

# IDEA OF HISTORY

IN

## **SRI AUROBINDO**

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN HISTORY

BY

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DECEMBER- 2003

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Certified that this thesis **IDEA OF HISTORY IN SRI AUROBINDO** submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor or Philosophy of the University of Calicut is a record of bonafide research carried out by Mr. M.P. Ajith Kumar under my supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for any degree before.

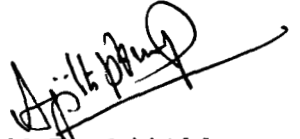
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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis "IDEA OF HISTORY IN SRI AUROBINDO" submitted for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Calicut has not been presented for the award of any degree, diploma or other similar title or recognition.

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## Preface

Sri Aurobindo has been the subject of my reading ever since my undergraduate days. This was solely out of my metaphysical interest but later this took me inadvertently on to the track of searching his ideas on History. True, Aurobindo is, first of all a metaphysicist, but his visions give history a new dimension, raising it to a high plane. His ideas on history are not put under a separate head in the vast literature he left behind. They are lying at random, in an incoherent style. Yet piecing them together we can finally arrive at his views on history which earn him a place in the realm of the philosophy of history along with Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee.

Here his views on history are analysed under separate heads. Starting with Aurobindo and his times in the first Chapter, the works in the second chapter dwells at length with his idea of the cyclical nature of historical developments. The third and fourth chapters deal with his ideas on culture and human unity respectively. The fifth compares some of the views of Sri Aurobindo with those of Spengler and Toynbee.

I should like to express my deep gratitude to my supervising teacher, Dr. M.P. Sreekumaran Nair for his

valuable guidance. I give my thanks to my teachers Prof. P.C. Menon and the late Prof. P.S. Raghavan for the help they rendered to initiate me into research. Thanks are also to my friend Mr. N. Narendran who suggested me write on this topic itself.

I would like to express my thanks to Dr.K.K.N.Kurup, Vice Chancellor, University of Calicut, who as the former Head of the Department of History of the University, gave me all necessary help in my research.

I extend my thanks to the librarians of the Dept. of History, and campus library, University of Calicut.

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University of Calicut  
10.12.2003

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## Introduction

Sri Aurobindo is usually regarded as a metaphysicist whose views are of highest spiritual values which matter little with the material world. Especially in a world which believes that philosophy is merely an impractical academic subject irrelevant in the present world the ideas of Sri Aurobindo are apt to remain in the plane of highest intellectuality. It is the subject of a few. And fewer have the idea that Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy has got wide application in human life, especially in man's social activities, in moulding human history, destiny and the future evolution of civilization.

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of history is never confined to itself, nor is it a separate topic cut off from the rest of his views. Indeed it is inseparable from his total philosophical outlook. He did not form his views for the sake of historical studies as Toynbee or Spengler did. His views on history are lying at random, strewn accros the entire range of his voluminous writings. Perusing and piecing them together, one can arrive at Aurobindo's views on history. Substantial and selfsupporting with logicality and validity, each of his views proves right when analysed against the backdrop of the past developments in world civilization though it may seem beyond the grasp of ordinary intellect which hardly accepts it. This, combined with his

prose style which is so difficult to follow that many would leave it in the beginning itself, is the reason why Sri Aurobindo becomes the subject of a few.

Sri Aurobindo, like all the great visionaries believes that man is the maker of history, but more than others he subscribes to the view that history is more the reflection of humanity's mental progress than anything else. History is to him the revealer of the truth, the path humanity treads towards this truth through the ages. However, Sri Aurobindo's objectivism is not confined merely to the discovery of historical facts, but facts or truths about man himself. It is the discovery of man by man; it is self-searching and self-discovery which involves a good deal of painstaking and readiness to undergo ordeals and suffering which purify and steel humanity in the final stage. History thus brings forth the various stages with man struggling to be superman using his will-to-power, the will that helped humanity retain its integrity and would help it to reach perfection, the final stage where man would come face to face with his long lost truth which is his primeval as well as the final truth. Thus the idea that humanity's mental evolution determines the progress of history forms the core of Sri Aurobinod's philosophy of history.

The nature of history, Aurobindo believes, is cyclical. To some extent he believes in what had already

been pronounced by the German thinker, Karl Lamprecht. But Sri Aurobindo's is not a blind acceptance of what this early thinker opinionated, instead he reconstructed the earlier view, adding to it the elements of reason and vision. Lamprecht's theory did not get the full acceptance of this Indian philosopher. On the other hand Aurobindo points out some of the errors of the German thinker and rightly fills the missing links. Basing on the theory of universal cycles mentioned in Indian lore, Aurobindo proceeds with his theory of human cycle which, according to him, begins with the age of symbolism when men of thought used symbols to express the truth. Literature of this period, poetry, prose or any other branch bristled with symbols which successfully carried the meaning of the highest truth to the ordinary man. Especially when this truth which is both primordial and ultimate became difficult to be transmitted symbols proved to be the media. The Vedas as well as the Old Testament thus give us innumerable stories with the symbols conveying this highest ideal. The age of symbols was, Aurobindo says, a prelude to so many stages in future. Man's relation with the ultimate truth made him strictly adhere to ideals and morals so that in future he developed 'types' or certain codes of conduct which would shape and perfect his life in accordance with the ideals he derived from his contact with the world of the divine. Hence the origin of the typical age which later slipped unfortunately into the age of conventions. There came in an age of mere blasphemy and conventions. Man

floated in the world of superficialities and untruths; his life became a high sounding nothing, a shell without kernel. But as time flowed forth man became restless, having seen himself chained and fettered by artificialities and conventions the crust of which he now longed to break apart. He started searching his long lost truth, the real vision of it and the related ideals. No sooner he realised that he was now living by a lie than he felt his inner urge for having in life the sparks of the ultimate truth. This resulted in the age of reason which appeared at different times among different nations and civilizations but with equal impact irrespective of East-West difference. Indeed the dawn of the age of reason had done away with the medieval darkness in European history for instance, and had led humanity to the threshold of a new world with man progressing further on the path of understanding and reason. He embarked on with new movements which he believed, would help him reach his ultimate truth. Humanity now was on its march from the truths that are relative to that beyond the world of relativities. Thus the cycle starts with the age of truth expressed through symbols and seems likely to end with man's having his final realisation of the truth after several stages of ignorance, enquiry and reason. He stops at the point whence he started.

Culture has been, Sri Aurobindo believes, an inseparable part of historical development. To him history

bereft of culture is meaningless. He thinks that nature has written each line on the brow of every nation, and accordingly cultures often differ one another. Indeed culture has been down the centuries the determining factor of national identity, and has been expressing itself through different ways. It got expression in accordance with the nature of the people dwelling in different lands. Aurobindo takes for comparison two of the most ancient civilizations of the world - Greek and Roman. The Greek culture he says was more wedded to the element of beauty than anything else. Though the culture of Greece reaped manysided progress encompassing within itself almost all the aspects required to embellish a civilization its most remarkable achievement was in its idolisation of the concept of beauty. Greeks were a people desirous of deriving the fullest enjoyment of life. Their education their art, poetry, philosophy and every thing targeted at the attainment and realisation of the beauty. And they would never succumb to or accept anything that stands in their way of enjoying this beauty. They were so wedded to the concept of beauty that their's was an aesthetic culture. But in the case of Rome it proved different. Romans were strictly adhered to the concept of law and disciplines of life. Strict austerity and ethics of life would supplant everything though this would mar beauty and enjoyment. Instead of a beautiful body Roman life suggested a robust one with protruding muscles Roman arenas proclaimed the strength of body and the consequent victory.

Beauty got the least significance. The Roman culture was ethical which killed beauty while disciplining life. Aurobindo says there were also cultures which held both beauty and ethics aloft and the harmony of them brought in excellent results. India, Aurobindo opines, is the best example. Here the disciplines were perfectly modelled. So many were the orders and restrictions in life; 'do's and 'dont's abounded. However these this was not enforced by any authority. Here soul-force rather than physical force prevailed and individual was free to select his path. And the man selecting the path of ethical life had an end before him. It was the attainment and realisation of beauty, ethics led one to aesthetics. The disciplines or (thapas) helped a seeker towards the ultimate beauty (saundrya) and the resultant bliss (ananda). Here the thing of beauty attained through an austere life brings the bliss eternal (sukham athyanthikam). Even the ordinary faculties of life were guided by this core teaching of the Hindu thought. For instance the theory of Indian music is connected with the ideas of 'Sruthi' and 'Laya'. The former with its musical setting merges with the latter which is connected with time measure, creating the musical ecstasy. Order thus leads to beauty. Whether in dance, painting or architecture or mathematics which is the maker of patterns there were set laws, order and rythm which would lead to the creative beauty. Here disciplines or ethics lead to the aesthetics.

Indian culture was thus both ethical and aesthetic, both working in harmony to perfect human life.

Also culture has got different stages it being the expression of different psychic levels. Culture is the product of human psyche and the culture of a nation is the expression of the national psyche. Nation has a mind as in the case of the individual. National mind is the sum total of the people's psyche. However one may be confused to understand what is the right stage of culture. For instance Aurobindo speaks of the rational, infrarational and suprarational stages of mental progression. All these are, he believes, the stages in humanity's progress towards the realisation of the ultimate truth which is also the end of all human cycles. But each stage, has its imperfections, some mere imitation of the aestheticism, some mere dilettantism with ignorant people pulling down the highest things to the level their lowest psychic stages ie, handling the higher things in mean manner. But with man progressing more on the lines of reason and truth, all these changes and he is soon to enjoy the suprarational beauty. This Aurobindo believes is the end of all historical progress.

