see, including the social and political institutions, are all work of the Spirit and realising a definite purpose. Every bit of existence is permeated and oriented by a definite purpose, of which one may or may not be aware.

IX

The General and the Individual in History. This general and highly philosophical view about the nature of things enables the philosopher of history to connect everything with whatever he likes. Consequently, historical generalisations and hypotheses become too comprehensive and vague to be tested and corrected. In that case any and every thinker may come forward with his own interpretation of history, historical events and processes of relatively limited durations; and history ceases to be an empirical discipline. If history is an empirical discipline, then, Sri Aurobindo alleges, it 'teaches us nothing'. If, on the other hand, history becomes an expression of spiritual truth, it is hardly testable and corrigible. One may point out that both the spiritualist and the materialist interpretations of history, in spite of their basic difference, are open to one common criticism.

They are untestable and incorrigible. Referring to Hegel Professor Dunning writes:

With benumbing legerdemain, the philosopher makes the commonplace facts of familiar history fit themselves nicely . . . into the categories and relations of his logic, and shows us mankind through all the ages marching steadily, but unconsciously along Hegelian lines towards Germanic perfection of the 19th Century. [*Political Theories*, Vol. III, p. 165.]

Similar criticism has been raised against the sweeping Marxist's generalisation that all history is a history of class-struggle. This interpretation of history turns out to be a dangerous *definition* of history. Those who believe in this definition of history try uncritically to transform, portray and interpret every phase of human history in terms of class-struggle and class-contradiction. In that case even the history of co-operation between different classes is distorted and interpreted otherwise. With the Marxist and the spiritualist history ceases to be a matter of *description* and it becomes essentially a matter of *interpretation* and *definition*. [William Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History*, London, 1957.] And this is due to their uncritical generalising tendency. In their zeal to defend a particular world-view they often tend to forget that history is an ideographic discipline, trying to discover and retain the individual character of its subject of study, and not a nomothetic science marked by an invariable generalising tendency.

Sri Aurobindo's main criticism against the objectivist's interpretation of history is that it attaches too much of importance to the facts and forces witnessed by our *physical* sense of reality and too little to our subjective movements and experiences. Nobody in sense would possibly deny that many of our mental phenomena are objectively conditioned. But to assert on that ground that all facets of our mental phenomena and all cultural products of different periods of history are objectively determined and, therefore, to be understood in terms of objective factors like the economic ones is patently a very one-sided view. Any

careful student of history would admit that social phenomena and historical forces are so complex and many-sided that they admit different and almost equally plausible *interpretations*. For example, one historian may glorify the city state of Athens of the Periclean age as a cradle of democracy, 'showing mankind many things, and, above all, the most precious thing in the world, fearless freedom of thought' (Bury); another historian perhaps with comparable plausibility may point out that the fearless freedom of thought in the upper strata of society was possible because of the fearful bondage of the slaves in the lowest stratum [Thompson].

Every historical phenomenon has different facets. Which particular facet will be chosen by the historian for study, description or interpretation depends upon his interest and value-judgement. Lecky says: "the predominating passion of every one (including the historian) colours the whole train of his reasoning, and in every subject he examines, he insistently turns to that aspect which is most congruous to his favourite pursuit." [*The Rise of Rationalism in Europe*, Vol. II, p. 36.] Perhaps it is to minimise this problem of historical subjectivism and relativism that Lord Acton said: 'study problems, not periods'. Rightly speaking, the problems of subjectivism and relativism have to be faced and cannot be avoided. For, every human being is bound to have his bias, prejudice, and value-judgement. These human considerations are not necessarily incompatible with the end of rational objectivity. The real problem is not with the subjectivity but subjectivism of the historian. By subjectivism we mean a psychological disposition which is uncriticisable, incorrigible and therefore makes it impossible for the historian or for that reason any human being to see the things *as they are* related to their perspective. The questions, "How the objects of history are in themselves?" and "To what extent their identity is influenced by imagination and thought of the historian?" are the perennial problems to the epistemologist, the theorist of knowledge. Simply because these are difficult questions we must not think ourselves helpless in tackling them.

First, we have to avoid the generalising tendency as we find

it in many historians and historiographers. We need more Huizinga and Namier, and not Toynbee or Spengler. The historian should address himself to specific questions and issues. If instead of that he tries to capture 'the spirit of the Time', or 'the general tendency and character of the Time', he will be landing himself and as well as ourselves into a host of problems and difficulties. When I say this I for one do not mean to deny altogether the importance of the generalising approach to history. It has its limited utility and necessity for some particular purposes. But the charm and the main characteristic of history consists in bringing out the individuality of the specific historical events and not in establishing general truths or formulas 'on the basis of' those specific events. Notwithstanding the diversity of the standpoint among the working historians, we may get to the objective historical truth provided we are more concerned with individual historical events and less with general truths. Morris Cohen observes:

Historians differ in their points of view, and accordingly in the question that they wish to answer, much more than they differ in answering even specific questions. The diversity of categories or perspective is (itself) an objective fact. [*The Meaning of Human History*, p. 67.]

