

A PEEK INTO THE HEARTS AND MINDS SHAPING INDIA'S NEXT FUTURE:

*Selection of thoughtful and thought-provoking reflections
by SACAR learners*



Photo by Eeshaan Mahesh (www.binduartaaura.com)

Sartaj Singh (USA, completed Orientation Programme in Sri Aurobindo Studies, 2007)

Topic: What, in your view, is the contemporary relevance and significance of the life-affirming spirituality of Indian tradition as described by Sri Aurobindo?

This is a great question and one I struggle with as I see some of the challenges in India: over-population, poverty, lack of education, lack of hygienic sanitation (I just read somewhere that 700 million people do not have access to hygienic toilets), pollution, corruption, and so on.

At a personal level, I believe a society (or world) that optimises the material and spiritual in all its glory will be a great place to live in. For example, a Shangri-la like environment or what James Redfield describes in his Celestine Prophecy series. Where we use technology and material advancement to support our spiritual growth (and vice versa), where there is more balance with distribution of wealth and education, where we do not destroy the planet with pollution, where we live with balanced values and not the western style consumerism (though, I have to say, I am totally caught up in this system) and so on. The West has for many years mastered the materialistic system, but the people are not leading "happy lives." Numerous studies have shown that while the real income levels have risen in the US since WW2, the happiness level has not risen. The attendance level at places of worship in

the US is amongst the highest, at least in the western sense, but people still lack a sense of meaning.

So what is missing? In my humble opinion, it is that Life Divine on earth that Sri Aurobindo talks about. A sense of harmony, balance, love, community, meaning, fulfilment, alignment, emotional/physical/mental/spiritual health and well-being. In a sense, the given topic relates to India's role in helping the evolution of the planet and our race to the next level.

As I struggled with some of the assigned reading for the course, I wondered if the reading conveys Sri Aurobindo's optimistic view to motivate lazy people like me to do our piece or is he taking such a long term perspective in an evolutionary sense, that all of this is just preparation for the future. In the spirit of this optimistic frame, here is what I would love to see (and in a sense this is the sequence in which I could possibly see things happening):

- India becomes an economic super-power.
- However, along the way, despite self-interested politicians, business people, administrators and so on, we find a way to bring more well-being to the masses (education, food, health, shelter,) I am not sure what will drive it, but it is likely to be the trickle-down impact of growth, perhaps some non-profits, and hopefully some enlightened leaders (this seems so far-fetched and my imagination/creativity struggles to visualize this!)
- While all of the above is happening, religions and spiritual discourses and practices evolve to meet the needs of contemporary times. And a lot of what is not relevant, e.g., caste system as it exists, public rituals with little meaning, fall away. I am not sure how, but somehow this reformation process takes place at a large scale.
- In parallel to the above, enlightened leaders create pockets of communities at work, in neighbourhoods, in spiritual communities, in schools, at work places, where this sense of holistic well-being exists (material and spiritual.) Thanks to the internet and globalization, once this approach is practiced and proven to create more in terms of material and spiritual wealth, it can spread easily. Academics will study it, generous leaders will give their practices and systems away, and people will realize that this is the best way to be. One of the other pieces that will contribute here is science - which will help prove that prayer, meditation, moods of generosity, communities, etc. all help promote better health and so on.

When I hear, that only one person registered for this course (though it suits me personally just fine), I get sceptical. Or for that matter, the challenges that I hear about in Auroville with governance, the lack of harmony in the interests of local Tamilians and various Aurovillians, make me worried about the future. I realize that this is my pessimistic nature and that Sri Aurobindo

would say this is a necessary trough that we have to go through before our next stage of evolution. I also know that this is my lens, and that is not yet a lens of complete surrender to the divine will. But then again, this is why I am on the path.

Gitanjali JB (Chennai, India, pursuing MPhil in Sri Aurobindo Studies, 2010)

Topic: What kind of renaissance may be needed to revive and renew the life-affirming spirituality in India? Are there any signs of such cultural renaissance in present-day India?

There are two issues here one is of "life" the other of "spirituality". Any renaissance in India has to take into account both, which have been divorced for long. Both have to be revived, renewed and synthesized. Life has to be revitalized, made dynamic and suffused with the Light of the Spirit and spirituality shorn of obsolete forms, superstitions and rituals has to be rediscovered and applied to life.