Like all the ideas of Sri Aurobindo his idea of nationalism also differs from those of other philosophers. According to him nationalism is a religion which nature has

been developing in the heart of humanity. Nation is a persistent psychological unit formed by identical ideas, distinct cultures, religion, philosophy, art, music and all the like elements. It is very difficult to do away with nationalism. A strong advocate of nationalism, Aurobindo often admires the Jewish and Irish people for their having held aloft their national ideals down their chequered history. The national minorities, he says, are stronger than all the other political units and would never allow their national interest to be jeopardised by any aggressive force. It is indeed nationalism's glorious fate that it was to cling to some areas of the globe and prove its might and infinite potential before the world. Aurobindo is proud of India's nationalism which is the expression of its culture. In India nationalism and culture are compatible or one and the same. Therefore he had it that India would live so long as the 'Sanathana Dharma' would live. He warns the Indians that if this 'Dharma' would decline the nationalism would also decline. Hence his exhortation to keep alive this eternal 'Dharma' as the only means to perpetuate India's nationalism. Often it was the decadence of inner vitality and culture that took many ancient civilizations and nations to their doom. Aurobindo believes that if this inner vitality is preserved it can steel the temperament of a people and nation so that they would not succumb to any alien force however much mighty it might be. The strength of the nation can suffice all the national needs. Nation must

therefore grow, heavily drawing upon the past and imbibing many new ideas and developments so that it can face all the challenges of modern times.

Along with nationalism Aurobindo eulogizes the idea of world unity. But he says that this unity should not be at the cost of nationalism which is eternal. The world unity is to be forged retaining the vitality and potential of the nations. The new world order may be the one in which each nation has its importance, standing independently, not infringing on or being infringed upon by other nations. Aurobindo envisions a universal unity based on the ideal of 'give and take' among different nationalities. The unity is to be forged without compromising each other's integrity and intrinsic cultural values.

But here again man is pivotal of this idea. Therefore Aurobindo speaks of the human unity rather than world unity. Like nations respecting each other man too must develop love and respect to his fellow beings. He must feel himself as part of the universal whole by having an intellectual vision regarding the unity of all things. Philosophy as well as science speaks of the ultimate unity. Everything is so inextricably intertwined as to form the intricate patterns of the universal entity. One is not different from the other, or both are the same, they being the manifestations of the permanent substance. The ancient

upanishadic teaching regarding brotherhood of man sourcing from the divine unity or the christian teaching of the divine love has got the parallel in modern science with its many theories, Quantum or Unified Field for instance, which proved the underlying unity of all things or the interconnectedness of the universe which is composed of a permanent infinite entity. Therefore Aurobindo exhorts man to see himself as a part of the whole world and see himself in others. Standing aloof and feeling oneself as a separate being callously indifferent with the rest is against the spirit of the world, and a fall out with all the eternal principles of the universe. The lore of India always holds aloft the idea of the 'Lokasangraha' or the 'holding together of all' which in totality brings balance, perfection and beauty. This holistic or integral approach would certainly bring in a world of harmony and unity in which all nations and people would find their proper place, believes Sri Aurobindo.

## CHAPTER - I

### SRI AUROBINDO - A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Along with other factors often great men determined history. May be this is why Nietzsche said, "not mankind, but supermen is the goal"<sup>1</sup>. Appearing at some rare moments of history they recede after fulfilling their mission<sup>2</sup>. India with her cultural dynamism never lacked in the appearance of supermen in the course of her long history<sup>3</sup>. She abounded in leaders and men of genius among whom Sri Aurobindo stands unique.

India Aurobindo lived was the British ruled one with the similar and uniform colonial nature throughout its length and breadth<sup>4</sup>. However it proved a blessing in disguise, it having helped the Indians in forging a unity of interest and organizing a common fight for freedom<sup>5</sup>. Often troubles like the Wahabhi movement, erupted<sup>6</sup>. The Wahabhis, powerfully organized, forced costly campaigns on the British before being crushed<sup>7</sup>. The Kukas, the Birsas, the Naikdas and the hill tribes of Assam carried prolonged hostilities against the British in the second half of the 19th century<sup>8</sup>.

1. Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy, New York, 1961, p.424
2. Sri Aurobindo, The National value of art, Pondicherry, 1970, p.4
3. Romain Rolland, The Life of Ramakrishna, Calcutta, 1986, pp.18-19
4. A.B.Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry, 1978, p.37
5. R.R. Diwakar, Mahayogi Sri Aurobindo, Bombay, 1976, p.4
6. Qeyamuddin Ahmad, The Wahabhi Movement in India, Calcutta, 1996, p.337
7. A.K. Majumdar, Advent of Independence, Bombay, 1963, pp.42-43.
8. R.C. Majumdar, History of the Freedom Movement in India, Calcutta, 1975, vol-I, pp.253-256.

The idea of revolution was gradually crystallizing<sup>9</sup>. Finally in 1885 was founded an all India organization, the Indian National Congress which however had some reservations about turning anti-British. Founded by an Englishman, it sought to serve the cause of the British in India by ventilating the anti-British fury of the educated Indians<sup>10</sup>. The Congress, Hume desired, should act in India like the opposition in British Parliament<sup>11</sup>. Led by Surendra Nath Banerjee and Pherozeshah Mehta who were satisfied just with a "right to all British institutions" they being "British Subjects", Congress was an assemblage of the highly educated and distinguished Indians whose attachment to the British Raj was as great as their patriotism<sup>12</sup>. With 'Prayer-petition-protest' as the trident of fight, it was only a political mendicant whom Aurobindo disparaged a "blind led by the blind"<sup>13</sup>. Time was changing and congress too. A torrent of extremist ideas and forces swept its platform<sup>14</sup>. Lala Lajpat Rai, Bala Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and C.R. Das were now leading it. Indian politics received a new life and vigour<sup>15</sup>. The Italian and Irish national ideals also made Indian nationalism put on

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9. Diwakar, op.cit, pp.4-5.

10. S.R. Mehrotra, The Emergence of the Indian National Congress, Delhi, 1971, p. 292.

11. Bipin Chandra, Indian Struggle for Independence, New Delhi. 1988 p. 64; H.V. Seshadri, Tragic Story of India's partition, Bangalore, 1982, p.18.

12. V.B. Kulkarni, British Dominion in India and After Bombay, 1964, p.104.

13. Sri Aurobindo, "New Lamps for old", Indu Prakash, 21 Aug. 1893.

14. Seshadri, op.cit, p.18.

15. Ibid, p.19

the mantle of extremism<sup>16</sup>. The racial superiority of the British and their contempt for everything Indian deeply wounded the national pride<sup>17</sup>. Consequently a militant nationalism swept the horizons of Indian politics. Touched off by the partition of Bengal in 1905, it spanned upto 1942's 'Quit India'<sup>18</sup>. This spirit reflected in Bankim's Ananda Math or Aurobindo's Bhavani Mandir<sup>19</sup> awakened the whole India to speak in militant terms.

The economic policies of Britain turned India a pauper<sup>20</sup>. The English mercantilism made her a venue for the collection of raw-materials and a market for the English goods<sup>21</sup>. Indian exports to England also declined<sup>22</sup>. In domestic market too India suffered, her products having failed to compete with the machine made English imports<sup>23</sup>. The British parliament also legislated against the Indian imports to England<sup>24</sup>.

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16. S.R. Bakshi, Revolutionaries and the British Raj, New Delhi, 1988, pp.10-11.
  17. Even some noble minded Englishmen themselves could not tolerate the abuse the English hurled at Indian culture William Archer's description of India as a mere state of 'barbarism' evoked much criticism from a group of scholars the most noted of whom was John woodroffe who wrote the book Is India Civilized? to defend Indian culture from such reckless attack.
  18. Bipin Chandra, India's Struggle for Independence, pp. 458-459.
  19. S.K. Bose, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 71-78.
  20. Bipin Chandra, Essays on Indian Nationalism, Delhi, 1993. p. 64.
  21. Ibid.
  22. Tarachand, History of the Freedom Movement in India, New Delhi, 1983, Vol-I, p. 324.
  23. Ibid., p. 325.
  24. Ibid., p. 310.

Mercantilism had sped up India's de-industrialization<sup>25</sup>.  
India thus presented the picture of acute poverty during  
the time under review<sup>26</sup>. No wonder she developed the con-  
cept of a 'Swadeshi' economy which became later a political  
weapon too<sup>27</sup>.

The English even resorted to Indology to indoctrinate<sup>28</sup>  
the Indians and underrate Indian culture and intellect<sup>29</sup>.  
They aimed at an intellectual enslavement<sup>30</sup>. Personal  
insult also manifested in many ways.

These policies however had aroused the national re-  
sponse. Leaders of all sections came up to awaken the Indi-  
ans. Vivekananda exhorted "the young, the energetic, the  
strong, the well-built, the intellectual" Indians to serve

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25. Bipin Chandra, Essays on Indian Nationalism, p. 65;  
Sumit Sarkar, Modern India: 1857 - 1947. Delhi, 1983,  
pp. 28-30.
26. Pandit Sunderlal. British Rule in India, Bombay, 1972,  
pp.55-56
27. Diwakar, op.cit. p.7
28. Sriram Sathe, Aryans: who were they?, Mysore, 1991,  
p.16. while editing the Manusmriti, Max Muller argues  
that the Smriti was not written by a single individual  
but by a group of scholars whom he calls the Manava  
School. Georg Buhler, The laws of Manu, Max Muller  
(Ed), New Delhi, 1988, pp. XVIII - XV.
29. Max Muller's rendering of the 'sacred Books of the  
East' into English itself as he himself says was moti-  
vated by evil designs. He wrote to his wife: "This  
edition of mine and the translation of the Vedas will  
hereafter tell to a very great extent on the fate of  
India... It is the root of their (Indians') religion  
and to show them as to what that root is, I feel sure,  
is the only way of uprooting all that has sprung up  
from it during the last three thousand years". Ram  
Sathe, op.cit., p. 20.
30. V.B. Kulkarni, Problems of Indian Democracy, Bombay,  
1977, p.27; George d.Bearce, British Attitude Towards  
India : 1784-1858, Oxford, 1961, pp.140-164

the cause of the nation<sup>31</sup> . Swami Dayananda's call, 'back to the Vedas'<sup>32</sup> was exuberantly inspiring . His Vedic interpretation on symbolic lines gave Indians an unprecedented insight about Indian spirituality<sup>33</sup> . Many others also fanned the flames of Indian nationalism.