Secondly, when we speak of the danger involved in the generalising tendency, we do not mean to say that laws, regularities or *trends* are unimportant in the field of social sciences. In fact the identification and co-relation of the individual social phenomena are made possible, may be indirectly, in and through some general propositions. Presuppositionless co-relation of social phenomena is a theoretical impossibility. To indicate the objective possibility of happening of certain events or phenomena in a certain situation we need certain laws. Laws have a prohibitive aspect as well. For, they also enable us to rule out the possibility of the presence of certain things and qualities in a given situation. In historical disciplines laws are of only indirect or heuristic importance. Max Weber writes: "Wherever the causal explanation of a cultural phenomenon—and 'historical

individual' is under consideration, the knowledge of causal *laws* is not the *end* of the investigation but only a *means*." [*The Methodology of The Social Sciences*, New York, 1964, p. 79.] The term 'causal laws' is to be taken in a weaker sense in this context. It is a sort of *adequate* co-relation. If in terms of some general concepts or theories some phenomena are not repeatable (repeatable for the purpose of understanding), the correctness or otherwise about their knowledge can never be satisfactorily ascertained. The concrete individual phenomena cannot be grasped without some relatively general and abstract laws or theories. This may sound paradoxical, but on analysis it turns out to be true. To avoid the fallacy of subjectivism limited use of general truths in history is unavoidable.

Thirdly, the pro-idealist or the anti-naturalist thinks that we can achieve objectivity without using laws or generalisations at all. Sri Aurobindo himself anticipates the charge of subjectivism against his view. He speaks of two types of subjectivism, true and false. The false subjectivism is due to false identification of the Self. If the individual or a group takes its ego as its true Self, it is likely to commit a series of mistakes. The narrow, superficial and separated ego cannot get to the objective truth of the world. To avoid the fallacy of false objectivism, Sri Aurobindo argues, we need not fall back upon abstract laws or theories. There is another way out. If the individual deepens his consciousness and transcends his immediate Self, he realises "that he is not only himself, but he is in solidarity with all of his kind." [*Human Cycle*, p. 54.] In his spiritual depth man *is* mankind. And at that level subjectivity, inter-subjectivity and objectivity become synonymous expressions. In fact Kant defines objectivity in terms of inter-subjectivity—structural identity of different individual human minds. The theoretical purpose served by laws or theories, on the one hand, and mental or spiritual structural identity, on the other, is basically similar. In other words, in whatever way we look at them, either through laws or through our own mental structure, we cannot definitely say what the historical events in themselves are. The true identity of them is always a matter of corrigible imagination and criticisable con-

jecture. The historian's mind is engaged in a perpetual and critical dialogue with the concrete world of historical events.

X

Demarcation Between the Subjective and the Objective in History.

The line of demarcation between the subjective and the objective cannot be drawn very rigidly. To be aware of what is going on even in my own mind I have to *objectify* my mind in some form or other. One cannot possibly grasp what pure *subjectivity* is like. Our subjectivity as an object of knowledge is bound to be conceptualised and objectified. Pure subjectivity is a limiting concept. The subject and the subjectivity which we can actually encounter in experience is always object-oriented. This is perhaps true also about object and objectivity. These are again ideal entities; we cannot actually apprehend them as such. Consequently, our knowledge of object knows no limit or bound. And that explains the possibility of limitless or boundless growth of knowledge, whether it is of object or of subject.

Sri Aurobindo says:

In fact, subjectivity and objectivity are not independent realities, they depend upon each other; they are the Being, through consciousness, looking at itself as subject on the object and the same Being offering itself to its own consciousness as object to the subject. . . . Indeed, we have no means of knowing the objective universe except by our subjective consciousness of which the physical senses themselves are instruments; as the world appears not only to that but in that, so it is to us. [*Life Divine*, p. 578.]

Sri Aurobindo rightly admits the relativity and interdependence of the subjective and the objective. Consequently, he is also obliged to admit that whatever is subjectively determined is also objectively determined and the *vice versa*. But even then he insists on the point that the subjective is not so dependent on the objective as the latter is on the former. Guided and fed by the physical sense of reality and working constantly under an ego-

centric attitude and predicament, we are prone to believe whatever is physical and objective and doubt whatever appears in subjective experience. Simply because subjective experience as such cannot be referred to the evidence of the external senses, we have a general tendency to challenge its validity. Our distrust of subjective experience, Sri Aurobindo argues, results from the fact that it is unverifiable in terms of standard scientific methods. "It has been implicitly or explicitly held as an axiom that all truth must be referred to the judgement of the personal mind, reason and experience of every man or else it must be verified or at any rate verifiable by a common or universal experience in order to be valid." [*Life Divine*, p. 579.] Sri Aurobindo rejects this 'false standard of reality and of knowledge', for this means the sovereignty of the former or the average mind and its limiting capacity and experience. The sovereignty of the normal or the average mind leads to what Sri Aurobindo calls 'an egoistic illusion', 'a gross and vulgar error'. Sri Aurobindo admits that our pursuit of knowledge in the sphere of subjectivity is beset with many difficulties. Of course we may commit error in our pursuit. But that is no reason why we should not attempt to explore the deeper depths and the vaster reaches of consciousness and experience. Sri Aurobindo thinks that the spiritual mind has its own method of verification, rather self-verification. Simply because it differs from the method of scientific verification, it need not be taken as less reliable than that. The determining power of consciousness, the subjective, particularly of spiritual consciousness, is claimed to be immensely superior to that of the objective world, the physical sense of the objective world. The objective as such does not and cannot determine or shape our mind, unless we are more or less open to it. But the point is we cannot shut ourselves for ever within the bounds of pure subjectivity. We are not alike windowless and atomic monad. There is going on an invisible but a continuous commerce in between ourselves and otherselves. In fact we live in a community of selves.