There are many signs of this renaissance. The first renaissance began with Vivekananda – a handsome, educated modern youth travels to the West and speaks on Sanatana Dharma, making the smug Westerners sit up and take cognizance of the richness and vastness of Indian Culture and Spirituality which they had long dismissed as archaic and barbaric.

The movie "Dil Chahta Hai" marked a radical departure in the thinking of the moviemakers in which for the first time in the history of Indian Cinema wealth was portrayed in a positive light. Usually poverty had been celebrated in Indian Cinema with the portrayal of the rich kid as spoilt, irreverent and evil while the poor kid as the coolie or the labourer embodied the selfless, heroic spirit. That was the bane of India for long – celebration of the spartan and the austere and the denigration of the wealthy and the elite. Mother has said that wealth is indispensable for the fullness of the outer life and has to be won back for Her, which now resides with the Asura. This change of attitude in the Indian conscience is one of the signs of the spirit of renaissance.

The ease with which the youth of today integrate their personal spiritual value system (indications of the subjective age) and outer success and excellence in their fields of activity is an encouraging sign of this life-affirming spirituality.

The various experiments in music, art, literature, dance etc. to combine the best of the true Indian Spirit and modern and western forms, the practicing of asanas and pranayama by millions of modern, jeans clad health-conscious youngsters along with their parents and grandparents is indicative of the resurfacing of aspects of Indian culture in modern forms and application.

The educationists in India are rethinking the imparting of education and many new ideas are being tried out with the renewed understanding of the individual as a soul to be assisted in evolution and not as dead matter to be moulded mindlessly. The confidence with which the best minds of India are engaged in the World scene today, be they academic, research-oriented, technological or artistic, is another sign of this upsurge. Where the socialites showed off liquor and cigarettes as their accessories thirty years ago, today they flaunt vegetarianism and yoga. Though basic and elementary at places, the evidence of coming together of life and spirituality is seen more and more in all walks of life and the day is not far when the two would reconcile in an eternal embrace.

Deepali Prasad (Bangalore, India, pursuing MA in Sri Aurobindo Studies, 2009)

Topic: Can spirituality and material success co-exist? Can India someday lead the world in such a co-existence of spirituality and prosperity?

'A culture must be judged, first by its essential spirit, then by its best accomplishments and lastly by its power of survival, renovation and adaptation.....' [Sri Aurobindo, in 'A Rationalistic Critic on Indian culture'] None of these are directly related to economic success, although that could definitely be one of the accomplishments Sri Aurobindo mentions. In fact, in her most productive times in terms of art, literature, theology, philosophy and everything that constitutes culture, India was also into her golden period economically. The two are therefore not mutually exclusive—in fact, together they would make any civilization perfect.

We must remember that Sri Aurobindo was writing about an India he saw—which was stripped of all its wealth because of subsequent foreign invasions. His defence of her was based on her glorious past and not her present economic conditions. He hoped that her past would give her the strength she needed to resist the demeaning assaults her culture was receiving at the hands of people who were not qualified to judge her. The example he gives of Greece and Rome is very relevant. If the Romans defeated the Greeks at war, that did not make their culture superior.

Just as spirituality is not helped by an empty stomach, it also is not aided by excess. We see that in our present all the time. India is on her feet and slated to be an economic super power in the not so distant future. The same addiction to 'success' that Sri Aurobindo saw as a western malady now afflicts us all. Has that made us happier people? I don't think so.

The good thing, however, is that we have the formula for happiness right here and ready to be called upon whenever we are ready. Our ancestors have done our work for us. Spirituality is not the domain of the rich or the poor. It is an experience waiting to happen to anyone who is ready for it. By

ready I mean when we have given up our dependence on both substances—happiness and unhappiness.

As Indians we all know it is within us, and very much within our reach. Perhaps that is why we are so complacent!

Geetanjali Prabhu (Mangalore, India, pursuing MPhil in Sri Aurobindo Studies, 2009)

Topic: Can spirituality and material success co-exist? Can India someday lead the world in such a co-existence of spirituality and prosperity?

It is my personal opinion that, yes, spirituality and prosperity can co-exist, and yet material prosperity is not an essential prerequisite for spiritual progress. Here I quote Sri Aurobindo's definition of Spirituality from "A Rationalistic Critic on Indian Culture – part 3":

"Spirituality has meant hitherto a recognition of something greater than mind and life, the aspiration to a consciousness pure, great, divine beyond our mental & vital nature, a surge and rising of the soul in man out of the littleness and bondage of our lower parts towards a greater thing secret within him."