The international scenario also changed. The revolutions in America and France irreversibly set the world politics on a new course<sup>34</sup> . With dictatorship fading out, liberty equality and nationalism emerged<sup>35</sup> . Irish and Italian nationalisms proved irresistible. Communism also proved a world force. The world was thus fast changing. So was India too.

Born in Bengal on 15 August 1872, Aurobindo was the son of Krishna Dhan Ghose, a medical doctor of English service, and Swarnalatha Devi<sup>38</sup> . His father was so much enamoured of

31. Swami Vivekananda, "How India can conquer the World" (Reply to a welcome presented to the swami by the citizens of Calcutta) To the Youth of India, Calcutta, 1984 pp. 98-111; Sri Aurobindo, The Renaissance in India, Pondicherry, 1986, pp.27-28.
32. R.C. Majumdar, History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol-I, p.265.
33. Sri Aurobindo, Benkim-Tilak-Dayananda, Pondicherry 1970 pp. 37-44.
34. R.C. Majumdar, History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol-I, p.291.
35. Ibid, p. 286.
36. Sri Aurobindo's Conversations of the Dead (Pondicherry, 1971) reflects this fully.
38. M.P. Pandit, Sri Aurobindo, New Delhi, 1987 p.13. Sri Aurobindo once explained the spiritual importance of 15th August. 15th August has a special significance - it is "the day of the Assumption of Virgin Mary; it implies that the physical nature is raised to the divine nature. Virgin Mary refers to Nature, Jesus is the son of divine soul born in man- he is the son of God as well as the son of Man". Diwakar, op.cit, p.12.

the values of Western civilization that the young 'Auro' as his father affectionately called him, was brought up in an English style. Dr. K.D. Ghose did not even engage Bengali speaking servants<sup>38</sup>. Thus at the very early age itself when a child is usually expected to be familiar with the mother tongue, Aurobindo had been trained in the English life-style and was divested of the opportunity of coming into contact with the richness of the Bengali life, culture and language<sup>39</sup>. It was only after years of English education that he could study Bengali and Sanskrit<sup>40</sup>. Aurobindo, along with his two elder brothers was sent to the Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling run by Irish nuns<sup>41</sup>. Wholly meant for European children the school had English as the only medium of instruction and communication at the boarding house. No Indian language was allowed. However this could not quell the inner spirit of the young Aurobindo and it is stated, he had some mystic experiences from the very childhood itself. Aurobindo once described a dream that he had at Darjeeling:

I was lying down one day when I saw suddenly a great Thamas (darkness) rushing into me and enveloping me and the whole universe. After that I had a great darkness always hanging on to me all through my stay in England. I believe that darkness had something to do with the Thamas that came upon me. It left me only when I was coming back to India<sup>42</sup>.

38. V.C. Joshi (Ed), Sri Aurobindo-An Interpretation, Delhi, 1973, p.1.

39. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, Pondicherry, 1989, p.1.

40. Diwakar, op.cit., p.21

41. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry, 1978

42. Purani, Evening Talks (Second series), Pondicherry, 1961, p.140.

Often he had an experience of infinite calm that lasted for a long time<sup>43</sup>.

Aurobindo had been at Darjeeling for barely two years when in 1879 he was taken to England along with his brothers, Benoy Bhushan and Man Mohan, by his father who was desirous of giving his children a training that would make them products of the best kind of English education<sup>44</sup>. It was during the Ghose family's stay in England that Barindra Kumar, Aurobindo's younger brother was born<sup>45</sup>. Shortly after this the family left England, leaving Aurobindo, Man Mohan and Benoy to the care of Rev. Drewett and Mrs. Drewett in Manchester<sup>46</sup>. While leaving England Dr. Ghose left strict instructions with the Drewetts that the children should not be allowed to make acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence<sup>47</sup>. These instructions were carried out to the letter and Aurobindo grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, religion and culture<sup>48</sup>. While the two elder brothers were enrolled in the Manchester grammar school, Aurobindo remained at home looked after by the Drewetts. He never went to the Manchester grammar school. Aurobindo was educated privately by the Drewetts. An accomplished Latin scholar, Drewett grounded Aurobindo so well in Latin that later this gave him a good background

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43. Diwakar, op.cit, p.21.

44. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.1.

45. Purani. The Life of Sri Aurobindo, p.4.

46. Pandit, op.cit, p.17.

47. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.1.

48. Ibid.

for his Greek studies<sup>49</sup> . Drewett also taught him English, history etc., as he found in young Auro a very willing and intelligent student<sup>50</sup> . All the tuition being given at home the young prodigy found enough time to read the Bible and Shakespeare, Shelley and Keats. Even at that very early age<sup>51</sup> Aurobindo started writing verses for Fox's Weekly<sup>51</sup> .

Having got a good background in Latin, Aurobindo left Manchester for London's St. Paul's school where he remained until 1889<sup>52</sup> . The school had a headmaster who was well versed in Latin and Greek. Frederick William Walker was very much enthusiastic in meeting an earnest student. Dr. Walker who was surprised at the precocity of young Aurobindo and his already gained background in Latin, lovingly<sup>53</sup> began to teach him Greek on his own initiative . Aurobindo's progress in that great language was astonishing and it made his promotion to the higher classes easy and quick<sup>54</sup> . At St. Paul's "he spent most of his spare time in general reading, especially English poetry, literature and fiction, French literature and history of ancient medieval and modern Europe"<sup>55</sup> . He spent some time also for learning

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49. Ibid.

50. Diwakar, op.cit., p.22

51. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, p.6.

52. Joshi, op.cit., p.2.

53. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.1.

54. Ibid

55. Ibid.

Italian, some German and a smattering of Spanish. Already at ease with his school syllabus, he did not think it necessary to labour over them and spent little time for this<sup>56</sup>. But what is more important and remarkable is that at the young age of fourteen Aurobindo began composing poetry and his 'Hecuba' seems to have been admired very much by the poet Lawrence Binyon who was a friend of his elder brother, Man Mohan<sup>57</sup>. Reading the poem, Binyon is said to have asked him why he was not writing more poetry. He was also the noted luminary of the literary Society at St. Paul's and won the Butterworth Second Prize in literature and an Honorable Mention in the Bedford History Prize<sup>58</sup>.

The remarkable record Sri Aurobindo had in his academic career and in mastering English, Latin and Greek at so young an age makes it clear that he was extraordinarily intelligent and his capacity for learning languages very high. Gentle and loving, and seldom assertive or aggressive, Aurobindo was more of a retiring and reserved temperament than one interested enthusiastically in giving himself to too much social mixing and gaiety. A sober scholar absorbed in the world of ideas and ideals, he was contemplative and his ideas intuitive. This may seem to be too much of an exaggeration, "but it is definite that his

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56. Ibid.

57. Diwakar, op.cit, p.23.

58. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, p.8.

tendencies lay that way"<sup>59</sup> . Also he had begun to feel an inner urge to be free of all selfishness even from the time he was thirteen and this later developed into his attempts at self-sacrifice<sup>60</sup> .

Having won an open scholarship for classics at the King's college, Cambridge, and also becoming qualified for a stipend as an I.C.S. probationer, Aurobindo went on simultaneously with his studies in classics at Cambridge and preparation for the I.C.S.<sup>61</sup> . At Cambridge the young prodigy got himself acquainted with a scholastic circle. His talents were discovered by Oscar Browning, then a noted figure at the University whom Aurobindo described as the "feature par excellence of king's"<sup>62</sup> . While talking to Aurobindo the "great O.B., otherwise Oscar Browning" admired him. O.B. told him "I suppose you know you have passed an extraordinarily high examination. I have examined papers at thirteen examinations and I have never during this time seen such excellent papers (Classical papers at the scholarship examination)<sup>63</sup> as yours" . While at Cambridge Aurobindo began to show interest in the developments in world politics. When the Irish leader Parnell died in 1891 he

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59. Diwakar, op.cit, p.23.

60. Purani, Evening Talks (second series), p.140.

61. Pandit, op.cit, p.22.

62. Ibid, p.23.

63. Sri Aurobindo Supplement, Pondicherry, 1973, p.419.

wrote a poem on him<sup>64</sup>. He took an interest in all public questions of those days and formed his own independent judgement and opinion about them. At Cambridge he participated in the meetings of the 'Indian Majlis' which played an important role in the social life of Indian students in England and the 'Lotus and Dagger' an organization which worked for India's liberation<sup>65</sup>. He wrote poetry in a prolific way at Cambridge, most of which were published later when he was in Baroda in 1895, in his book, Songs to Myrtilla<sup>66</sup>.

Aurobindo did not graduate at Cambridge. He writes:

he passed high in the First Part of the Tripos (First Class); it is on passing this First part that the degree of B.A. is usually given; but as he had only two years at his disposal he had to pass it in his second year at Cambridge; and the First Part gives the degree only if it is taken in the third year; if one takes it in the second year one has to appear for the Second part of the Tripos in the fourth year to qualify for the degree. He might have got the degree if he had made an application for it but did not care to do so<sup>67</sup>.

For he had no intention of pursuing an academic career at the University<sup>68</sup>.

