

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

—his Intelligence—has studied and classified them arranging them serially as the well-known sciences of Physics, Biology and Psychology.

Now, Sri Aurobindo says, evolution marches onward and will rise beyond mind to another status of consciousness which he calls Supermind. In the earthly scheme there will thus manifest a new type, a higher functioning of consciousness and a new race or species will appear on earth with this new consciousness as the ruling principle. Out of the rock and mineral came the plant, out of the plant the animal, out of the mere animal man has come and out of man the Superman will come inevitably.

Standing on the mental plane, immured within the dimensions of Reason and mental intelligence, it is not easy to contemplate the type of consciousness that will be; even as it was difficult for the ape to envisage the advent of his successor, man. But certain characteristic signs, rudimentary or fragmentary movements of the higher status are visible in the mental consciousness even as it is: the ape likewise was not without a glimmer of Reason and logic, even the faculty of ratiocination that seems to be the exclusive property of man. There is, for example, a movement we call Intuition, so different from Reason to which even Scientists and Mathematicians acknowledge their debt of gratitude for so many of their discoveries and inventions. There is also the other analogous movement called Inspiration that rules the poet and the artist disclosing to them a world of beauty and reality that is not available to the normal human consciousness. Again, there is yet another group of human beings at the top of the ladder of evolution—mystics and sages—who *see* the truth, possess the truth direct through a luminous immediacy of perception, called Revelation. Now, all these functionings of consciousness that happen frequently enough within the domain of normal humanity are still expressions of a higher mode of consciousness : they are not the product or play of Reason or logical intelligence which marks the character, the differentia of human consciousness.

But, as at present, these are mere glimmers and glimpses from elsewhere and man has no command or control over them. They are beyond the habitual conscious will, they come and go as

they like, happy visitations from another world, they do not abide our question and are not at our beck and call. The Supermind, on the contrary, is in full possession of that consciousness of which these are faint beginnings and distant echoes. The Superman will be born when man has risen above his mind and emerged into the supramental consciousness.

One thing needs to be pointed out here: it is that man is expected to consciously transcend himself and deliver this supermanhood, for it is to be a conscious process, a labour of the wakeful will. That is the great difference which the new transition has brought in. So long evolution was a spontaneous and apparently unconscious process, moving slowly and inadvertently as things in nature normally move. Man rose out of the animal: he simply found himself man one day, there was no conscious effort, no previous knowledge of the change on the part of the animal undergoing the change

Likewise the animal came out of its plant origin spontaneously and unwittingly: the plant too evolved out of the inert and inanimate matter through a natural process of slow mutation. But now at the stage of manhood consciousness has become fully conscious, self-conscious, and therefore its further ascension cannot but be conscious, ever more conscious, the result of deliberate energising. This is a process of self-transformation. It has a method, a technique, a whole system of its own. The growth of consciousness, its culture and transformation is the end and purpose of all true education: its highest consummation, its supreme perfection is what is intended by Yoga, the mystic's system of inner discipline.

We say, then, supramentalisation of consciousness is the goal Nature is aiming at and man striving for: it is the next step that earth and man are taking in their evolutionary urge. Man, however, represents a very crucial stage—he is the dividing line between two hemispheres—two modes of consciousness, two types of creation. As I have said, up to man it is a natural spontaneous unreflecting unconscious evolution: with man it is conscious, deliberate, wilful evolution. What was being done behind the veil in ignorance will now be done openly in full knowledge. The very first result will be the shortening of the time factor. The conscious process increases the tempo, telescopes into decades or years a process or development that

would take centuries or more otherwise; in man a growth is achieved in one life that would normally need several lives. The other characteristic result is that when the Supermind establishes itself, there is no more ignorance, it is all light and knowledge. Till the mental range, even at its highest heights, it is a mixture of light and darkness, of knowledge and ignorance: there is always an element of doubt, uncertainty or partial perception: there is a groping, a trial and one moves at best from greater darkness to lesser shade. With the Supermind all that changes: the Superman lives always in the full daylight, in the zenith consciousness, in the plenitude of knowledge. He moves from light to light, knowledge to knowledge, no longer bound to the division and duality inherent in the present human consciousness. It may be that man may not at a bound reach the peak of the Supermind: for there are lower ranges, voluntary limitations of the Light, less absolute formulations of the perfect being through which man will have to pass for a greater enrichment of his nature and for the establishment of other orders of luminous existence upon earth. Sri Aurobindo has, in this connection, spoken of the Overmind and the Mind of Light. But these too lie beyond the border of mental twilight and are domains of Light, own delegates of Supermind.