While it is not easy to scale the heights of spirituality, it is just as difficult to describe what spirituality is. The definition by Sri Aurobindo is so complete and comprehensive, it is so real and the words just flow so naturally even as he describes something that is so abstract. Material success and prosperity are immaterial to spiritual endeavour.

Money is definitely a means but it is not an end in itself; however, I would like to recollect that Swami Vivekananda is known to have said that one can't preach religion to a hungry man. Undoubtedly true; but the thirst of the spirit cannot be quenched with anything material. While food, clothing and shelter are basic necessities of life, spiritual prosperity is what makes life meaningful and fruitful. Asceticism and monastic life does not depend on any gold coins in any coffers. Here I wish to use a vernacular term 'yukta-vairagya' which means that 'an appropriate detachment,' suitable as per one's age and station in life, is the first step to attain spiritual heights.

Cultural disorientation is what we face as a problem in modern India. The reasons are divergent and perhaps uncalled for in the context of the question posed above. Sri Aurobindo very poetically calls this a "temporary eclipse."

It is my personal opinion that the rule of the White man and cultural domination shall not prevail forever, the very fact that the West looks at the East in general and India in particular for spiritual advancement is a proof to the effect that we live in a world of inter and intra dependencies. Each nation

is a force and is uniquely blessed by Nature. It is only when the technologically advanced West and the humane and spiritually conscious East passionately love and respect each other that fraternal co-existence and concord are possible. It is only when the nations of the world learn to respect and understand cultures other than their own that the world shall attain any semblance of peace and prosperity. Only such peace and prosperity can be long lasting in this world where nothing is eternal; everyone and everything is a mere subject of Time and Nature!

Siv Jakobsen (Norway & Auroville, pursuing MA in Sri Aurobindo Studies, 2009)

Topic: Reflections on 'The Religion of Humanity' and what I learned from it.

This chapter "The Religion of Humanity" from Sri Aurobindo's book, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, was a discovery for me. Now I have an understanding of why religion is important for humanity. I never saw it this clearly before, it has become so visible now through this chapter and context. I also understand where my own humanitarian view comes from.

Sri Aurobindo starts the chapter with "A religion of humanity may be either an intellectual and sentimental ideal, a living dogma with intellectual, psychological and practical effects, or else a spiritual aspiration and rule of living, partly the sign, partly the cause of a change of soul in humanity." He further points out that the religion which was mind-borne in the eighteenth century had humanitarianism as its most prominent emotional result and that Democracy, Socialism, Pacifism were to a great extent its by-products or at least owe much of their vigour to its inner presence. Sri Aurobindo explains that in humanitarianism, "The fundamental idea is that mankind is the godhead to be worshipped and served by man and that the respect, the service, the progress of the human being and human life are the chief duty and the chief aim of the human spirit."

From this description I find a deeper understanding of my own view as a citizen of a democratic country with socialistic tendencies. I have even argued with others about exploitation of the poor by the rich! I have always had this zero tolerance for any mistreatment against human beings, and a zeal for the uncompromising aim of equality for all people in the world as the only acceptable standard and aim. I have also been in agreement with the idea which Sri Aurobindo says in these words: "the progress of the human being and human life are the chief duty and the chief aim of the human spirit." The difference, however, between my previous understanding and now that I have come to know spirituality, and especially Sri Aurobindo's vision and work, is that earlier I was only seeing this aim from the outer surface. Now I see that both spirit and matter have to progress for the same aim, man has to become a perfect

vessel for a conscious Divine manifestation in matter.

I find it very interesting that Sri Aurobindo says that "...the enemy of all real religion, is human egoism, ...These (egoisms) could for a time soften, modify, force to curb their more arrogant, open and brutal expressions, oblige to adopt better institutions, but not to give place to the love of mankind, not to recognise a real unity between man and man. For that essentially must be the aim of the religion of humanity... Till that is brought about, the religion of humanity remains unaccomplished. With that done, the one necessary psychological change will have been effected without which no formal and mechanical, no political and administrative unity can be real and secure. If it is done, that outward unification may not even be indispensable or, if indispensable, it will come about naturally, not, as now it seems likely to be, by catastrophic means, but by the demand of the human mind, and will be held secure by an essential need of our perfected and developed human nature." I can see that humanitarianism is aiming at liberty and equality. At the same time I can see as Sri Aurobindo that in a socialistic democratic society these two are very difficult to combine because the liberty to progress is in most cases taken as a liberty to grow in power and money, while equality in such a society aims at the same possibility for all, but it has also fixed standards for what is possible and seen to give beneficial outcome. In a way, my own country, Norway, is in a constant fight between the two. When equality is diminished, liberty has to be diminished and vice versa. Now liberty is given most space and equality is diminished. It seems to be closely connected to the state of economy. Strong economy and high level of employment give higher degree of liberty while a weak economy cries for equality because it has less to share.