64. Sri Aurobindo "Charles Stewart Parnell", Collected Poems, Pondicherry, 1986, p.15.  
65. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.4.  
66. Ibid., p.5.  
67. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.2.  
68. Ibid.

At the bidding of his father and without being specially tutored Aurobindo passed with distinction the open competition for I.C.S. But as he did not pay any attention to the necessity of being able to ride a horse, he failed in the riding test. In fact he felt no call for the I.C.S and "was seeking some way to escape from that bondage"<sup>69</sup>. By certain manoeuvres he managed to get himself disqualified for riding without himself rejecting the service, which his family would not have allowed him to do<sup>70</sup>. Otherwise also the I.C.S would not have perhaps been given to him on account of his being associated with the Indian revolutionary movement in England. But Aurobindo was in fact avoiding the obligation of pursuing the official career, he being destined to fulfil quite a different mission the call of which presumably cleared his path of all impediments<sup>71</sup>.

By the time Aurobindo was twenty one he mastered not only English language but Greek, Latin and French and "had also acquired some familiarity with the continental languages like German and Italian"<sup>72</sup>. He thus had got a solid background regarding Europe, its languages, civilization and culture. Actually his study of Europe and India developed in him a sense of harmony. Though grown into a great admirer of India and her glorious culture, he was singularly

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69. Ibid., p.3

70. Ibid.

71. Diwakar, op.cit, p.24.

72. Sri Aurobindo, On himself, p.3.

free from any dislike of the West. Indeed he loved and admired many aspects of the western civilization. A fully mature man of catholic sympathy and comprehensive outlook, Aurobindo pleaded for an integral synthesis of the East and the West<sup>73</sup>. He loved the spiritual East but equally admired the vital west. In his vision all material entities were but manifestations of the spirit itself. He was of the firm conviction that man can attain the real fulfilment and perfection only through the development of a real evolutionary spirituality which along with revolutionizing the spiritual outlook and soul-force transforms the outer life and material existence<sup>74</sup>.

It would be interesting to have a look at the working of his mind and thought which influenced him during his days in England. This can mostly be inferred from his poems and other writings and his activities there. Of course his father Dr. K.D. Ghose was not a religious man with much madness of faith, but he had yet another religion to which he was steadfastly adhered, the religion of serving the poor which caused him untold misery and hardship. Besides, the Ghose household had under its roof an influence wholly spiritual and Indian which derived from Aurobindo's maternal grandfather, Maharshi Rajnarayan Bose in whose house at Deogar Aurobindo had occasional stay<sup>75</sup>. Aurobindo's

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73. Diwakar, op.cit., p.25

74. Ibid

75. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, p.3

father Dr. Ghose himself, though an admirer of the West and its culture, was no enemy of India. On the contrary he was a strong nationalist who might perhaps have believed that the salvation of India could be attained through the incorporation of Western methods and ways of life. Often he sent to his sons in England letters worth enough to instill national sentiments in his children. They were full of complaints in strong language against the injustices, inelasticity and "heartlessness" of the British Government in India<sup>76</sup>. He sent to Aurobindo even the news paper The Bengali with passages marked relating to the cases of maltreatments of Indians at the hands of Englishmen<sup>77</sup>. This national spirit of a denationalized father who believed in denationalizing his sons might have perhaps acted as the first lessons of patriotism to his sons. Thus the paternal exhortations helped Aurobindo to have a firm decision to serve his country's cause as early as he was hardly fifteen.

Already, even at the age of eleven Aurobindo had "received strongly the impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it"<sup>78</sup>. This feeling soon developed into the idea of the liberation of his motherland and his attention was drawn to India. As

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76. Diwakar, op. cit., p.27.

77. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, pp. 3-4

78. Ibid., p.4

already mentioned, Aurobindo became a member and sometimes the secretary of the 'Indian Majlis' at Cambridge where "he delivered many revolutionary speeches which as he afterwards learnt, had their part in determining the authorities to exclude him from Indian Civil Services"<sup>79</sup>. The failure in the riding test, Aurobindo says, was only the occasion, "for in some other cases an opportunity was given for rectifying this defect in India itself"<sup>80</sup>. In England Aurobindo and his brothers worked among a group of fiery young men who openly avowed the aim of liberating India from the British stranglehold and pronounced themselves against the liberal and moderate views of the leaders of the Congress. The ardent nationalism did not end in mere talks and discussions. As a means to channel the views and propagate the cult of militant nationalism they formed a secret group known as 'Lotus and Dagger' in which "each member vowed to work for the liberation of India generally and to take some special work in furtherance of that end"<sup>81</sup>. Thus his family background and the patriotism instilled in him by his father made Aurobindo increasingly intolerant of the moderate school of Indian politics and laid in his mind the foundations of an aggressive nationalism which was soon to be transformed into an immediate and extreme action against the standing insult of the foreign rule in India.

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79. Ibid.

80. Ibid

81. Ibid

On returning to India, the question of getting an employment naturally loomed large in Aurobindo's mind. To his good fortune even before boarding the ship to India he got the opportunity of meeting Sir Sayaji Rao Gaekwar, the ruler of the princely state of Baroda in India. On the advice of James Cotton, the brother of Henry Cotton, Gaekwar agreed to enlist Aurobindo into the Baroda State Service<sup>82</sup>.

Aurobindo's home coming was troubled by a tragic happening. He set sail for India on 'S.S Carthage' early in January 1893. But his father, Dr. Ghose, had been wrongly informed by the Grindlays, his bankers, that Aurobindo departed by the boat 'Roumania' which sank off the coast of Portugal. This misinformation was a shock to the father. Already suffering from a weak heart, Dr. Ghose collapsed<sup>83</sup> and died uttering Aurobindo's name in lamentation. But the vessel 'Carthage' Aurobindo sailed in anchored off safely at Bombay on 6 February 1893.

Aurobindo entered the service of the Baroda State then ruled by Sayaji Rao Gaekwar. Unlike the other Indian princes most of whom were the puppets of the British, the prince of Baroda was a freedom-loving individual who cared for his subjects and tried to do some good to them<sup>84</sup>. Well

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82. Pandit, op.cit., p.35

83. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.7

84. Diwakar, op, cit., p.32.

educated and widely traveled, the Maharaja insisted on the need of an efficient administration and a good type of education and initiated a number of reforms.

For the advancement of the cause of education he started a library movement, established a technical institution and worked to advance the conditions of women and backward classes<sup>85</sup>. Having an appreciation for good and efficient men and recognition of the importance of Western education, he was careful in selecting his officials and ministers. Naturally, Aurobindo saw in Baroda a suitable atmosphere for his educational activity. Accumulation of knowledge<sup>86</sup> seemed then to be the whole aim of Aurobindo's life.

Sri Aurobindo served in Baroda state from 8 February 1893 to 18 June 1907<sup>87</sup>. Beginning on a salary of Rs. 200/- per month, he worked as a probationer in the Revenue Settlement Department, thereafter in the Stamps Office and in the Central Revenue Office<sup>88</sup>. He carried out some secretarial work and spent some time in writing dispatches and reports which required special and careful diction. But his taste still remained with the intellectual pursuits. He was drawn towards educational work and teaching where, undoubtedly, he felt more at home. He entered the Baroda College first as a part-time lecturer in French, afterwards worked as a regular professor teaching English and was finally appointed vice-principal<sup>89</sup>. The Maharaja had a great

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85. Ibid., p.32

86. Ibid., p.32

87. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, p.37

88. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.9

89. Ibid, Diwakar, op. cit, p.32

regard and admiration for Aurobindo. This is clear from the fact that Aurobindo was very often called by the prince for writing letters, composing speeches or drawing up documents of various kinds which as already noted, called for special care in the phrasing of language<sup>90</sup>. At one time the Maharaja asked Sri Aurobindo to give instruction on English grammar with exact and minute rules of syntax. On another occasion the king asked him to advise on travel after consulting the timetables of European railway<sup>91</sup>. Sometimes he visited the palace to teach the children of Maharaja as was recorded by Maharaja's daughter, later the Dowager Maharani of Cooch Behar<sup>92</sup>. But these were quite informal works he was asked to do when invited to breakfast with the Maharaja. Aurobindo's interest, however was in intellectual pursuits and the Prince having a high admiration of Aurobindo never stood in the way of his intellectual activities.

Some months after reporting to duty at Baroda Aurobindo visited Bengal where he met relatives. He met his mother, young sister Sarojini, uncle Jogendra and grand father Rajnarayan Bose. The return to Baroda after the family reunion was not quite to Aurobindo's liking. With all its dullness and monotony the place seemed to him a hundred

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90. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.9.

91. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Sri Aurobindo - A biography and History, Pondicherry, 1985, p.45.

92. Karan Singh, Prophet of Indian Nationalism,. Bombay, 1967, p.43

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times more Boring .

Back at Baroda Aurobindo continued his educational activities. He devoted much of his time to study the Indian languages like Sanskrit and his mother tongue, Bengali. First he started with Bengali. Of course Aurobindo had to learn Bengali during his I.C.S preparation<sup>94</sup>. But his teacher in Bengali, Robert Mason Towers himself knew as little Bengali as to say "it is not Bengali" when he heard Bankim Chandra read<sup>95</sup>. For Towers did not read beyond the Bengali of Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar. But now during his days in Baroda Aurobindo went further in Bengali and mostly taught himself though Dinendra Kumar from Bengal lived with him as a companion to help him correct and perfect his knowledge of the language and to accustom him to conversation in Bengali. Aurobindo was not a regular student of Dinendra Kumar<sup>96</sup>. So admirable was his progress in Bengali that shortly he became familiar with Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the pioneer in modern Bengali poetry and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the great Bengali novelist and prose writer<sup>97</sup>.