It is true that the objective works in history through the subjective. But from that it would be wrong to infer that the value in ope-

ration of the objective is absolutely dependent upon the subjective, upon our minds. Truths or results of our knowledge and experience as embodied in ideas, propositions and theories are very much objective. Their validity or otherwise does not depend upon what we think about and how we feel about them. The world of knowledge and experience finds its institutional expressions in library, laboratory, language, university and other modes of cultural life. They are of course objective, do exist on their own right, and have varying life-span of their own quite independently of the life of this or that individual man. These institutions and agencies certainly shape our life, mind and even the patterns of our emotional responses. It is almost equally true that over the years, decades, and centuries the reactions and responses of 'our mind' to what 'we' understand and experience, mould and transform the institutions and agencies of our cultural life. I say 'almost true' because a careful study of the inter-relation between the subjective and the objective unmistakably reveals that in the long run that we, human beings, including the heroes, are more influenced by the objective conditions of our life than we can possibly influence the said conditions.

THE YOGA OF SRI AUROBINDO

KIREET JOSHI

YOGA is not a closed book. It is not a body of revelations made once for all, unverifiable and unsurpassable. It is not a religion; it is an advancing Science, with its fields of inquiry and search always enlarging; its methods are not only intuitive but include also bold experimentation and rigorous verification by means of *abiding experience* and, finally, even physical change and transformation.

2. The Vedas and Upanishads have, in this sense, marked not a culmination, but a great beginning of the yogic endeavour. They are themselves records of subtle yogic processes, developing experiences, and enlargements of knowledge and power. They have been an original great synthesis, based upon some supreme realisations, and yet opening further gates of discoveries. In the words of the Vedic poet:

brahmanas tvā śatakrata
ud vamsam iva yemire
yat sānoḥ sānum āruhad
bhūri aspasta kartvam,—

“The priests of the word climb thee like a ladder,
O hundred-powered. As one ascends from peak to peak,
there is made clear the much that has still to be done.”

3. The later periods of history have witnessed in the yogic endeavour an increasing subtlety, plasticity, sounding of depths, extension of seeking,—even though this endeavour has been less surprisingly lofty and less massive in power. During the long stretch of time—extending to several millennia—Yoga has developed a number of methods, disciplines, techniques, numerous systems of knowledge and effective results, assured consequences of Yoga Siddhi. Throughout this period there has been a spirit of research, and there have been systems of specialisation and systems of synthesis.

4. But there have indeed been also exclusive claims and counter-claims, claims of Samkhya against Yoga—to use the terms in the sense in which the Gita employs them—claims of Jnana against Karma, of Karma against Bhakti, and of Bhakti against Jnana and Karma, trends of conflict between the Vedantic Yoga and the Yoga of the Buddhistic and Jain disciplines, sharp oppositions between the Vedanta and Tantra. Among these conflicts, the one that came to be powerful and perilous has been the trenchant opposition between Yoga and Life itself.

In the recent past, towards the close of the 17th century, there also came about a stagnation and an arrest, even an obscurity of the knowledge of Yoga, a misleading confusion between Yoga and Religion, between Yoga and Occultism, and a rise of numerous superstitions, ignorant practices, mechanical pursuits of rigid and fixed formulae, a lapse into darkness and inertia.

5. Yet a little light has always been burning, and with the reascent India, and the great churning in our age of continual crisis in the East and in the West, this light is growing, and there is an attempt of Yoga to recover itself and to develop with fresh efforts a fundamental research to affirm itself on newer, bolder, loftier, and even, on unprecedented lines.

6. In this new endeavour, the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo marks a momentous programme and project of Yogic research taking within its sweep all the domains of life, all aspects of culture, a synthesis of the systems of Yoga based upon a new discovery resulting in an ever-growing methodised discipline for a transmutation of Man into a new transformed humanity or super-humanity.

II

7. That new discovery is that of the Supermind, not merely in essence and in principle, but in its supreme ranges, and the possibility and the inevitability of its descent and manifestation upon the earth.

It is this discovery which is at the base of Sri Aurobindo's affirmation that 'spiritual liberation' or Mukti is not the highest possible aim for Man on the earth, and that there is a farther aim

imperatively demanded by the concealed intention of 'evolutionary' Nature. Not merely the liberation of the Spirit *from* Nature, but also the liberation *of* Nature itself from its limitations by a radical transformation; not merely an escape into the acosmic static Reality of featureless Nirvana or into superaterrestrial planes of heavenly existence, but the establishment of the kingdom of the Spirit on the earth; not merely an individual achievement but a collective one for the earth; not merely the realisation of the Divine, but the realisation of the integral Divine and its integral manifestation in the physical life, this is the aim which, according to Sri Aurobindo, is demanded of us, and it can be fulfilled only by the descent and manifestation of the Supermind.

This is the aim Sri Aurobindo puts forward as central to his Yoga.

8. But what is Supermind? What is its nature and character of action? What is its locus? And why is its descent indispensable for the aim set forth in this Yoga?

In the following passage from Sri Aurobindo, we have a brief but illumining exposition of the concept of the Supermind:

"The Supermind is in its very essence a truth-consciousness, a consciousness always free from the Ignorance which is the foundation of our present natural or evolutionary existence and from which Nature in us is trying to arrive at self-knowledge and world-knowledge and a right consciousness and the right use of our existence in the universe. The Supermind, because it is a truth-consciousness has this knowledge inherent in it and this power of true existence; its course is straight and can go direct to its aim, its field is wide and can even be made illimitable. This is because its very nature is knowledge; it has not to acquire knowledge but possesses it in its own right; its steps are not from Nescience or Ignorance into some imperfect light, but from truth to greater truth, from right perception to deeper perception, from intuition to intuition, from illumination to utter and boundless luminousness, from growing widenesses to the utter vasts and to very infinitude. On its summits it possesses the divine omniscience and omnipotence, but even in an evolutionary movement of its own graded self-manifestation by which it would