TC Venkateswara Rao (Vijaywada, AP, India, pursuing MPhil in Sri Aurobindo Studies, 2010)

Topic: Problems with present constitutional setup of Indian government and a way toward the future

The peculiarity of our constitution is fusion of the highest executive and legislative authorities without any antagonism. But there is a clear distinction between the functions of executive and the functions of Parliament. The Parliament is to deliberate, discuss, legislate, advise, citizens and ventilates public grievances. It has also to play a legitimatization role. The Executive is to govern the people on behalf of the Parliament and Parliament on behalf of the people.

The Executive has almost unlimited right to initiate and formulate legislative and financial proposals before Parliament and to give effect to approved policies unfettered and unhindered by Parliament. The Parliament

has the unlimited power to call for information, to discuss, to scrutinize and to put the seal of popular approval on proposals made by the Executive. At the same time the Executive remains responsible and the administration accountable to Parliament. The function of Parliament is to exercise political and financial control over the Executive and to ensure Parliamentary surveillance of administration.

But unfortunately neither the Executive nor the Legislative authorities are keen about anything except their continuity in power and amassing the wealth as capital for further investment for absolute power at the cost of anything including the Sovereignty of the nation. The present parliamentary system gives a feeling that we are still under the foreign administration even after more than 60 years of independence, as there is not even an iota of change from the slavish mentality, divide and rule policy, and looting the Indian society and depositing the looted money in the foreign countries. The solution to come out of this pathetic condition is to implement what Sri Aurobindo suggested long ago – “[In India] one should begin with the old Panchayat system in the villages and then work up to the top. The Panchayat system and the guild are more representative and they have a living contact with people; they are part of the people’s ideas. On the contrary, the parliamentary system with local bodies – the Municipal Councils – is not workable: these councils have no living contact with the people, the Councilors make only platform speeches and nobody knows what they do for three or four years; at the end they reshuffle and rearrange the whole thing, making their own pile during their period of power.” (Nirodbaran, Talks with Sri Aurobindo, Vol.1, pp. 230-234)

The Constitution of India established an independent judiciary with powers of judicial review. The High Court and the Supreme Court form a single integrated judicial structure with jurisdiction over all laws – Union, State, Civil, Criminal or Constitutional. The judiciary not only adjudicates disputes but also acts as the custodian of individual rights and freedom and may from time to time interpret the Constitution and review legislation. It is painful to point out that for a common man it appears that the adopted British law and the judicial system in India is meant for protecting the interests of the rich, influenced, politicians in power, terrorists and corrupted people in all walks of life at the same time as justice for honest and sincere common man is always delayed if not denied.

Secularism in its true spirit and sense is not implemented. Political parties are commercializing the term secularism and pampering certain section of people and curtailing the fundamental rights of the rest of the people. Caste system is exploited by the political parties for their illegal activities. Ambedkar’s fight for the cause of the socially and economically suppressed section of the people and the provision of reservation in the Constitution is misused for meeting the political ends. As a result of this, a kind of insecurity is prevailing among people of all sections. People are afraid of approaching police,

politician, advocates, courts, or for that matter any government machinery, because the entire government machinery is working at the beck and call of the political party in power which works only for the interests of their party men. It amounts to saying that everyone in the government machinery is a recognized party man of the ruling party or the group of parties which may be representing less than 50% of the electorate.

This could be eliminated by introducing party-less democracy through introduction of village governments of each big village or a group of small villages formed by the elected representatives and an elected President. All functions including revenue collection, police, registration, electricity, education, health and hygiene, drinking water, irrigation, roads and buildings, forestry, animal husbandry and hygiene and dairying, agriculture, court and maintenance of records etc. should be at village level so that the villager need not move out of village for any government related works. The presidents of these village governments will become the members of the Provincial government and the head of the Provincial government shall be elected from these members. The heads of the provincial governments form the members of the Federal government and elect the Rashtrapati who will head the Federal government. This type of structure will have soul contact with the people and the question of falling of the government for want of majority does not arise. The term of office will be completed without any hurdle unless and until the member violates the dharma.