It may not be out of place here just to mention a few characters proper to this supramental over-border consciousness. First of all, it is the seat and organon of complete knowledge: knowledge here is not the result of the deductive and inductive process of reason, it does not balance pros and cons and out of uncertain possibilities strike out an average probability: it is direct, straight, immediate, certain and absolute. Knowledge here comes by identity—the knower and the known are one and what is known is therefore self-knowledge, Secondly, the will too is not an effort or striving and struggling, but the spontaneous expression of the self-power of the consciousness; willing means achieving, one wills the inevitable truth for, knowledge and will too are one. Thirdly, it is the status of perfect delight, for one has passed beyond the vale of tears and entered the peace that passeth understanding, one has found that Joy is the source of creation and the truth of existence is held in Ecstasy.

It is in other words at bottom the Vedantic status of Sat-chit ananda (perfect Being, Consciousness-energy and Beatitude), but individualised serving as the basic reality of the world-life and existence: it is this that seeks to manifest and embody itself in its own dharma—supreme law—in and through the physical forms and modes of that life and existence. Beyond this it is not possible here to enter into the further mysteries of the Arcanum.

Lastly, another point and we have done. It is that all human efforts in the past in any realm or domain towards a higher life has been contributory to this supreme consummation that Sri Aurobindo envisages as coming or sure to come. It is very often asserted that human nature is irremediable and although we may try at a little amelioration of his instinctive life, especially as a social being, there can be no permanent or radical cure of the original sin of Ignorance and Inconscience with which his earthly nature is branded. Reformers, idealists, even saints and sages have seen and sought to counter the evil —some tried to get rid of it, others round it: but it is still there, as rampant as ever, apparently with no effect upon it. For one thing, evil was sought to be cured by its opposite, the good, but the good that belongs to the level of consciousness to which evil too belongs. In other words, we tried to deal with the world and treat it with the force of the Mind, even though in some cases, the mind was a high or even the highest spiritual mind. To touch the roots of the malady that extend into our deepest fibres, our most material being, dead inconscience, one must rise to the very source of consciousness, the creative truth-consciousness: the Supermind alone can transform the earth, transfigure the earthly life. In the second place, the past attempts did not all go in vain: they were preparations, the first ground-work, on various levels and in various domains of human life and consciousness where the light infiltrated, to whatever extent it may be and things, and forces were shaken and reshuffled to admit of other forces and inspirations; if nothing else, at least the possibility was created.

Sri Aurobindo's aim, we have said, is not an individual fulfilment, however glorious and successful it might be, and not merely the fulfilment of one limb only of the individual however deep and high. Sri Aurobindo embraced the whole

man and the whole society. A fulfilled life in society upon earth—the highest and completest life possible, not only possible but inevitable to the human being—that is the work for which he laboured. Man's mind and intelligence, his life- energy, his body-form are all taken up, purified of the lower formulation, remoulded into the mode and pattern of the supramental truth-consciousness: he becomes a complete, integral perfect being expressing and embodying in all his limbs and movements the supreme reality made of utter truth and knowledge and power and delight. This being his individual life, his collective or social life too would figure the same pattern. A new society in which men have found their soul and soul function is a harmonious, a unitary body, composed of individuals who by living each one in his self live in all and living in all each one lives in his self. Likewise, an aggregate of such societies—a society of nations, as it is already called somewhat in a prophetic vein,—will also be an inherently harmonious and unified, even a unitary body too, since all these larger units will express through their corporate life each in its own special way the glory and greatness of the Divine Consciousness.

In this global reconstitution of the earth life, Sri Aurobindo gives India a great role—a mighty destiny and a heavy responsibility. For he considers India as the repository of the spiritual consciousness, the Guardian of Truth, as the Veda says, and in the new age of world unification her national being will act as the spearhead breaking into the old-world formations and signalling the shape of things to come.

II

"The poet of patriotism, the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity" he was, in the famous words of his advocate and friend and follower who stood for him before the bar of History for his cause, and not merely before a British Court of Justice. Indeed he was all that, but today we have to add another epithet and complete the description. For he is now the builder of the Life Divine. This was indeed the secret Truth that worked in him from behind and gave to these

earlier preoccupations the reality and the beauty they attained and the fullness of their significance. He worked for human evolution, that was his life mission. He thus formulates the stages of human evolution:

"Family, nationality, humanity are Vishnu's three strides from an isolated to a collective unity. The first has been fulfilled, we yet strive for the perfection of the second, towards the third we are reaching out our hands and the pioneer work is already attempted".