eventually reveal its own highest heights it must be in its very nature essentially free from ignorance and error; it starts from truth and light and moves always in truth and light. As its knowledge is always true, so too its will is always true; it does not fumble in its handling of things or stumble in its paces. In the Supermind feeling and emotion do not depart from their truth, make no slips or mistakes, do not swerve from the right and the real, cannot misuse beauty and delight or twist away from a divine rectitude. In the Supermind sense cannot mislead or deviate into the grossnesses which are here its natural imperfections and the cause of reproach, distrust and misuse by our ignorance. Even an incomplete statement made by the Supermind is a truth leading to a further truth, its incomplete action a step towards completeness. All the life and action and leading of the Supermind is guarded in its very nature from the falsehoods and uncertainties that are our lot; it moves in safety towards its perfection. Once the truth-consciousness was established here on its own sure foundation, the evolution of divine life would be a progress in felicity, a march through light to Ananda."¹

9. Supermind is, according to Sri Aurobindo, a grade of existence beyond mind, life and Matter. And, between Mind and Supermind are the intermediate grades of what Sri Aurobindo has termed the 'Higher Mind', 'Illumined Mind', 'Intuitive Mind', and 'Overmind'.² The Supermind is an eternal reality of the divine Being and divine Nature. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "A supramental Truth-Consciousness is at once the self-awareness of the Infinite and Eternal and a power of self-determination inherent in that self-awareness, the first *is its foundation* and status, the second is its power of being, the dynamis of its self-existence. All that a timeless eternity of self-awareness sees in itself as truth of being, the conscious power of its being manifests in Time-Eternity."³

10. In its own plane, Supermind already and always exists and possesses its own essential law of being. Its own life on its own plane is divine and, if Supermind descends upon the earth, it will bring necessarily the divine life with it and establish it here. The descent of the Supermind and its manifestation on the

earth is, according to Sri Aurobindo, an inevitability of the 'evolutionary' process. Evolution is, according to Sri Aurobindo's Yogic knowledge, a gradual unfolding of higher and higher levels of consciousness through the necessary modifications of Matter, which in itself is a mode of consciousness. In Matter or below it in the Inconscient the higher levels of consciousness are all involved, and evolution is a resultant process of a double pressure of the ascent of the involved levels of consciousness and the descent of the corresponding levels from above. In this vision, supermind is involved in the Inconscience, and it is bound to emerge or evolve in the gradual movement of Time, by an ascent of the supermind from below and by a descent of the supermind from above. As explained by Sri Aurobindo:

In fact, a supermind is already here but is involved, concealed behind this manifest mind, life and Matter and not yet acting overtly or in its own power: if it acts, it is through these inferior powers and modified by their characters and so not yet recognisable. It is only by the approach and arrival of the descending Supermind that it can be liberated upon earth and reveal itself in the action of our material, vital and mental parts so that these lower powers can become portions of a total divinised activity of our whole being: It is that that will bring to us a completely realised divinity or the divine life. It is indeed so that life and mind involved in Matter have realised themselves here; for only what is involved can evolve, otherwise there could be no emergence.⁴

III

11. It is significant that the modern trend in the theories of evolution is to stress the possibility of the emergence of newer and better terms of existence. Samuel Alexander speaks of the emergence of the Deity as the promise of the future; Whitehead speaks of the 'ingression' of the Godhead in evolution and of the God in the making. A French anthropologist and paleonto-

logist, Father Teilhard de Chardin, has proposed a theory having a similar conclusion; the possibility for the human species to surpass itself and bring its evolution one step farther.

12. But, while these theories are mainly speculative and indicate only the general trends in the present civilisation which promise a new mutation, they do not offer any programme of scientific dealing with those trends to effectuate consciously and deliberately an advance in the evolutionary process. Sri Aurobindo, however, not only perceived the inevitability of the mutation of Man, but he made an intensive search into the means by which it can be aided and effectuated.

13. In this search, Sri Aurobindo discovered Yoga as a method of accelerating the evolutionary process. He found, however, that each system of Yoga is a specialisation in a more or less limited field of achievement, and therefore none of them sufficient for the total movement of Evolution. In his analysis of the systems of Yoga, he shows how an integrating principle of Yoga could be discovered, and how on the basis of this principle, a synthesis of Yoga could be so achieved that Yoga is fully equated with the total demands of Evolutionary movement. He shows how the evolutionary movement itself is a secret Yoga, the Yoga of Nature, and how this secret could be used as a clue to a conscious integral method in our effort to lead Nature as rapidly as possible and as perfectly as possible towards its next momentous evolutionary stage, viz., the radical and complete transmutation of Man. All life is Yoga, declares Sri Aurobindo, but all life has been so far a subconscious Yoga of Nature. But we can study Nature consciously and apply scientifically the inner workings of Nature to our own evolution, and we can consciously make all life a conscious Yoga. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

The true and full object and utility of Yoga can only be accomplished when the conscious Yoga in man becomes like the subconscious Yoga in Nature, outwardly coterminus with life itself and we can once more looking out both on the path and the achievement, ray in a more perfect and luminous sense: 'All life is Yoga'.⁵

14. Each system of Yoga selects certain activities of Nature, purifies them, develops them, perfects them, and achieves a contact, a union with an Object that is at the source of these activities. Each system chooses an instrument in our psychological complex by which the selected activities can be dealt with. The essence of each system is the method of *concentration* on the Object in view; and by this concentration is achieved a conscious acceleration of the evolution of Nature. Thus, Hatha Yoga selects the body and vital functionings as its instrument of perfection and realisation. The method is a concentration and effort of energy released by *Asana* and *Pranayama* in the outer and inner body for an object of physical perfection. Raja Yoga selects the mental being in its different parts as its lever-power. It effects a change of the ordinary fleeting mind by a process of *Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana* and *Samadhi*, where it can dwell constantly in a fixed poise and reflect and luminosity of the Object that is pursued. The triple Path of Works, of Love and of Knowledge uses some part of the mental being, will, heart or intellect as a starting-point and seeks by its purification, development and perfection by conversion, the liberating Truth, Beatitude and Infinity. Its method is a direct commerce, a direct contact, a direct concentration of the human individual or Purusha in the individual body with the Divine, the Purusha who dwells in every body and yet transcends all form and name.