To explore the possibilities of such a future form of Indian government, it is important to recall a few words from one of Sri Aurobindo's letters in which he briefly wrote about his vision for the future of Indian politics. He said, "I have no doubt we shall have to go through our Parliamentary period in order to get rid of the notion of western democracy by seeing in practice how helpless it is to make nations blessed. India is passing really through the first stage of a sort of national Yoga...It is only when this foolishness is done with that truth will have a chance.... In all I believe God to be guiding us, giving the necessary experience, preparing the necessary conditions." (Archives & Research, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, December 1977, p. 84)

Humera Roshi (Kuwait & Kolkata, India, pursuing Post-graduate Diploma in Studies in Indian Culture, 2008)

Topic: Reflections on Secularism, Communalism and Terrorism in India

I am happy to have this opportunity to speak from the bottom of my heart. I have just finished reading this week's selections ("The Current Hindu Upsurge in Sri Aurobindo's Light" by Mangesh Nadkarni, and "Is an Indian Alternative to Secularism Possible?" by Ashis Nandy) and based on some of the topics covered in these excellent readings I'll talk here about secularism,

communalism and terrorism. Excuse me for being informal at places.

When we speak about secularism in India, it's taken as being pro-Muslim and anti-Hindu. When we speak about communalism, it's usually Hindu communalism against Muslims and the copy right to terrorism has gone to Muslims! We all know that these notions are not always correct and can be vice versa but in social or public life we are comfortable in maintaining this stance as it gives us social acceptance. Here, I'm talking about the English educated and so-called liberal minded class and that includes me too. However, guided by my conscience, I've tried to think on these topics separately based on my own life experiences.

Secularism

Are all Muslims secular? NO! Muslims can be as communal as any Hindu or any other human being. In fact, in my own life of 36 years, I've come across more secular Hindus than Muslims. The masses amongst Muslims consider themselves God's own children and are waiting for the day when all non-believers would be wiped off the face of earth. They are highly critical of the rights and privileges that the Indian government should offer them. They speak about their victimization but never openly denounce Islamic terrorism or say, the dislocation of Kashmiri pundits. They project themselves to be secular when they are afraid of being cornered but can be quite communal when they are in majority.

In this context, a recent incidence comes to my mind. On my last visit to Kolkata, my brother-in-law played a CD during a dinner party at our place (everyone watching was a Muslim). The CD covered an interfaith dialogue meeting between Dr. Zakir Naik and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. It was organized by Dr. Zakir's own organization and the convener was his own brother. What struck me immediately was that Dr. Zakir was invited to talk first and that his primary focus was on criticizing the technical flaws in Sri Sri Ravishankar's book about which he himself had admitted to write in haste in the backdrop of the Gujarat riots. The majority of the questioners posed questions to Dr. Zakir and the rest were there to insult Sri Sri Ravi Shankar by hurling abuses at him and being cheered by the public. Dr. Zakir Naik's rote memory exceeds that of a genius and he remembers the exact location of verses in the Quran, Gita and the Vedas. He was there to flaunt this. In contrast, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar remained calm and poised. He spoke very little and those few words were enough to express his message. No wonder, when I pointed out these facts to the cheering lot present at my own home, I was looked back with contempt.

Are all Muslims non-secular? NO! Muslims are as secular as Hindus or any other human being. Our armed forces comprise of a large number of Muslims and their integrity has never been questioned. The Muslims present in the film industry practice true secularism, many of them have inter-religion

marriages, not seen much elsewhere. Also there is no dearth of practicing Muslims who are not only secular but are also patriotic, law abiding and have a significant contribution to the society.

Is secularism present in the Indian society? Everywhere. The pluralist tradition of our civilization has taught us to live and let live. Had it not been so, our society would not have rebounded after the great many riots which India has witnessed. I conclude with the observation that secularism is not confined to any particular community. It's a human trait and is more pronounced in India because it's in accordance with the pluralist tradition of Indian culture. Indian society does not need to learn secularism from the West or from political pundits. In fact, people have resisted against secularism more when it is enforced or when it becomes the agenda of political parties.

