

## SPIRITUALIZED SOCIETY: SOME REFLECTIONS

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### **Introduction**

The ideal of a spiritualized society appears to me to hold forth the only hope for mankind, if mankind is to solve the numberless problems it is faced with at present, and the numberless new problems it is engaged in making for the future—near and distant. Mankind has come to such an impasse that a solution itself creates new problems: hence mankind is living in a state of perpetual crisis so much so that nothing of quality can ever be initiated—it is always a matter of crisis management for the leaders of the world.

No political system appears to be able to satisfy the human need for peace, happiness and harmony. On the contrary, all political systems foster conflicts and wars, disharmony and unhappiness. No religion has succeeded in ensuring equity, brotherhood and love among the people of the world. All their elaborate belief systems, avowed piety and magical rites and traditional rituals notwithstanding, religions have failed to salvage mankind from disillusionment and decay. As a matter of fact religions with their emphasis on conventions, traditions and rituals rather than the need for the search for truth, have become the greatest obstacle that stands in the ways of spiritualization of mankind. Science and technology fuelled by the rampant consumerism keep producing numberless goodies; but behind the shoddy comforts and conveniences created there looms large the specter of ecological disaster, biochemical degeneration and global warming. Powerful drugs occasion the coming into being of the most virulent strains of germs that are resistant to the most powerful drugs in existence. All human endeavours are for bettering the

human condition; but all attempts end up in failures which give rise to the thought that there must be some radical defect somewhere in all the human endeavours at betterment.

The ideal of a spiritualized human society might appear as a utopian pipe dream or else at best as a figment of the imagination. Imagination too has a connection however distant it might be, even when it is free from the rigour of rational thought which is necessarily tethered very closely to sense based facts or probabilities, with facts and probabilities that are in the ultimate analysis sense based. Imaginary ideal is one thing and Sri Aurobindo's ideal of a spiritualized society is another thing. Sri Aurobindo's ideal is based on supramental facts regarding the structure of human personality.

### **Personality Structure of Man**

Man is a composite whole made up of body, life, mind and spirit. Body is material in nature; and Matter according to the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is the culmination of the principle of Ignorance. Hence the human body offers to the spirit a fundamental opposition in the form of Ignorance. There is another opposition in the form of bondage to mechanistic law. Response to stimulus is the sign of the presence of life in the body. Life that is spoken of by Sri Aurobindo is not the life that modern science believes to have evolved from matter. Life in Sri Aurobindo is a dynamic energy that is all pervading, imperishable and eternal. Similarly Mind spoken of by Sri Aurobindo is not the mind modern science speaks of. The opposition offered by the mind to the spirit is that it looks at the world after taking up a particular view point, and tries to know everything from that limiting stance without realizing its Procrustean nature. Spirit is the essential man: the body and the life and the mind are mere encrustations. This is not to belittle the role of body, life and mind: they are instruments meant to serve the spirit.

The ideal society of Sri Aurobindo is a society that gives due importance to spirit. In fact in the existing society spirit is not a subject for serious discussion, study and search. On the contrary, it is looked down as the result of a superstitious belief that somehow still clings on to the minds of some people in spite of all the scientific and technological advancements achieved by mankind. Mankind is thus habituated to neglect the spirit and live by what is not the highest in man. Human beings have a lower, a higher and a highest nature built into their personality structure.

The commonly found, normal human society has its genesis in the lower nature; and the lower shall bring about the doom of what it creates. In a society that is built on the lower nature, two forces are at work: one is the gregarious instinct, and the other is the clash of interests and the conflicts of egos. It means converging and diverging forces are at work in the formation of a normal human society; and this society is necessarily devoted to the development of the physical, the vital and the mental aspects of human life. But it neglects the development of the spiritual aspect. A society that develops by neglecting the spiritual aspect may become physically rich, vitally overactive and mentally complex and depressing. Hence such societies have to die in spite of their development, or may be more accurately, because of their development. This death by development is a sure sign of the presence of a radical defect in such social systems.