15. This analysis of the systems of Yoga indicates a solution to the problem of their synthesis. The synthesis cannot be arrived at by a combination of these systems in mass. That is neither possible, nor desirable, nor needed. Synathesis does not mean successive practice of the various systems. It is effected by neglecting the forms and outsides of the Yogic disciplines and seizing rather on the central principle common to all which will include and utilise in the right place and proportion their particular principles. Since each system is a specific process of concentration, integral yoga would be based on the principle of *integral concentration*; since each system makes a selection from the

activities of Nature for purification and perfection, integral yoga would admit all activities of Nature for their transformation and perfection; since each system aims at a specific object or a poise or aspect of Reality of the Divine, the Object of the integral yoga would be the realisation of the Integral Divine. An integral concentration on the integral Divine through the whole of our being for a complete perfection by a union with and manifestation of the Divine—this would be the natural formula of the Integral Yoga. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

The method we have to pursue, then, is to put our whole conscious being into relation and contact with the Divine and to call Him in to transform our entire being into His, so that in a sense God Himself, the real Person in us, becomes the Sadhaka of the Sadhana⁶ as well as the Master of Yoga by whom the lower personality is used as the centre of a divine transfiguration and the instrument of its own perfection.⁷

16. In the integral Yoga, the Divine Power in us uses all life as the means of our upward evolution. Every experience and outer contact with our world-environment, however trifling or or disastrous, is used as an occasion and opportunity for the yogic work, and every inner experience becomes a step on the path to perfection. "And we recognise in ourselves with opened eyes the method of God in the world, His purpose of light in the obscure, of might in the weak and the fallen, of delight in what is grievous and miserable. We see the divine method to be the same in the lower and in the higher working; only in the one it is pursued tardily becomes swift and self-conscious and the instrument confesses the hand of the Master. All life is a Yoga of Nature seeking to manifest God within itself. Yoga marks the stage at which this effort becomes capable of self-awareness and therefore of right completion in the individual. It is a gathering up and concentration of the movements dispersed and loosely combined in the lower evolution."⁸

17. By this integral method is proposed an integral realisation and perfection: the realisation of not only unity in the self but

also of unity in the infinite diversity of activities, worlds and creatures, the perfect harmony of the results of knowledge, Love and Works, the perfection of freedom, purity, beatitude, and the perfection of the mind and body.

18. The integral Yoga aims at an integral transformation. The word 'Transformation' has a special meaning in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. It does not mean merely that is known as conversion in the psychology of religion, where one becomes centrally occupied with a religious belief, which was previously absent or present only in the periphery. Nor does it mean a conversion that occurs as an inner change into sainthood or ethical perfection. Even what are known as Yogic Siddhis of mere spiritual experiences or realisations such as those of Mukti or Nirvana do not amount to 'transformation'. As Sri Aurobindo explains it in one of his letters:

'Transformation' is a word that I have brought in myself (like 'Supermind') to express certain psychological concepts and spiritual facts of the integral Yoga . . . Purification of the nature by the 'influence' of the Spirit is not what I mean by transformation; purification is only part of a psychic change or a psycho-spiritual change—the word besides has many senses and is very often given a moral or ethical meaning which is foreign to my purpose. What I mean by the spiritual transformation is something dynamic (not merely liberation of the Self or realisation of the One which can very well be attained without any descent). It is a putting on of the spiritual consciousness dynamic as well as static in every part of the being down to the subconscious. That cannot be done by the influence of the Selfleaving the consciousness fundamentally as it is with only purification, enlightenment of the mind and heart and quiescence of the vital. It means a bringing down of the Divine Consciousness static and dynamic into all these parts and the entire replacement of the present consciousness by that. This we find unveiled and unmingled

above mind, life and body. It is a matter of the undeniable experience of many that this can descend and it is my experience that nothing short of its *full* descent can thoroughly remove the veil and mixture and effect the full spiritual transformation. . . . I may add that transformation is not the central object of other paths as it is of this Yoga—only so much purification and change is demanded by them as will lead to liberation and the beyond-life.⁹

19. The transformation that is sought after in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo is that of Nature, Prakriti. The Spirit that is manifest to itself is to be made manifest to Nature and is Nature. The Prakriti of *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*, has to be fully transformed by the Divine Nature, the Supramental Nature, so that Nature itself would be liberated from its limitations and be the direct and full expression of the Divine Supermind. In the supramental transformation of Nature, there is not merely the transcendence of the three *gunas* but the three *gunas* themselves become purified refined and changed into their divine equivalents: *sattva* becomes *jyoti*, the authentic spiritual light; *rajas* becomes *tapas*, the tranquilly intense divine force; *tamas* becomes shama, the divine quiet, rest, peace. But this can be done, according to Sri Aurobindo in its fullness in the physical only when the physical life is finally transformed by the supramental power.