But the supreme secret lies in Vishnu's fourth stride, from humanity to divinity. That is the goal of the evolution and that furnishes also the key to the solution of the problem. Whether in the matter of the family or the nationality or humanity in general there has been a stalemate, a stagnation, even a frustration; an effort towards progress seemed to lead more towards conflict, disharmony, away from what is beautiful and good and happy. That is bound to be. Man must reach his very highest and deepest, his absolute itself before he can arrive at perfection in the lower and the relative. Man must exceed himself if he is to fulfil himself. A new connotation has to be found for family and nationality and even humanity. That connotation, Sri Aurobindo says, is divinity.

We must understand however that there is divinity and divinity. There is a divinity that suffers, supports and transcends all that is existent. For it is the all-reality, all-consciousness, the ever-present and- omnipresent Immutable behind the mutabilities of creation. That does not take part in the cosmic struggle, the universal urge of progress forward. Apart from the divinity that suffers, there is a divinity that shapes —and is shaped at the same time, shapes from behind and is shaped itself in front. This dynamic Divine Sri Aurobindo calls the supramental Divine or the incarnate Divine Mother.

In the inevitable course of evolution man is something that will be surpassed, not in the sense that he will be rejected and thrown out as an unnecessary element, like some of the prehistoric animals, no, he will still be at the head of earthly creation, but undergo a sea-change, as it were, and be transmuted into a divine creature.

As at present man is a mental being, that is to say, it is his mind—his reason and intellect—that governs him and it is through that faculty that he governs the world. But mind is not the highest or the most powerful faculty in him, nor the last term of his consciousness. Beyond the mind there rise other powers of consciousness, tier upon tier, and man can go there, live there or bring them down into his normal life and change it into their pattern. The highest of these Sri Aurobindo calls the plane of Truth-Consciousness, the Supermind. It is the supreme luminous Power—the Light of lights—towards which the creation moves and by which the creation is moved in secret. It is the heart-centre of fulfilled harmony.

Man has been striving through his lesser powers, through "the grace of the lower gods since his advent upon earth to arrive at a reconstruction of his life and surroundings. That is why he has never attained the full measure of success. Indeed a period of success or progress was always followed by a period of decline and retrogression, a so-called golden age by an age of iron. As a matter of fact today humanity finds itself terribly enclosed in a cage of iron as it were. The earth has become too small for his soaring capacities and multitudinous necessities—he is already thinking of a place in the moon! That is only the sign and symbol of an inner impasse to which he has arrived. The anguish of the human soul has reached its acme: the problems, social, political, educational, moral it is facing have proved themselves to be totally insoluble. Yes, he has run into a cul-de-sac, where he is caught as in a death-trap. No ordinary rational methods, half-way nostrums can deliver him any more. All the outer doors and issues are now closed for him; the only way is to turn inward, there lies the open road to freedom and fulfilment. That is the way to transcendence and surpassing. To attempt any other way is not only to try the impossible but to head straight towards doomsday.

The time then is now, for the time is ripe. It will not do to say that the way proposed is beyond the reach of the common man. He has neither the capacity nor the knowledge nor even the inclination or impulse to surpass himself, to do anything non-human. First of all, as I said, if man is to survive in any form, this is the only way and there is no second. Next, what do we know of the capacity and impulsion even of the common

man ? Even in a smaller scale and on the material level, have we not seen to what tremendous acts of heroism he can rise automatically, through what travails—tapasya—of concentrated effort he agreed to pass, simply because the occasion demanded it ? Man's secret soul is greater than all the limitation of his outward frame.

That does not mean that the entire human race will wholly change over to the new life. All, without exception, are not expected to come up to the highest level of fulfilment. But that is not required, for the beginning at least. It is always the few pioneers, a select group of forerunners that form the foundation of a new creation A first snowball perhaps, but it moves and gathers others on the way and builds up larger and larger collectivities. At all crises of evolutionary cycles such beings inevitably appear, they are thrown up-by Nature or they come down from above and incarnate; especially it is so when Nature proposes to take a leap and not merely trudge and crawl.

