

## *Sri Aurobindo*

### **I**

From a certain standpoint Sri Aurobindo's message is very simple, almost self-evident. The sum and substance of all he says is that man is growing and has to grow in consciousness till he reaches the complete and perfect consciousness, not only in his individual but in his collective, that is to say, social life. In fact, the growth of consciousness is the supreme secret of life, the master key to earthly evolution.

Sri Aurobindo believes in evolution. Creation, according to him, has a purpose and man moves to a goal. That is nothing else than the unfolding of consciousness. Originally all was Matter, only dead Matter. At a certain stage out of Matter came Life: what was or appeared to be dead became alive. Thus the plant world was born—the first primeval stirring of consciousness, a consciousness vague, blind, practically unconscious, yet moved by a newly acquired or awakened pulsation. There was again a period of gestation and incubation bringing out at the end a rudimentary Mind, a first conscious consciousness: so the animal was born. Consciousness is clearer and freer here, emerging into formulation: it is now instinct or sensibility and in its higher grades infused with a streak of spontaneous thinking. Sensuous mentality gave birth to Mind proper, that is thought, reflection and man appeared. A fully awakened consciousness, consciousness that can turn round upon itself is the characteristic marking out human consciousness.

Such then are the stages in the progression of consciousness; they are clearly observable and admitted practically on all hands. Only Sri Aurobindo points out two crucial characters

---

of this movement. First: Matter, Life, Mind-Intelligence—these are not distinct or separate entities, one coming after another, the succeeding one simply adding itself to the preceding, coming we do now know from where. Not so, for something cannot come out of nothing. If life came out of Matter, it is because life was there hidden in Matter Matter was secretly housing, was instinct with life. That only can evolve which was involved. So, again, if Mind came out of life, it is because Mind was involved in life and therefore also in Matter although at a farther remove. Yet again, vital mind developed into Intelligence and consciousness proper, and it could be only because that too was its secret nature and hence the secret nature of Life and even brute Matter. Thus the whole chain of gradation is linked together indissolubly and the binding reality that runs through all is consciousness, overt or covert. It is indeed consciousness that lies at the root of existence—the basic substance, Matter is nothing but consciousness become unconscious; and the whole scheme or process of the cosmos is the increasing manifestation and expression of that consciousness. Secondly, the other character is that at each cross-over, there is not only a rise in consciousness but also a reversal of consciousness, that is to say, the level attained turns back upon the preceding levels, influencing and moulding them as far as possible in its own mode and law of existence. When life appeared in Matter, wherever there was material life, the matter thus taken up by life behaved differently from dead matter: an organic body does not follow the strict mechanical laws of inanimate bodies. Likewise a life endowed with mind has a different functioning than mere life. And a body which houses a life and mind, which has, as it were, flowered into life and mind moves and acts in another way than an inert body or even a vitalised body. Man's intelligence and reason have reoriented or tend to reorient his vital instincts and reactions, even his bodily functions and forms. A conscious regulation, even refashioning of his life and body is the very essence of human consciousness, the urge of his nature, instead of a spontaneous *laissez-faire* movement of pure vitality or the mechanical ground of the material base. These three major provinces or layers of consciousness—Matter, Life and Mind—man has taken up into himself and in the light of his consciousness