20. This is quite different from what is known as spiritual liberation or Mukti. Spiritual liberation is an important step in the integral Yoga towards transformation, but it is not its consummation. Spiritual liberation means the liberation of the Spirit from Nature, whereas transformation of Nature means the liberation of Nature itself from its own limitations. In the state of spiritual liberation, the spirit is realised as above and unaffected by Nature, and thus the bondage to Nature is broken, and spiritual freedom is achieved. It is true that to effect this liberation there has indeed to be a radical change of Nature, the mental nature is silenced, the vital is purified and falls quiescent, even the physical collaborates, the *sattva* becomes predominant and *rajas*

and *tamas* become subordinated, the *gunas* do not any more cloud or eclipse the spirit, desire and ego are eliminated from Nature, but still, the *gunas* themselves are not transmuted into their original divine attributes. The free spirit as in the case of the *Jivanmukta*, can act in the world, but still the instrument of action is not liberated from the *gunas*, and therefore the action is not yet the full and luminous expression of the will of the Spirit. In a complete transformation of Nature, the modes of Nature, the action of Nature, the total vibrations of Nature express *automatically* (not by virtue of an obligation of a regular practice of Siddhis) the law of the divine Nature. This is what is meant in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo as the *sādharmya mukti*, 'the acquisition of the divine nature by the transformation of this lower being into the human image of the divine'.

IV

21. The entire process of transformation is a triple transformation, the psychic, the spiritual and the supramental Sri Aurobindo uses the word 'psychic' in the Greek sense, where it does not mean merely the inner psychological powers, but stands for the inmost soul. The psychic entity is, according to Sri Aurobindo, the true soul secret in us, screened behind the body, life and mind and its presence burns in the temple of the inmost heart. It is the flame of the Godhead always alight within us, inextinguishable even by the dense unconsciousness which obscures our outward nature. It is this psychic entity which puts forward gradually a psychic personality which changes, grows, develops. At first, the psychic being can exercise only a concealed and partial and indirect action through the mind, the life and the body, for it permits these parts of Nature to develop as its instruments of self-expression. But in due course it can come forward and lead our entire growth, internal as well as external. "It is", in the words of Sri Aurobindo, "this secret psychic entity which is the original Conscience in us deeper than the constructed and conventional conscience of the moralist, for it is this which points always towards Truth and Right and Beauty, towards Love and Harmony and all that is a divine possibility in us, and

persists till these things become the major need of our nature. It is the psychic personality in us that flowers as the saint, the sage, the seer; when it reaches its full strength, it turns the being towards the Knowledge of Self and the Divine, towards the Supreme Truth, the supreme Good, the supreme Beauty, Love and Bliss, the divine heights and largenesses, and opens us to the touch of spiritual sympathy, universality, oneness."¹⁰ The coming forward of the psychic Person marks a momentous stage in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. It then begins to govern overtly and entirely our outer nature of mind, life and body, and these can be cast into soul images of what is true, right and beautiful, and in the end the whole nature can be turned towards the real aim of life, the supreme victory. A transformation of the mind, life and body by the presence and powers of the psychic being is effected. This process may be rapid or tardy according to the resistance in our developed nature. But ultimately, by the greater and greater infusion of the psychic light every part of the being is psychicised. As Sri Aurobindo describes it:

Every region of the being, every nook and corner of it, every movement, formation, direction, inclination of thought, will, emotion, sensation, action, reaction, motive, disposition, propensity, desires, habit of the conscious or subconscious physical, even the most concealed, camouflaged, mute, recondite, is lighted up with the unerring psychic light, their confusions dissipated, their tangles disentangled, their obscurities, deceptions, self-deceptions precisely indicated and removed; all is purified, set right, the whole nature harmonised, modulated in the psychic key, put in spiritual order.¹¹

22. The psychic transformation is the one necessary condition of the total transformation of our existence, but that is not all that is needed for the largest spiritual change. As explained by Sri Aurobindo:

"... since this is the individual soul in Nature, it can open to the hidden diviner ranges of our being and

receive and reflect their light and power and experience, but another, a spiritual transformation from above is needed for us to possess our self in its universality and transcendence. By itself the psychic being at a certain stage might be content to create a formation of truth, good and beauty and make that its station; at a further stage it might become passively subject to the world-self, a mirror of the universal existence, consciousness, power, delight, but not their full participant and possessor . . ."¹²

23. While the psychic is the *inmost* and *deepest* being in us, the spiritual is the *higher* and *transcendental*. While the psychic life is the life immortal, endless time, limitless space, ever progressive change, unbroken continuity in the world of forms, the spiritual consciousness on the other hand, means to live in the infinite and the eternal, to throw oneself outside all creation beyond time and space. When we go deeper *behind* the mental, we enter into the field of the psychic, when we go *above* the mental, we enter into the domain of the spiritual experiences of the transcendental Self or of the wide cosmic consciousness or of the One and the Supreme as the upholder of time-space.

24. For purposes of transformation, it is not enough in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo to have even these spiritual experiences and realisations. The realisations of the One and of the Unit, of the Cosmic and Transcendental Peace, Knowledge, Power, Bliss,—these need to be expressed in our dynamic Nature. And for that, according to Sri Aurobindo, there is to be an ascent into the planes of the higher dynamic action and the descent of the powers of these planes into our mind, life and body. These planes are those of the Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, and Overmind preparing the ascent and descent of the Supermind. It is this process that is specifically called in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo the process of spiritual transformation.