It is the fulfilment of Nature that has to happen and is happening, the fulfilment of the inferior Nature in and through the higher divine Nature. Here we come perhaps to the very heart of the mystery. For till now, till almost yesterday, we may say in a general way, the spiritual life, any kind of divine life was considered possible only through battling with Nature, through a struggle upstream against the current of Nature. Indeed Nature was despised, feared, rejected as an enemy of the Spirit. But today the wheel seems to have turned full circle. The, Spirit recognises the body as its counterpart and visible form, welcomes the body as its earthly figure and expression. The old antinomy has become obsolete, because the body too on its side recognises that it has not the structure and character that millennial ignorance gave it. The material particles that constitute the physical body are found to be after all not inert masses but quantas of energy, of luminous energy.

The spiritual Light above demands nothing better for its earthly home. This is symbolical of the collaboration that Nature is now offering to the Spirit. A new substance, made of light-energy emanating from Consciousness-Force, is now slowly permeating the earth atmosphere, as the Mother declares and it is this

that will serve as the basis of the new creation and give it its law and constitution. A new world built out of knowledge and vision and luminous power is destined to come, for man is no longer in love with his ignorance, but a divine afflatus is possessing him.

The new world has to be based on new foundations. The old world was built from outside with superficial cheap elements that lower Nature offers easily and profusely. It is body's needs, vital hungers assembled and arranged according to a plan supplied by mind's ideas and notions under the directive and compulsion of the ego, the sense or consciousness of one's separate individual existence as against others. The new world will start from the soul, the luminous divine element in man which is one with all and grow from within outward. It is as if the foundations are laid not below, but above—the tree of existence would branch out not from below upwards, but from above downward, in the image given by the ancient Rishis of India. The individual will therefore be not primarily a body housing secondary—or as it is sometimes called epiphenomenal —movements such as those of the mind and the vital limited and largely conditioned by it. The individual will primarily be a consciousness, a focus of energy-consciousness existing and acting in union and communion with all other similar individual foci, for all form one single undivided entity. The body . and life and mind are moulded in the substance and rhythm of that sovereign consciousness. The hard egoism or self-centredness, the gross animality that seem to be the very constitution of the human individual are dissolved into the soul's radiant urges.

The individual can be and is to be fulfilled in and through his soul—the presiding consciousness that has at its disposal the mind, the vital and the body as its instruments and means of expression, but which till now, because of an evolutionary necessity of growth and development, acted more as an obstruction or a veil than as an aid or a channel. When in the new consciousness the individual attains its soul-status, in other words, its divinity, then a reshaping and recasting of the lower . limbs becomes possible and even inevitable. The soul-status means freedom, harmony, purity, knowledge, power, delight and immortality, absolute and inalienable.

As individuals grow in this line, the social structure too is altered and transmuted. The harmony and fullness that individuals present are automatically represented in the collective grouping. Instead of a battling competitive society we have not merely a, cooperative but a unitive community striving in a common aspiration towards a single unique achievement. For all individuals know and feel that they are but various limbs of the same organism, luminously and unfailingly functioning each in its and for its own appointment—expressing differently the one Light 'supreme.

And nations that are finding so difficult, almost impossible, to form a comity, that are in their disparate tendencies driving towards a catastrophe, perhaps annihilation, shall undergo a sea-change. The nation, the national being is also a reality, a divine reality that has to come to its own"—that is to say, its own soul. For there is a collective soul, as well as an individual soul. It is the presiding deity, the norm of consciousness and being that works out the growth and evolution of a collectivity that has found a common life. This collectivity is also enlarging itself in wider and wider commonalty. As we see actually today the nation is tending towards and growing into the supranation or Commonwealth or Federation as it is termed politically.

The conception of the United- States of the world is taking possession of the human mind; it is being applied and larger and more integrated collective groupings than the nation are developing; they may ere long become familiar realities. Such . formations moving towards and effectuating the one indivisible humanity open out the possibility towards a superhumanity which will have to base itself on a new principle of organisation ; for that must be a new mode of consciousness.

Even the family, the first unit of collective formation in humanity that has attained a fulfilled status, is yet capable of a remodelling, a transmutation in the higher supramental consciousness. The family instead of being built upon blood-relationship may surely have a different foundation in soul- kinship, in affinity of consciousness, comradeship in life-work. It means a total revolution, a reversal of nature, the roots being above instead of being below, as already referred to. Such far-reaching changes may well be called for and inevitable if mankind is to be radically cured of all the illnesses of

which it is till now a natural prey The full health of a divine body in its individual as well as its collective and global functioning is assured only when the human being is lifted out of its mental sheath and established in the supramental status.

It is an adventure for the heroic soul, for the vanguards of humanity; but its fruition will spread abroad a benefit that even the common level shall share, even those that denied shall offer their accession and adhesion.