Communalism

Since India has a Hindu majority, charges of communalism are always levied against them. I've experienced Hindu communalism in my own life but I reassert that communalism is not a domain particular to the Hindu community. I think communalism is a product of age old biases, prejudices and subjugation of interests of a community over a period of time. Communalism is also maneuvered to fulfill political motives.

Being an Indian Muslim, I have come across communalism many times but they are too few in contrast to the love and friendship I've received within the Hindu community. Also I feel that communalism exists more on a mass basis and less on individual basis. Speaking about myself, I've at times felt insecure in moving alone being a woman but never because of being a Muslim woman. The government has a big role to play in this. Firstly, the riot victims do not get full justice and secondly, the rioters are not identified and convicted. A general air of suspicion looms and this manifests into yet another riot. To be specific, I take the example of the Godhra train burning and the riots that followed. Nadkarni says that the pilgrims in the train were subjected to this violence in their own country. Does this mean that those who died in the post-Godhra violence were not living in their own country? The point that I want to make here is that Hindus will have to get rid of the idea that the Muslims living in India do not belong to this land. On the other hand, Muslims should whole-heartedly take pride in their Indian roots, lineage and culture (and not cheer for Pakistan during cricket matches). I am no authority to speak on what exactly happened in the fateful train at Godhra but I fail to understand why the culprits have not been identified till now and why such matters are pushed under the carpet? Also, the entire world seems to know and believe that the riots were maneuvered by the CM of Gujarat but why could not the law of this country levy a single charge against him? These incidences create mistrust within an entire community

against the governing system.

Terrorism

Since the 9/11 bombings in the U.S, terrorism has been linked with Islam. These terrorists of Islamist groups attacked innocent people in many cities in India and most recently in Mumbai. Here, it's the duty of the government to ensure all possible methods to wipe out terrorism from the country, but a greater onus lies on the Muslim community, seeing the fragile communal fabric of our country. I think that the whole Muslim community should condemn Islamic terrorism in stronger words. On the other hand, it is wrong on the part of any community to brand all Muslims as terrorists and anti-Hindus and important to understand that they too are victims of this terrorism just as other Indian citizens. Similarly, like secularism and communalism, terrorism has no religion. I remember, a few years ago, my son was playing hide and seek with his friends. A boy called him, 'Hey, you Taliban, come out!' This may be an isolated incident but it does reflect how quickly people associate a group or community with a bad name, sometimes, for fun sake. Unfortunately, at times, this insensitivity comes more with affluence and economic prosperity.

Response to these reflections from Beloo, course facilitator:

I really appreciate your sharing these reflections – straight from the heart and yet quite balanced and reasonable in their analysis and approach. The critical and sincere self-reflective nature of these thoughts about both the communities adds much value to these reflections. Very well done! As a pre-requisite to any mutual understanding and goodwill between different communities, people have to first look honestly and reflectively at themselves with as much sincerity and objectivity as possible. Sure, there will be sore spots and difficult feelings to work through, but no one said the path to peace will be easy! So I really appreciate and congratulate you for your taking all these readings in the true spirit in which they are intended and taking this opportunity to speak about feelings and thoughts so candidly and respectfully.

I fully agree with you that so much of the ill-will and prejudice can be removed if the culprits of such horrendous crimes like the Godhra train burnings or the riots that happened after this incident or other communal riots that happen in the country are swiftly and appropriately punished. But sadly, the greedy and power hungry politicians want to make use of these things for their own political purposes and thereby keep both the communities suspicious of each other. An online friend of mine (someone whom I have never met but we were members of an online chat community of Indians living abroad, a Muslim guy living in Australia) once told me

about some comment made by a religious leader (I think it was some Shankaracharya of some particular Math) in which he spoke about Hindus and Muslims in India being like Ram and Lakshmana – the two who combine to make one. Rama was incomplete as an Avatar without Lakshmana, and so is India incomplete without Hindus and Muslims. This is the opportunity Nature has given to India to work at and arrive at a real living unity of these two different religions. And these riots and prejudices and ill-will that we see are perhaps the necessary struggles on the way because we have to go through the worst in order to arrive at the golden future. So as painful and destructive as all of this part of our Indian society is, we must develop an optimistic and widest possible vision to see all of this as a necessary hump we have to cross. It is like living through hell before arriving at the gate of the heaven. No other culture in the world can take up such a challenge of synthesizing and uniting these two very different faith systems. Only Indian culture has the potential and know-how to do this because Indian culture can give us the necessary tools to look beyond the outer surface of these religions and go deeper and deeper and find the unity at the level of the spiritual essence of these religions.