25. This process is extremely complex and it is impossible to give any idea of it here. Sri Aurobindo has written extensively

on this subject, but in the following passage from one of his letters, we have some indication of this process:

The Self governs the diversity of its creation by its unity on all the planes from the Higher Mind upwards on which the realisation of the One is the natural basis of consciousness. But as one goes upward, the view changes, the power of consciousness changes, the Light becomes ever more intense and potent. Although the static realisation of Infinity and Eternity and the Timeless One remains the same, the vision of the workings of the One becomes ever wider and is attended with a greater instrumentality of Force and a more comprehensive grasp of what has to be known and done. All possible forms and constructions and things become more and more visible, put in their proper place, utilisable. Moreover, what is thought-knowledge in the Higher Mind becomes illumination in the Illumined Mind and direct intimate vision in the Intuition. But the Intuition sees in flashes and combines through a constant play of light—through revelations, inspirations, intuitions, swift discriminations. The Overmind sees calmly, steadily, in great masses and large extensions of space and time and relation, globally; it creates and acts in the same way—it is the world of the great Gods, the divine Creators. Only each creates in his own way; he sees all but sees all from his own viewpoint. There is not the absolute supramental harmony and certitude. These, inadequately expressed, are some of the differences. I speak, of course, of these planes in themselves—when acting in the human consciousness they are necessarily much diminished in their working by having to depend on the human instrumentation of mind, vital and physical. Only when these are quieted, they get a fuller force and reveal more their character.¹³

26. The descent of the Overmind and the consequent transformation of the lower instruments of the mind, life, body and the

inconscious mark a further decisive stage in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. It is the final consummating movement of what Sri Aurobindo has called the dynamic spiritual transformation. And yet, there are certain reasons arising from its status and power that prevent it from being the final possibility of the spiritual evolution. As Sri Aurobindo explains it:

In the terrestrial evolution itself the Overmind descent would not be able to transform wholly the Inconscience; all that it could do would be to transform in each man it touched the whole conscious being, inner and outer, personal and universally impersonal, into its own stuff and impose that upon the Ignorance illumining it into cosmic truth and knowledge. But a basis of Nescience would remain; it would be as if a sun and its system were to shine out in an original darkness of Space and illumine everything as far as its rays could reach so that all that dwelt in the light would feel as if no darkness were there at all in their experience of existence. But outside that sphere or expanse of experience the original darkness would still be there, and since all things are possible in an overmind structure, could invade the island of light created within its empire. Moreover, since Overmind deals with different possibilities, its natural action would be to develop the separate possibility of one or more or numerous dynamic spiritual formulations to their utmost or combine or harmonise several possibilities together; but this would be a creation or a number of creations in the original terrestrial creation, each complete in its separate existence. The evolved spiritual individual would be there, there might evolve also a spiritual community or communities in the same world as mental man and the vital being of the animal but each working out its independent existence in a loose relation within the terrestrial formula. The supreme power of the principle of unity taking all diversities into itself and controlling them as parts of the

unity, which must be the law of the new evolutionary consciousness, would not as yet be there. Also by this much evolution there could be no security against the downward pull or gravitation of the Inconscience which dissolves all the formations that life and mind build in it, swallows all things that arise out of it or are imposed upon it and disintegrates them into their original matter. The liberation from this pull of the Inconscience and a secured basis for a continuous divine or gnostic evolution would only be achieved by a descent of the Suenmind into the terrestrial formula, bringing into it the supreme law and light and dynamis of the Spirit and penetrating with it and transforming the Inconscience of the material basis. A last transition from Overmind to Supermind and a descent of Supermind must therefore intervene at this stage of evolutionary Nature.¹⁴

27. Only the supramental Force, can, according to Sri Aurobindo, entirely overcome the difficulty of the resistance of the Inconscience. Only the luminous Supermind and its sovereign imperative can descend into the Inconscience without any diminution of its omnipotent Power and thus displace or entirely penetrate and transform into itself the Inconscience.

'Only the Supermind', writes Sri Aurobindo, 'can thus descend without losing its full power of action; for its action is always intrinsic and automatic, its knowledge and will identical and the result commensurate: its nature is a self-achieving Truth-Consciousness and, if it limits itself or its working, it is by choice and intention, not by compulsion; in the limits it chooses and inevitable. . . . The whole radical change in the evolution from a basis of Ignorance to a basis of Knowledge can only come by the intervention of the supramental Power and its direct action in earth-existence.'¹⁵

V

28. The results of the descent of the Supermind on the earth and the consequent supramental transformation of the mind, life, body and the inconscient would mean a momentous stage in the evolutionary process. It would mean the mutation of the human species into what Sri Aurobindo has termed the 'gnostic' species. It would mean a step which would radically alter even the human body, its structure and the principle of its working. It would mean the appearance of what Sri Aurobindo has termed the Divine Body, an every-youthful physical envelope of the unveiled Spirit.

'For the manifestation or building of a divine body on earth', writes Sri Aurobindo, 'there must be an initial transformatin, the appearance of a new, a greater and more developed type, not a continuance with little modifications of the present physical form and its limited possibilities. What has to be preserved must indeed be preserved and that means whatever is necessary or thoroughly serviceable for the uses of the new life on earth; whatever is still needed and will serve its purpose but imperfect, will have to be retained but developed and perfected; whatever is no longer of use for new aims or is a disability must be thrown aside. The necessary forms and instrumentations of Matter must remain since it is in a world of Matter that the divine life has to manifest, but their materiality must be refined, uplifted, ennobled, illumined, since Matter and the world of Matter have increasingly to manifest the indwelling Spirit.'¹⁶

29. According to Sri Aurobindo, the present crisis through which mankind is passing today has in it truly the evolutionary *nisus* to transmute Man. And, the varied problems of mankind which perplex us beyond any hope of solution would find their true solution when we, as the human race, would take a firm step towards this evolutionary transmutation. 'Man is', says Sri