Aurobindo's ability in writing Bengali had grown upto the extent of his conducting a Bengali weekly the Dharma in which he himself wrote most of the articles.

93. Srinivasa Iyengar, op.cit., p.48.

94. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.10.

95. Srinivasa Iyengar, op.cit., p.48.

96. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.11.

97. Diwakar, op.cit., p.35.

The next language he mastered was Sanskrit. To Aurobindo the study of this language was very important, it being the key to the original source of Indian thought, philosophy and culture. In Sanskrit studies Aurobindo's attention was deep and continual and he studied it directly and at times through English<sup>98</sup>. He studied the Gita and the Upanishads which served him well later in his spiritual adventures. He studied Sanskrit more intuitively than with intellect and when he wrote on subjects of Indian thought and its basic ideas his diction was so much superb and chiseled. He could give elaborate explanation to the meaning of the Sanskrit words which cannot be conveyed by English in translation<sup>99</sup>. He became equally familiar with Kalidasa, Bhavabhuthi, the Ramayana, the Mahabharatha as with the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita and the Manu Smrithi.

The insight Sanskrit gave him was so extraordinary that he could go through the various levels of the meaning of the Vedas, of which the most important, as it appeared to him was the symbolic<sup>100</sup>. It was the deep knowledge in Sanskrit that enriched Aurobindo's life and thought. His Essays on the Gita is the finest among the commentaries ever written on the Gita. The Life Divine, The Synthesis of Yoga and the articles he wrote in the Arya which later

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98. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.12.

99. Diwakar, op.cit., p.35.

100. Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda, Pondicherry, 1987, p.54.

came in the form of the book The Foundations of Indian Culture have all sprung up from the depth of his knowledge in Sanskrit. Savitri is another excellent product of Aurobindo's erudition in Sanskrit. It is so characteristic of Indian imagination and Sanskrit imagery that it must be reckoned as a classic in English literature. His Sanskrit studies helped him understand the core of 'Sanathana Dharma' the sum total of what the Hindu scriptures teach<sup>101</sup>.

However his Sanskrit studies never did away with his interest in European languages and philosophy. Indeed they broadened his mind and made it accommodative to a synthesis of the ideals of East and West. His studies on Epictetus and Heraclitus make this very vivid. He could interpret the philosophy of war expounded by Heraclitus and bring it to a correspondence with the philosophy of the Gita. He could see the 'ever living fire' of Heraclitus and the 'Agni' of the Vedic literature as symbols of the supreme and ultimate truth<sup>102</sup>. German and French were also continued to be studied. In fact it was his reading Karl Lamprecht of Germany that inspired him to theorise on the cyclic movement of history<sup>103</sup>. He read Homer, Dante and Horace as vividly as he studied English and Sanskrit, and

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100. Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda, Pondicherry, 1987, P.54.

101. Sri Aurobindo, Uttarapara Speech, Pondicherry, 1973, p.14

102. Sri Aurobindo, Heraclitus, Pondicherry, 1989, p.3

103. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - war and Self Determination, Pondicherry, 1985, p.2

had a library full of books in more than half a dozen Euro-  
pean languages<sup>104</sup> .

Meanwhile he continued to devote time to writing and to publication. His contributions to the 'Fox's Weekly' while at Manchester, and his poem 'Hecuba' have already been referred to. At Baroda he published his Songs to Myrtilla<sup>104</sup> which included the songs he wrote while in England . Far more important were the articles he contributed to the Indu Prakash of Bombay under the title 'New Lamps for Old' which mirrored vividly his political opinion. The series of articles of which, the first began on 26 June 1893 under the headline "India and the British Parliament" were written at the instance of K.G. Deshpande, Aurobindo's Cambridge friend who was the editor of the paper<sup>105</sup> . The article series 'New Lamps for Old' was as its headline made clear intended to imply the offering of new lights to replace the old and faint reformist light of the congress<sup>106</sup> . For, the Congress of the time, as already made, was to Aurobindo, an organization of the blind led by the blind into a ditch<sup>107</sup> . Strongly condemning the hypocrisy which had been the besetting sin of India's political agitation and the oblique vision which had become a fashion, K.G.Deshpande wrote a

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104.Sri Aurobindo, Collected Poems, pp.1-6.

104.Diwakar, .op. cit., p.36

105.Sri Aurobindo, New Lamps for Old, Pondicherry, 1974, pp.1-5

106.Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.13

107.Sri Aurobindo, New Lamps for old, p.7

telling introduction to Aurobindo's articles on 7 August  
1893<sup>108</sup>. He introduced them as of "gentleman of great  
literary talents, of liberal culture and of considerable  
English experience, well-versed in the art of writing. . .  
to give out his views in no uncertain voice. . . in a style  
and diction purely his own"<sup>109</sup>. The editor assured the  
readers that "they will find in those articles matter that  
will set them thinking and steel their patriotic souls"<sup>110</sup>.  
The articles of Aurobindo were unusually vigorous. What  
one could see in it was "a young man's intolerance and  
idealism and a wise man's deep and abiding wisdom"<sup>111</sup>.  
Aurobindo had seen that since the genesis of Indian Nation-  
al Congress much time had elapsed. Its activities with the  
blazing fanfare of trumpets and deafening bugle sounds  
could do nothing in the way of India's independence. Auro-  
bindo therefore wrote: "The walls of Anglo-Indian Jericho  
stands yet without a breach, and dark spectre of penury  
draws her robe over the land in a greater volume and with  
an ampler sweep"<sup>112</sup>.

In the first article itself Aurobindo strongly exposed  
the meanness of the English people before Indians who had  
an exaggerated notion about them. He wrote the English

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108. Editorial Note, Indu Prakash, 7 August 1893

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid.

111. Srinivasa Iyengar, op.cit., p.54

112. Indu Prakash, 7 August 1893

people are "really very ordinary men- and not only ordinary men, but ordinary Englishmen- types of the middle class or Philistine, in the graphic English phrase, with the narrow hearts and commercial habit of mind peculiar to that sort of people"<sup>113</sup>. The usual habit of the Congress to pray to the British to be lenient and generous or to "quarrel with them for not transgressing the law of their own nature" appeared to Aurobindo a folly<sup>114</sup>. He criticized the "bare-faced hypocrisy of our enthusiasm for the Queen-Empress-an old lady so called by way of courtesy, but about whom few Indians can really know. . . "<sup>115</sup>. He strongly came out against the general timidity of the Congress, its glossing over of hard names, its disinclination to tell the direct truth, its fear of too deeply displeasing the English masters<sup>116</sup>. Aurobindo therefore asked, "If the blind lead the blind, shall they not fall into a ditch?"<sup>117</sup>.

What Daniel read on the wall centuries back Aurobindo read about the Congress: "Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting"<sup>118</sup>. Having seen the utter inadequacy of the Congress, and felt called upon to proceed against the British domination and Congress' political mendicancy, Aurobindo wrote in the best fashion at his command and with what boldness he had:

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113. Ibid, 24 August, 1893  
114. Ibid.  
115. Ibid, 7 August, 1893  
116. Ibid.  
117. Ibid., 21 August, 1893  
118. Ibid., 28 August, 1893

I say, of the Congress, then this - that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods and the leaders in whom it trusts, not the right sort of men to be leaders; in brief, that we are at present the blind led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed"<sup>119</sup> .

Aurobindo firmly believed that a set of complacent comfortable middle class individuals who constituted the Congress could not speak and act on behalf of the millions of Indians comprising the proletariat. Pherozeshah Mehta and his Congress friends thought that the proletariat was not important, but the heart of the matter was that without "the elevation and enlightenment of the proletariat" nothing really could be achieved. Therefore, Aurobindo urged that only a mass awakening, the awakening of the entire power of the nation, could redeem time, cause discomfiture<sup>120</sup> to the alien rulers and usher in national independence . Aurobindo had charged the generality of the British officials in India with rudeness, arrogance and meanness and described their conduct as that of " a coterie of masters<sup>121</sup> surrounded by a nation of Helots". However he asked his

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119. Ibid

120. Srinivasa Iyengar, op.cit., p.55

121. Indu Prakash, 21 August, 1893

countrymen neither to nurse hatred for the foreigners nor merely cringe before them. Instead they were exhorted to seek strength and the way to salvation within them. He wrote:

Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weakness, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism. . . . If we were not dazzled by the artificial glare of English prestige, we should at once acknowledge that these men are not worth being angry with . . . . Our appeal, the appeal of every high souled and self-respecting nation, ought not to be the opinion of the Anglo-Indians, no, nor yet to the British sense of justice, but to our own reviving sense of manhood, to our own sincere fellow- feeling. . . . with the silent and suffering people of India<sup>122</sup> .

He exhorted the Indian patriots to learn more from the French republican experiment than from the British. He told them to carry their glance across the English channel so that they witness a very different and more animating spectacle of the French people who, with a lighter, subtler and clearer mind than their insular neighbors moved irresistibly towards a social development. Aurobindo was to inject a popular tendency into the national effort "before<sup>123</sup> it can hope to be great and fruitful" .

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122. Ibid.

123. Srinivasa Iyengar, op.cit, p.56

The articles of Aurobindo in Indu Prakash were to give uncompromising hammer blows to the congress and send tremors to the foundations of the British imperialism in India. They made a sensation and frightened Mahadev Govind Ranade and other Congress leaders. Ranade warned the proprietor of the paper that if this went on he would surely be prosecuted for sedition<sup>124</sup>. Accordingly the original plan of the series had to be dropped at the proprietor's instance. Deshpande requested Aurobindo to continue in a modified tone and he reluctantly consented, but felt not further interest. Now the articles were published at long intervals and finally dropped of themselves<sup>125</sup> altogether . . .