The Mother had once said that whatever problems that modern times will throw at us – whether they are economic, social or political – will come in their most extreme forms in India because India has to be the churning ground for all these problems. And because India alone has the power to provide solutions to these problems from a spiritual perspective, and that is what is needed. After all, we have tried all that the mind and intellect can provide. You have shared several examples about how the well-educated and prosperous sections of all different communities can harbour ill-will and prejudice against one another. This is true of all human nature because of the strong hold of our lower vital nature and our infra-rational tendencies. So the only solution is to move up in our level of consciousness – beyond infra-rational to rationality and supra-rationality, beyond vital to mental and then further beyond. Spiritual, inner progress alone can provide us the necessary path on this journey.

Deepali Gupta (Saharanpur, UP, India, pursuing PhD in Sri Aurobindo Studies, 2009)

Topic: Knowledge Societies and Sri Aurobindo's vision for the future

Sri Aurobindo's integral vision offers a vast richness of thought to the evolving Knowledge Societies of the future. "Even when a nation or an age has developed within itself knowledge and science and arts, but still in its general outlook, its habits of life and thought is content to be governed not by knowledge and truth and beauty and high ideals of living, but by the

gross vital, commercial, economic view of existence, we say that that nation or age may be civilized in a sense, but for all its abundant or even redundant appliances and apparatus of civilization it is not the realization or the promise of a cultured humanity." (The Human Cycle, 1997, p. 92)

A true knowledge society should regard social, cultural, ethical and aesthetic values as its prime concern before putting any sort of knowledge into practice. "The sword of knowledge is a double-edged weapon; in the hands of the hero it can save the world, but it must not be made a plaything for children." (CWSA, vol. 1, p. 328) Along with all the empowerment achieved by material progress through intellectual and scientific development, knowledge societies should develop in heart and spirit too, if they are to become knowledge societies in the truest sense or otherwise they are prone to using knowledge for self-interest and may even cause harm to the society at large. "For man intellectually developed, mighty in scientific knowledge and the mastery of gross and subtle nature, using the elements as his servants and the world as his footstool, but undeveloped in heart and spirit, becomes only an inferior kind of Asura using the powers of a demigod to satisfy the nature of an animal." (ibid, p. 439) The nation called India needs to re-awaken to its higher ideals of exercising wisdom over knowledge, spiritual strength over the power of matter unleashed by technology, harmony among the varied knowledge societies catering to diverse interests, and the pursuit of perfection in seeking purity of the heart, mind and soul over and above individual or group interests, as since time immemorial we have been worshippers of Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati.

The West has made concentrated effort towards improving the quality of life through specialized knowledge. India, along with adopting and adapting to new ways of storing and retrieving knowledge has a vast potential to supplement and enrich it with its cherished ideal of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*,' (the world is a family). The national and cultural spirit needs to be revived in the youth of India, most of who are unaware of their rich heritage of knowledge and culture. They need to grow conscious of the fact that their individual and collective thinking forms the national mind.

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Topic: Sri Aurobindo's vision of future of poetry and literary theory

The beginning of the 20th century marked the coming of the school of formalism and New Criticism. Here, the reader and the poet both were subdued under the weight of text. The reader had to take into consideration the form of the text alone and interpret it without being concerned about the history and background of the poet. This facilitated an objective reading of the text.

From this text centric approach emerged the theories for the texts, myth criticism, structuralism, post-structuralism, Marxist criticism etc. These theories tried to establish the autonomy and supremacy of the text over the poet and the reader. Once the importance of text was established it gave way to the Reader Response theory bringing the reader into focus. Roland Barthes emphasized that it is the reader who gives meaning to the text. Then the subsequent theories developed about the dominant cultural, political and social aspects in the text, in the poet and the reader. There is a gradual development of the schools emphasizing the importance of the poet, the text, and the reader. It was not a linear development though; many of thoughts and approaches co-existed simultaneously.

The amalgam, integration, heightening and deepening of the ways to appreciate and create poetry or literary texts reaches its acme in Sri Aurobindo. Certainly, post-structuralism and such other theories came into being after Sri Aurobindo wrote, but Sri Aurobindo's vision of poetry which he envisaged and exemplified has already integrated these fragments of thoughts and visions and the theory has already seen the day light before the dawn.