## Personal Reflections

This ideal of a spiritualized society gives me a robust optimism in the face of the tremendous negativism rampant in the world. I feel, I think, I know why nothing works in the world. Earlier I used to console myself by telling myself that though the Almighty had created the world, the management is entrusted to the Dark One and his tribe of devils. This is replicated in the human realm where the altruistic humanitarians lead a revolution or a liberation struggle or an independence movement; but no sooner than the heroic efforts come to a successful close than self seeking rascals of the very lowest type take over the whole management. God creates and the devil manages! Though that black humour was not much of a consolation that was all the consolation I had, and hoped to have none better for all times to come. Then Beloo came to me insisting that I read Sri Aurobindo and understand his social thought. Till I read Sri Aurobindo, my social outlook had been that of an ardent Marxist. But Marxism seemed to work well only in the realm of theory; when it came to praxis it was rather difficult to distinguish Marxists from others who promised heaven on earth and created hell in reality. So my only consolation was the black humour.

When I was introduced to the personality structure of man as understood by Sri Aurobindo I had not suspected the social implications of that understanding. It became clear only when I began reading *The Human Cycle*. The socio-political riddles that used to pester me became very transparent then: the neglect of the Spirit foredooms all efforts at developments and growth. With this insight I would now like to probe my personal life to see how far the need for integral development applies to me personally.

The first two decades of my life were devoted to physical developments and vital satisfactions. Food was the main thing; the meaning of life dependent on the quality and quantity of gustatory enjoyment. Even the beauty of the opposite sex did not have any meaning to me till the middle of the second decade of my life. Food alone mattered. Then starting from the mid of the second decade, sex also had become a matter of great significance. And by imperceptible degrees the vital urges assumed supreme importance: food became a matter of secondary importance only. Even while sex ruled the mind, I had a great fascination for reading; but it cannot be said that mind mattered more to me than sex, drinks and company. Luckily for me I happened to come across the works of Dr. Paul Brunton who had been a fascinated student of Indian culture, especially of the sages like the Ramana Maharshi of Arunachala. I was taken up by his moving account of the spiritual lore of India. And when I got posted to Chandigarh in 1973 I took up the study of Philosophy in all earnestness. That possibly could be characterized as a passage from vital interests to the realm of the mind. This is not to say the vital had gone off: it was very much there but the mental had become a major contender with the vital. Though I did not have the luck to attend the lecture classes of any teacher of philosophy, I kept reading and thinking and finally secured the second rank in M.A. Philosophy from the Punjab University in 1978. Well, I mention this because to my thinking this signals some triumph of the mental over the vital.

The spiritual aspect had always fascinated me; but not so the religious. The temple going religious people had always held me as an atheist; for at the age of 14 itself I had forsaken temple worship. The man responsible for my break off from the traditional path of piety had been none other than a temple priest himself. I salute him as my Guru in this regard and am indebted to him for opening

my eyes to the reality beyond the temple. Of course he had not done this service with any awareness; he had no occasion even to guess what he had done to me. You see, he was a passive homosexual; and after one of my close friends of those days narrated his adventures with the priest of our Siva temple, I decided on my own that there could not be any meaning in temple worship. Giving up of temple worship had meant atheism to me in those days, for I knew no better than that; and hence I seemed an atheist to myself. It was during my school final exam days that I stopped fancying myself as an atheist. So the spiritual had been a matter of dire need and experimental inquiry for me, not a matter of dead belief and ritual.

As I matured the need for God became not simply a manner of overcoming exam fear but a deeper need upon which depended the meaning of whole existence itself. After attending a few sessions of Vipassana meditation, I became convinced that it is not through reading that I can ever get the answers I want. The same conviction became doubly strong when Sri Aurobindo came to me. I had read of Sri Aurobindo from the book *Among the Great*. No doubt I was fascinated; but did not dare to read Sri Aurobindo in the original after my miserable failure at reading *Savitri*. But it is through SACAR that I have received a proper introduction to Sri Aurobindo. Thanks to my studies at SACAR the path before me is clear. For now reading should continue till knowing makes reading redundant. This autobiographical excursion has once again made it clear to me that the personality of man is a composite whole and that the most precious part of them all is the Spirit. And, anything that neglects the spirit is foredoomed to fail. The ideal of a spiritualized society means hope for both the individual human being and the human race. Personally, to me it means clarity and courage. Its possibility may not be apparent right now: mankind will have to traverse through very many failures yet to get the possibility of a spiritualized society apparent. Only through failures can people be made wiser.

## **Conclusion**

It seems if a spiritualized society is to come into being, the sway of the body over the vital, and the sway of the vital over the mental, and the sway of the mental over the spirit has to be overcome once and for all. This triple overcoming is certain, for it is the will of the higher Nature; it is towards this transcendence that mankind is moving even if it is at a snail's pace. Nothing can prevent mankind from reaching its divine destiny: The Divine Life.

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