Socially speaking, the most important thing that took place in Aurobindo's life while at Baroda was his marriage<sup>126</sup> in April 1901 to the young and beautiful Mrinalini .The daughter of Bhopal Chandra Bose of Jessore (who had settled in Ranchi), she was cultured and enlightened enough to understand the exalted mind of her husband and never proved an obstacle in the way of his progress in political and spiritual life. Though she had rarely the opportunity of living with Aurobindo, their relations were most cordial and full of affection from beginning to end. A high-souled woman of great devotion and piety, Mrinalini, by her dignity made suffering itself a step or 'Sadhana' towards a

124. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.13

125. Ibid.

126. Diwakar, op.cit., p.41

higher life <sup>127</sup> . Aurobindo also knowing well the dignified heart of his Mrinalini, often wrote to her in detail his own spiritual experience and tried to prepare her mind for a life other than that of a mere housewife <sup>128</sup> . He wrote to her of his three madness: the sacrifice to god, his direct vision of God and worshipping India as mother, and asked"... will you come along with me and share my ideal in this respect? We will act and dress like ordinary men, buying only what is truly needed and offering the rest to God. . . My purpose can be fulfilled once you give your approval, once you are able to accept the sacrifice. You have been saying "I have made no progress". Here I have shown you path towards progress. Will you take this path?" <sup>129</sup> . It was an inspiring call: "Give up all this and follow after me . We have come to this world to do God's work; let us begin it" <sup>130</sup> . Some time after he settled down at Pondicherry in 1910, he could not visit her any more as he plunged into deeper 'Yoga' which required utter seclusion and austere continence. However he permitted her to come to Pondicherry in 1918 <sup>131</sup> . But while making journey to Pondicherry she fell ill at Calcutta and died on 17 December 1918 after a severe attack of influenza <sup>132</sup> .

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127. Ibid.

128. Ibid.

129. Sri Aurobindo's letter to Mrinalini Devi dated 30 August 1905.

130. Ibid.

131. Diwakar, op.cit., p.41

132. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, p.166

Curzon's scheme of partitioning Bengal in 1905 stirred up the patriotic sentiments of the Indians and a majority of the Hindu population of Bengal rose up against this high-handed measure which would destroy the solidarity of the Bengali people<sup>133</sup>. Bengal was soon transformed into a bee-hive of anti-British activities. The young and old, the educated and unlettered and the landless labourers and rich Zamindars, all joined in one mighty effort to undo the partition<sup>134</sup>. The Swadeshi movement also gained a great impetus during the anti-partition agitation, giving hope and inspiration to Indian entrepreneurs to replace the British industries with Indian ones<sup>135</sup>. The suggestion of boycotting the British goods spread quickly all over India. All towns and villages of Bengal witnessed massive gatherings. In Barisal, at one meeting, an effigy of Lord Curzon was burnt and a mock 'sradh' (funeral) ceremony performed<sup>136</sup>. Oaths were often taken in the premises of the temples of 'kali' the Mother Goddess; and the cults of Swadeshi', 'Bande Mataram and 'Bhavani' almost merged together, giving an ecstasy to the nationalists of the day. Nationalism was identified with the cult of 'Bhavani', the Mother Goddess<sup>137</sup>. It became almost a religion. The soil of Bengal noted for its highly elevated culture and unbending

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133. A.k. Majumdar, op.cit., pp. 30-31

134. Kulkarni, op.cit., p.110

135. Ibid.

136. R.C. Majumdar, op.cit., Vol II, p.14.

137. Sri Aurobindo, "Bhavani Mandir", Bande Mataram Pondicherry, 1973, pp.61-74

vigour could not think of anything bereft of the cult of the Mother Goddess, and the worship of the Motherland soon transformed itself into the worship of 'Durga', the destroyer of demons. Thus Bengal was vigorously spearheading the movement of militant nationalism.

True, the Indian National Congress was the only all India organization of the time which could speak for the nation. But it was still under the dominance of the moderate elements who were satisfied with the policy of political mendicancy. The Congress leaders still found relish in the garden parties the English masters gave them. The problem of India's slavery still remained unsolved. Naturally the new developments in Indian nationalism were bound to affect the Congress. Outside, the force of extremism was swelling and the Congress had to recognize that fact at its Bombay session of 1904<sup>138</sup>. Though not as an active agitator Aurobindo attended the meeting. Indeed he had already burnt his boat to impart militancy to the Congress and make it tread a path hitherto unfamiliar. At the Benaras session in 1905, the elders in the Congress began to realize that the ranks of the extremists had swollen still further and that moderatism would soon be off the platform of the Congress<sup>139</sup>. The Bengal partition had come as a sudden shock even to the moderates. Yet they would not join hands with the extremists. Consequently

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138. Diwakar, op.cit., p.51

139. Ibid

when the Congress met at Calcutta in 1906 the division between the moderates and extremists became almost obvious and would have brought in an open clash had it not been for the shrewdness of the venerable Dadabhai Naoroji who was the president of the session. Among the nationalist leaders at the Calcutta session were Tilak, Lajpat Rai and Kharpade; and Aurobindo had got the nationalists to accept Tilak as the leader<sup>140</sup>. He worked in the Reception Committee as well as in the working committee to get passed the resolution setting independence as the goal of the Congress<sup>141</sup>. Large support adequate enough to ensure the acceptance of the resolution at the open session of the Congress was secured. Also under the leadership of Tilak and Aurobindo the extremists put forward the four-fold programme which included swaraj, swadeshi, Boycott and National Education<sup>142</sup>. The Nationalists were adamant in getting the plans accepted by the Congress and they had left no stone unturned for it. It was in their desperation that the moderate leaders hit upon the idea of inviting the octogenarian Dadabhai Naoroji to preside over the Congress this time too. For they believed, none would oppose this Grand Old Man who, they thought could be won over to their side<sup>143</sup>. But Tilak foresaw what would happen. He knew that it was Dadabhai's considered conclusion that "the British rule over India is a canker which is eating

140. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.29

141. Pandit, op.cit., p.106

142. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.29

143. N.G. Jog, Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, New Delhi, 1979, p.85

into the vitals of the country"<sup>144</sup>. This being the case, Tilak held that "it would be unwise to suppose that he would be opposed to the resolutions on Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education"<sup>145</sup>. He saw in Dadabhai a "life devoted to the service of the country" and a mind alive to the value of the new spirit which was sweeping the country at the time<sup>146</sup>. Dadabhai himself was aware that the resolution had wide support from Bengal and other provinces as he proceeded to get it accepted<sup>147</sup>. Addressing the large political gathering of 2000 delegates and thousands of visitors, the Grand Old Man in his feeble voice made the unfeeble declaration: "We want. . . justice. The whole matter could be compressed in one word-self Government or swaraj"<sup>148</sup>. The term 'Swaraj' which became the war cry of India for the next forty years was already used by Tilak, but was brought to the Congress platform by Dadabhai Naoroji though he never explained what he exactly meant<sup>149</sup>. Thus as the Englishman the Anglo-Indian mouthpiece wrote "Dadabhai, who was called upon to quench the flames of hatred towards the British rule had only used kerosene for that purpose"<sup>150</sup>. The extremists scored a victory in gaining the emphatic declaration that the boycott movement was and is legitimate<sup>151</sup>. In the Calcutta session Tilak made his

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144. Ibid

145. Ibid

146. Ibid, p.86

147. Pandit, op.cit, p.106

148. Jog, op.cit, p.86

149. R.C. Majumdar, op.cit, Vol. II, p.193

150. Jog, op.cit, p.86

151. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, History of the Indian National Congress, Delhi, 1969 Vol.I, p.44;  
Annie Besant, How India Wrought for Freedom, Adayar 1934, p.452.

presence felt and was the reaper. Of course Pherozeshah Mehta also played a leading part in the Congress and even occasionally acted as the spokesman of the aged president. But the atmosphere of Calcutta prepared by the extremists could hardly have been to the liking of a man accustomed to force himself over the others. The extremists more than once challenged his ruling and even defied his authority which was a new experience to the 'lion of Bombay'. However, the benign presence of Dadabhai cooled the tempers and averted an open split. The omens of the Surat crisis were thus clearly discernible in Calcutta. The Congress was drifting towards split. But Tilak and his extremist group had good reasons to be satisfied over the achievement of the Calcutta Congress. Writing in the Kesari, Tilak humorously summed up:

Dadabhai, the venerable priest of patriotism has joined in holy wedlock the National congress and India's right to swaraj. This marriage is not entirely approved by some of those who claim paternity of the congress, but now that the marriage is effected no one has the power to dissolve it or hinder its final consummation - the attainment of Swaraj. Day by day the country is accepting in growing measure views and principles of the new party which is a gratifying sign of our political progress

The Calcutta Congress, no doubt witnessed the victory of militant nationalism. Congress was no more prepared to walk the way its old masters have shown. It was no more a blind to be led by the blind.

Though Aurobindo had a prominent yet silent part in forcing the issue on behalf of the extremists, his action may still be said to have been 'in cognito'<sup>153</sup>. Tilak acknowledged fully the nationalist mind of Aurobindo, directly collaborated with him and recognized in him the leadership of Bengal. However, Aurobindo was still publicly shy to take the plunge into open politics. But circumstances soon forced him to be the 'de jure' leader of the militant Bengal, if not, at that time the 'de facto' nationalist leader of awakening India<sup>154</sup>.

At Baroda Aurobindo also thought of organizing revolutionary societies. Spending his days there in company of his younger brother Barindra Kumar Ghose, Aurobindo invoked the blessings of the spirit of Sri Rama Krishna Paramahansa. The spirit was called and asked questions. The spirit kept silence for a long time. Then while going, it said, "Make a temple, Make a temple (Mandir Karo)"<sup>155</sup>, Now Aurobindo thought of establishing a temple for the Mother Goddess, and evolved the 'Bhavani Mandir' scheme. Years later Aurobindo interpreted the words of the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna as command to make in oneself a temple to the mother<sup>156</sup>.