Aurobindo, 'a transitional being; he is not final. For in man and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees that climb to a divine supermanhood. There lies our destiny and the liberating key to our aspiring but troubled and limited existence.'¹⁷

30. But the idea of the Superman as we find it in Sri Aurobindo is to be clearly distinguished from the Nietzschean idea of the Superman. The former is that of the divine Superman, the latter is that of the Asuric or Rakshasic Superman. The Nietzschean superman is the most dominant egoistic immense Man who would trample under his feet of Power a submissive and meek humanity. But the divine superman reconciles and harmonises in him the absolute of Power with the absolute of Love and Knowledge. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

When the full heart of Love is tranquillised by knowledge into a calm ecstasy and vibrates with strength, when the strong hands of Power labour for the world in a radiant fullness of joy and light, when the luminous brain of knowledge accepts and transforms the heart's obscure inspirations and lends itself to the workings of the high-seated Will, when all these gods are founded together on a soul of sacrifice that lives in unity with all the world and accepts all things to transmute them, then is the condition of man's integral self-transcendence. This and not a haughty, strong and brilliant egoistic self-culture enthroning itself upon an enslaved humanity is the divine way of supermanhood.¹⁸

31. The descent of the Supermind the appearance of the superman on the earth would, according to Sri Aurobindo, have immense influence on mankind as a whole. In his *Supramental Manifestation upon Earth* Sri Aurobindo has given us some glimpses into the consequences for humanity of the descent of the Supermind on the earth. As he points out:

The descent into the earth-life of so supreme a creative power as the Supermind and its truth-consciousness could not be merely a new feature or factor added to

that life or put in its front but without any other importance or only a restricted importance carrying with it no results profoundly affecting the rest of earth-nature. Especially, it could not fail to exercise an immense influence on mankind as a whole, even a radical change in the aspect and prospect of its existence here, even if this power had no other capital result on the material world in which it had come down to intervene. One cannot but conclude that the influence, the change made would be far reaching, even enormous; it would not only establish the Supermind and a supramental race of beings upon the earth, it could bring about an uplifting mental being and would equally bring about a radical and transforming change in the principles and forms of his living, his ways of action and the whole build and tenor of his life.¹⁹

32. This and much more would be the significance of the results of the Yoga of Transformation for humanity. It is in this context that Sri Aurobindo has previsited the coming of world-unity and of the spiritual age for mankind. The advent of the supramental at the present critical hour is for Sri Aurobindo the key to the gates of the New Future. And the present hour is for Sri Aurobindo the Hour of God, the hour of decisive change, advent and manifestation. Indeed, it has been affirmed that the descent of the supermind has already been effected and the supramental is at work in the earth-conditions. A new Call is upon humanity.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ Sri Aurobindo: *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 16, pp. 41-2.
- ² For a description of these grades, vide Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 19, pp. 939-63.
- ³ Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 18, p. 312.
- ⁴ Sri Aurobindo: *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 16, p. 43.
- ⁵ Sri Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 20, p. 4.

- ⁶ *Sādhanā*, the practice by which perfection, *Siddhi*, is attained; *Sādhaka*, the Yogin who seeks by that practice the Siddhi.
- ⁷ Sri Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 20, p. 40.
- ⁸ Sri Aurobindo: *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- ⁹ *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 26, pp. 109-10.
- ¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 18, p. 226.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 19, pp. 907-08.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, Vol. 18, p. 227.
- ¹³ For some adequate idea, *vide The Life Divine*, Vol. 19, pp. 889-918.
- ¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo: *Letters on Yoga*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 24, p. 1154.
- ¹⁵ Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 19, pp. 953-4.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 917-18.
- ¹⁷ Sri Aurobindo: *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 16, p. 39.
- ¹⁸ Sri Aurobindo: *The Hour of God*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 17, p. 7.
- ¹⁹ Sri Aurobindo: *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 16, p. 281.
- ²⁰ Sri Aurobindo: *The Supramental Manifestation Upon Earth*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 16, p. 50.

EVOLUTION AND MAN

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DARWIN'S *Origin of Species* has revolutionised man's understanding of himself and of the universe. Although the notion of evolution is not new, with Darwin, it has become a scientific theory. In its light, the traditional views of the world in which 'time' and 'change' have played no significant role are being given up, and new pictures of the world with evolution as the central concept are being constructed. At the same time there has been a radical shift in man's understanding of himself. Contrasted with the traditional anthropologies, wherein man had been conceived as a completed being with a fixed nature, living in a world to which he does not really belong, the modern anthropologies conceive him as dynamic and growing. According to the traditional anthropologies, man is unique in relation to all that is around him, by virtue of his possessing a soul, the real being of man. Since the soul is a gift from above, man's real interests and ultimate aspirations have little or nothing to do with the world; world is looked upon as more of a hindrance than a help in the fulfilment of his highest aspirations. The natural outcome of such an attitude is to set an unbridgeable gulf between man and the world. Contrary to this, the evolutionary concept of man views him as an integral part of the universe or as organically belonging to it; and as he has emerged in the process of evolution, his destiny cannot be viewed as outside of the world. Man grows in and along with the world, and his destiny is interlinked with that of it. The theory of evolution has in a sense brought man and his goals down to earth, and gave him a perspective in which time and growth are the key words. Similarly, human values and the institutions that embody them are now viewed as not fixed, but as changing phases in the evolution of man and his understanding; hence the development of historical method to study them.

Although the theory of evolution was originally meant to describe and explain a limited phenomenon of biology, soon in