Sri Aurobindo does not undermine the importance of any – reader, writer/ poet, text, technique, genius, style, imagery or the figures of speech. All these are important for the formation of poetry; they have to have a harmonious interaction and manifestation in words. The breaking and making of form, the structural and cultural explorations of the text, the emphasis on the word, its semantic use, the importance of sound and its impact, all these studies are actually trying to bring out the inmost, the higher and the deeper essence of the text. The explorations in the field of literature and literary theory also bring out the potential of a text and its impact and relation to humanity. V.S. Seturaman traces the whole corpus Indian and Western aesthetics and concludes his observation foreseeing the future of literary theory with the eyes of Sri Aurobindo –

The function of poetry is to make the soul of a man a reality, something that is palpable and substantial as substance itself. Now that human intelligence has reached its highest peak, it must have seen its limitations and has to grant the superiority of intuition. In the best poetry there will be the marriage of the word and the spirit; the word will be an appropriate instrument of the spirit itself. And that word is not and cannot simply be a sign or a counter. (It is not surprising that the structuralists and the post structuralists examine any poem or utterance entirely on semantic and epistemic terms neglecting wholly other dimensions of poetry such as rhythm/imagery/sensuous components to which intuition alone can be responsive.) It is this possibility, shall we say, certainty, that is envisaged...[in] Sri Aurobindo's Future Poetry.

These theories are different attempts of the critics and poets to excel and exceed in their own poetic and critical endeavor. They wanted to make the method of appreciating poetry or any text more and more scientific and objective. However, not all parameters other than the formal could prove to be objective. Even, when the form is analyzed, it might not yield the same

meaning for all the readers and critics. Therefore, a new parameter has to be found. Sri Aurobindo found this parameter in the source of inspiration. His letters on poetry reveal that poets seek inspiration they call the Muse to help them write good poetry. This Muse does not only belong to a particular realm, it comes from different realms and even in a mixed form. These are the levels of inspiration, which Sri Aurobindo calls the Overhead inspiration. They belong to the realm higher than the mind. He writes –

All poetry is an inspiration, a thing breathed into the thinking organ from above; it is recorded in the mind, but is born in the higher principle of direct knowledge or ideal vision which surpasses mind. It is in reality a revelation. The prophetic or revealing power sees the substance; the inspiration perceives the right expression. Neither is manufactured; nor is poetry really a poesis or composition, nor even a creation, but rather the revelation of something that eternally exists. The ancients knew this truth and used the same word for poet and prophet, creator and seer, sophos, vates, kavi. (Essays Divine and Human p.28)

The “higher principle of direct knowledge” to which Sri Aurobindo refers here is intuition. He envisages that the poetry in future will be born out of the direct knowledge through intuition and revelation unlike its make in the mental atmosphere. The mind would only be the receiver and the vital would breathe life into it, but poetry would descend onto the poet in its perfect mould for which the poet has to prepare himself.

It is noteworthy that Sri Aurobindo’s study and experience of the Vedic texts have percolated into his analysis of poetry. Vedas were received by intuition and revelation. They came down and were scribed in the same mould. They have a rhythm and a fixed meter. Sri Aurobindo does envisage a fixed and rigid form of poetry of poetics for the future. In this vision, poetry and poetics both would have ample flexibility of form, content and presentation. Fixity and rigid forms belong to the past when there was a need for the fixed forms, today the mind of humanity has grown to the extent that it can conceive of the abstract, intangible and subtle forms. Therefore, the poetry in the future will be more lucid and subtle. Even its appreciation would be more intuitive and would not be a mental gymnastics of finding forms and meaning. If the poetry comes from the revelatory or intuitive level, the appreciation too would come from there. Sri Aurobindo calls this appreciation “aesthesis.” It would not only be appreciation of the beauty in poetry but also of the truth, delight, the power of life-force and the force of the spirit. These five – truth, beauty, delight, life and spirit – are the five suns of poetry according to him. The future aesthesis or the appreciation of poetry would dwell on these five essential elements. Sri Aurobindo’s letters and his analysis of the levels of inspiration in various poets have given us the glimpse of what the future of criticism can be. For it to develop in all its aspect we have to wait for the time to when the intuitive poetry would be produced and the intuitive appreciation would take place.