153. Diwakar, op.cit., p.51

154. Ibid., p.52

155. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, p.51

156. Ibid

In the hectic days that preceded the Bengal partition Aurobindo wrote in detail on the scheme<sup>157</sup>. The idea was, of course, of Barin (Barindra Kumar Ghose), but it was Aurobindo who gave it a form. Copies of the 'Bhavani Mandir' written by him were printed in thousands and circulated. It envisaged a temple dedicated to the 'Mother Bhavani' where her children spirited with nationalism gave themselves to total renunciation and dedicated themselves for the liberation of the nation<sup>158</sup>. In it he envisioned the gaining of strength by adoring the 'Mother' for India's spiritual regeneration. He suggested a three fold order of Bhakthi, Karma and Jnana (devotion, action and knowledge) for the devotees of the Mother<sup>158</sup>. To him 'Bhavani' was the ever pleasant goddess to her devotees, but an ever inspiring fierce deity exhorting her children to fight against all that are unjust. The idea of the 'Bhavani Mandir' however simply lapsed of itself. Aurobindo thought no more about it but Barin who clung to the idea tried to establish something like it on a small scale in the Manicktola Garden<sup>159</sup> (Calcutta). Aurobindo took advantage, nonetheless, of the Swadeshi movement to popularize the idea of violent revolt in the future. At Barin's suggestions he agreed to start a paper, the Yugantar<sup>160</sup>. Though intended to preach open revolt against the British rule, Yugantar was to include such items like instructions for guerrilla warfare. Aurobindo himself wrote some of the opening articles in the

157. Sri Aurobindo, "Bhavani Mandir", Bande Mataram, pp. 61-74

158. Ibid

159. Ibid p. 59

early numbers and always exercised a general control .  
Although Aurobindo's name never came in any by-line few  
doubted that he was writing in it. Yugantar with its  
seditious articles, soon became an object of suspicion in  
the eyes of English bureaucracy. Naturally police action  
came against the paper. Bhupendra Nath Dutta, Swami Vive-  
kananda's brother who was on the sub-editorial staff,  
presented himself on his own motion to the police as the  
editor of the paper and was prosecuted <sup>162</sup> . Some other  
writers of the Yugantar also went into jail. However  
Yugantar under the orders of Aurobindo, adopted the policy  
of refusing to defend itself in the British Court, it  
having held the ground not to recognize a foreign govern-  
ment and its court <sup>163</sup> . This bold policy of the paper gained  
for it immense popularity and prestige among the Bengalees.

It is to be noted that even though Aurobindo associat-  
ed himself with the work of Yugantar and Bande Mataram he  
could not take part in active politics as long as he was in  
the Baroda state service. It was during the long leave he  
took from Baroda that he put himself actively in helping  
the working of these papers and organizing the nationalist  
youth of Bengal. It was at this time that Raja Subodh

160. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.24

161. Ibid

162. Ibid

163. Ibid

Mullick started the National College at Calcutta in August 1906<sup>164</sup>. But along with starting the college Subodh made a very welcome condition that Aurobindo, till then in Baroda Service must be requested to come to Calcutta and associate himself with the working of the college<sup>165</sup>. The request was duly made and Aurobindo stopped once for all his Baroda assignments and came to Calcutta<sup>166</sup>. "Looking ahead" on that day of glory and greatness when India would work for the world, he took over as the Principal of the Bengal National College<sup>167</sup>. At the college, Aurobindo was the idol of the students. He not only taught them but inspired them as well with his examples. But his service in the college was often marred by the trials and prosecutions that befell him on account of his being actively engaged in the national politics. He resigned from his post when he was first prosecuted in the Bande Mataram case in August 1907 so as not to embarrass the institution and rejoined the college as a professor in September when the case against him failed. It was in connection with the Manicktola Bomb case that Aurobindo, sending his resignation from Alipore jail, finally severed his connections with the College<sup>168</sup>.

In Calcutta Aurobindo took up the main burden of knitting together the extremists and openly challenging the

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164. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, p.89

165. Manoj Das, Sri Aurobindo in the First Decade of The Century, Pondicherry, 1872, p.1

166. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.28

167. Pandit, op.cit., p.98

168. Ibid

moderate school of thought . This extremist organization received an unprecedented momentum from the political atmosphere the Swadeshi agitation created and the government policy of repression could only steel the national feelings. Aurobindo put himself heart and soul into the work of Bande Mataram started by Bipin Chandra Pal<sup>170</sup> . He called a private meeting of young nationalist leaders in Calcutta, and they agreed to take up Bande Mataram as their party paper with Subodh and Nirodh Mullick as the principal financial supporters<sup>171</sup> . The paper had on its editorial staff very eminent writers like Hemendra Prasad Ghose and Syam Sundar Chakraborty. It was the latter who wrote in times of Aurobindo's incarceration, and he had caught up a journalistic jargon almost similar to Aurobindo's<sup>172</sup> . It was so similar that the readers often took Syam Sundar's diction for Aurobindo's<sup>173</sup> . The paper got the acceptance and blessings of the national leaders like Tilak and Rabin-dra Nath Tagore. Often Aurobindo met Tagore at the poet's residence and the poet visited the office of the 'Sanjeeva-ni' (secret society & journal) where he met Aurobindo<sup>174</sup> .

During April 1907 (11 to 23 April) Aurobindo wrote in Bande Mataram a series of articles on passive resistance

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169. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.28  
170. Ibid  
171. Ibid  
172. Ibid  
173. Srinivasa Iyengar, op.cit., p.227  
174. Pandit, op.cit., p.108

under the general title, 'New Thought'<sup>175</sup>. In the very introduction itself he wrote on "both of the ideal which Congress had adopted, the ideal of Swaraj or self Government. . . and of the possible lines of policy by which congress had adopted the ideal of Swaraj or self Government. . . and of the possible lines of policy by which that ideal might be attained"<sup>176</sup>. He called upon the nationalists to put forth an "organized resistance" to the then existing form of government for the "vindication of the national liberty", to create " a free popular Government" and to dominate the future by strength of courage and faith<sup>177</sup>. The writings of Aurobindo naturally raised suspicion among the British bureaucrats. Already apprehensive, the government decided to remove Aurobindo from the scene of action. Prosecutions for sedition were launched against Yugantar and Bande Mataram. But the government completely failed in its attempts. While the authorship of Yugantar articles was owned by Bhupendranath Dutta, in the Bande Mataram case there was no real evidence to prove Aurobindo's authorship<sup>178</sup>. When the Bande Mataram case came up for hearing, the Chief Presidency Magistrate, Kingsford, declared that the general tone of 'Bande Mataram' was not seditious, and put his ruling, acquitting Aurobindo<sup>179</sup>.

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175. Sri Aurobindo, Bande Mataram, Pondicherry, 1973, p.83

176. Bande Mataram, 11 April 1907

177. Ibid., 12 April 1907

178. Diwakar, op.cit., p.54

179. Manoj Das, op.cit., p.54

As the Bande Mataram itself wrote editorially, the prosecution that had "commenced with a flourish of trumpets" ended merely "in the most complete and dismal fiasco such as no Indian Government has ever had to experience before in a sedition case"<sup>180</sup> . . . The Bande Mataram prosecution also rendered valuable service to the cause the paper worked for . For the trial could only enhance the popularity of the journal as well as the man behind it. Aurobindo, hitherto shy of publicity was brought to the full glare of publicity and became the idol of the nation<sup>181</sup> .

Meanwhile the national-minded Indians were anxiously waiting to know what would happen in the congress. Indian nationalism had seen so far only the supremacy of the moderate elements in the congress. But the Calcutta session of the Congress witnessed a different scene with the nationalists pressure forcing the Congress to accept Swaraj as its goal. The note of disharmony the Calcutta Congress struck, though hushed up for the time being, had left too much dissension within the party to become obvious and open in the Surat Session in 1907. All knew that the Surat meeting of the Congress would be a decisive one in measuring the relative strength of the moderates and the extremists. Therefore, even a week before the scheduled date both the group had started mustering their forces. Surat being their stronghold, the moderates chose it as the venue

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180. Bande Mataram, 26 September, 1907

181. Diwakar, op.cit., p.54

with the view of securing a majority for them<sup>182</sup>. The extremists naturally interpreted this as a move to facilitate the triumph of the moderates<sup>183</sup>. There was also difference of opinion over the selection of the president. The name of Lajpat Rai was suggested by the extremists. His election as the president, the extremists thought, would mark the country's indignation and protest against the unfair treatment government accorded to him. This was not acceptable to the moderates who had Rash Behari Ghose as their nominee for the president ship. Lajpat Rai later declined to be in the political game. But this, as R.C. Majumdar writes "showed the extremists which way the wind blew" and their suspicions were further confirmed by the fact that the list of the subjects likely to be taken up for discussion by the Surat Congress, officially published ten days before the date of the congress session did not include Swaraj or self-government, boycott and national education<sup>185</sup>. The movements of the moderates were thus aimed at keeping the Congress under their rein and to keep it away from ideal of Swaraj or anything uncompromisingly national. The extremists soon found tangible evidence that their fear was not unfounded. The breach was so wide that the session soon proved to be a 'Kurukshetra' as Aurobindo considered it<sup>186</sup>. The moderates as well as the extremists

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182. Sitaramayya, op.cit., Vol-I, p.96

183. R.C. Majumdar, op.cit., Vol-II, p.197

184. Ibid

185. Ibid., p.198

186. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.47

arrayed their forces and mobilization went on till almost the opening of the regular session. As has been described:

In the moderate camp, Mehta was an imperious and dominant force, Gokhale was intellectually and morally the most distinguished, and Surendranath was the necessary counterpoise to the strong extremist contingent from Bengal (which included even revolutionaries like Barindra). As for Rashbehari Ghose, the president-elect, he was known to be a brilliant lawyer with a lucrative practice, as an erudite and polished speaker, and as a perfectly safe politician from the point of view of the moderates. In the opposite camp, there was Lajpat Rai wearing the crown of recent persecution and deportation, there was Sri Aurobindo - to many a dark horse still - who appeared calm in his ocean oneness on the eve of a storm; and there was Tilak, and on either side there was none at the time to equal him in his Oak-like massiveness and stature. Surat was really Tilak's Congress <sup>187</sup>.

When the session of December 26 began, the name of Rash Behari Ghose was proposed for the office of the president <sup>188</sup>. It was objected and a loud protest followed. Surendra Nath's seconding the proposal was cowed down by a

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187. Srinivasa Iyengar, .op.cit., pp. 252-253

188. R.C. Majumdar, .op.cit., Vol - II p. 199

grand uproar from a section of the delegates. The bustle would not end till an assurance that the resolution on Swadeshi, boycott and National Education would have its status quo<sup>189</sup>. Finding it impossible to hold the session the meeting was suspended for the day. All the negotiations for an understanding became fruitless. On the 27th the proceedings were resumed. Surendra Nath seconded the proposal for the election of the president and Motilal Nehru supported it. Amidst great uproar the chairman declared the motion carried, and Dr. Ghose rose to read his address. But Tilak had already requested the chairman, in writing, permission to address the delegates on the proposal of the election of the president after it would be seconded<sup>190</sup>. Finding no response Tilak proceeded to the platform to assert his right of speech. Nothing would prevent him and he was seen "standing straight in front of the presidential chair itself, expostulating, protesting in all that calm, decisive voice of his, the voice of a man indifferent to fate"<sup>191</sup>. Tilak had given the notice of an amendment, he was there to move it, and there he would remain at all cost. Malvi, the the chairman had ruled that Tilak's motion was out of order, but Tilak refused to accept this decision<sup>192</sup> and decided to appeal to the delegates. There was

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189. Ibid.; Sitaramayya, op.cit., Vol. I p.96

190. Sitaramayya, op.cit., Vol-I, p-97. Tilak had given in writing to Thribhuvendas Malvi that he wished "to address the delegates on the proposal of the election of president after it is second. I wish to move an adjournment with a constructive proposal. Please announce me".

191. Jog, op.cit., p.113

192. R.C. Majumdar, op.cit., Vol-II, p.201

attempt to remove Tilak physically from the platform. Bustle pervaded the whole atmosphere, and shoes and stones flew in the pavilion<sup>193</sup>. The president, finding the situation too difficult to tackle, suspended the Congress session 'sine die'. Immediately afterwards the Nationalists gathered together in protest and swore to embark on with the gospel of Swaraj and Swadeshi<sup>194</sup>. Aurobindo who was mainly responsible for the decision to break away rather than surrender to the moderate view, presided the meeting at which Tilak spoke<sup>195</sup>. Aurobindo exhorted the young men to be avowed to sacrifice themselves for the mother country and never to rest till freedom was won.

The Surat Congress marked a turning point in the history of India's freedom movement. The extremists had taken out of the Congress its spirit and what remained in the hands of the moderates was only the shell. In the days to follow the patriotic activities flourished outside the precincts of the national organization. It took a very long time for the Congress to champion once again the cause of Indian independence.

Along with the intense patriotic activity Aurobindo had,

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193. It was alleged by the Extremist leaders including Aurobindo that the moderates had made arrangement the previous night to dismiss the nationalist volunteers and hired Borah or Muhammadan Goondas. R.C. Majumdar, op.cit., Vol-II, p. 201.

194. Diwakar, op.cit., p.65

195. Ibid.

as a deeper undercurrent, some experience of a spiritual nature which had a decisive and far reaching influence in his life. After the Surat session Aurobindo did not go directly to Calcutta. Instead he responded to the calls from a number of cities, beginning with Baroda. At Baroda, having felt the need of consulting an authority on Yoga he asked Barin to arrange a meeting with someone who would help him in his 'Sadhana' or practice of Yoga<sup>196</sup>. Barin soon wired to the Maharashtrian Yogi. Vishnu Bhaskar Lele,<sup>197</sup> who was at Gwalior on his way to Baroda. As he received the telegram Lele intuitively knew that he would have to initiate a very great soul into Yoga. He met Aurobindo in the first week of January 1908<sup>198</sup>. Lele was all ready to help Aurobindo in his 'Sadhana'. He measured the great strides Aurobindo had made and suggested that he should concentrate on making his mind a complete blank (Nir-vishaya) so that the divine might enter and take possession<sup>200</sup>. The intrepid seeker succeeded in his practice and within no time attained a stage wherein he could overcome the ego and surrender himself completely into the hands of the Divine. He found himself, like Dhananjaya at Kurukshe-tra, a puppet in the hands of his 'Maker', a 'Nimitha Matra' or a mere instrument. This change his state of mind had undergone thanks to the yogic practice, Aurobindo himself narrated in a letter to his wife, Mrinalini

196. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, p.97

197. Pandit, op.cit., p.118

198. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, p. 97

200. Diwakar, op.cit., p.57, Sri Aurobindo, On Himself p. 83.

Devi <sup>201</sup>. In it he mentioned that he was no longer his own master and that all his future actions would be on what the 'Supreme' dictates. He perceived some undefinable reality which was "beyond space and unconnected with any cosmic reality, but yet was met wherever one turned" <sup>202</sup>. There was, of course, a return to participation in the world consciousness. But wherever he moved and whichever activity he participated in there was the intervention of a highest experience <sup>203</sup>. Something else than himself took up his dynamic activity and spoke and acted through him but without any personal thought or initiative" <sup>204</sup>.

After his attainment of equanimity and establishment of peace within there arose the question as to what he should do about the delivery of his message and his mission he so set on. To solve the difficulty Lele suggested that while standing to address an audience he should suspend the process of conscious thought, close his eyes for a moment and then face the audience with folded hands as if he were in the presence of God himself so that the needed utterance would then come without effort <sup>205</sup>. While addressing an audience in Bombay it did happen and the audience was held spellbound. Though not an eloquent orator and had spoken in slow simple English, his words springing directly from the

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201. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself pp. 57, 83

202. Ibid, p.86

203. Ibid

204. Ibid.

205. Diwakar, op.cit, p.58

heart had tremendous effect on the audience. They bore the stamp of sincerity and impressive depth of feeling. They poured out like from an evangelist, the prophet:

There is a creed in India today which calls itself Nationalism... What is Nationalism? Nationalism is not a new political programme; Nationalism is a religion that has come from God..... You must remember that you are the instruments of God.... In Bengal Nationalism has come to the people as a religion, and it has been accepted as a religion. But certain forces which are against that religion are trying to crush its rising strength. It always happens when a new religion is preached, when God is going to be born in the people that such forces rise with all their weapons in their hands to crush the religion... Nationalism has not been crushed. Nationalism survives in the strength of God and it is not possible to crush it, whatever weapons are brought against. Nationalism is immortal; Nationalism cannot die... God cannot be killed, God cannot be sent to jail<sup>206</sup> .

He thus preached faith in God and the mission of India. "Service of the mother, sacrifice for her, self-help and Swadeshi, these and other eternal virtues of heroes' and of

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206. Sri Aurobindo's address before the National Union, Bombay, 19 January, 1908.

men of God were the burden of his inspired song of patriotism"<sup>207</sup>. These sentiments gushing forth from him thrilled his audience who felt spiritually lifted up and became conscious of something deeper in themselves. He was at once the seer and prophet of nationalism in India, the poet of inspiring patriotism, the high priest spearheading the pilgrimage to freedom, the General of the great army crusading against all that was gross and evil.

After the Surat split Aurobindo developed his ideas further to propagate the creed of nationalism and elaborate the programme of the fight for freedom. he was truly an advocate of passive resistance though not a believer of non-violence in the Gandhian sense. But both Aurobindo and Tilak held that the British policy of repression would lead only to bloody revolution. They knew well the discontent seething in the minds of Indian youth with whom they sympathized, though they had no personal connection with any conspiracy and organized violent programmes or activities<sup>208</sup>. But this proved no matter to the English bureaucracy which tried its best to implicate him directly in whatever conspiracy or violence that took place. At any cost it wanted to remove him from Indian political scene. The repressive policy of the government was too much that even Lord Morely, then Secretary of State, warned Lord Minto, the Viceroy:

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207. Diwakar, op.cit., p. 58.

208. Ibid, p.59

I must confess you that I am watching with the deepest concern and dismay the thundering sentences that are being passed for sedition etc. We must keep order, but excess of severity is not the path to order. On the contrary it is the path to the bomb <sup>209</sup> .

Interestingly the same sentiment was expressed by the Lokamanya under Kesari's headline "Bombkhe Rahasya" (the secret of the bomb) after the Muzaffarpur bomb blast <sup>210</sup> .

The opinions of the British officials and the premonition of Indian patriots that the repressive policy of the government would lead only to the bomb proved right. Naturally it was Bengal that took the lead. The storm centre of revolutionary activities, Bengal was already set ablaze by the partition scheme. The more the anti-British activities grew the more ruthless the suppressive measures became. The government unleashed its ruthless operation not only against the agitators but editors, public men and students as well. The towns and cities experienced an atmosphere of terror and uncertainty. The noted Bengal journalist, Brah-mabandhava Upadhyaya was proceeded against though he died long before the trial. A young boy Susil Sen of Calcutta was ordered to be flogged in open court for having shouted "Bande Mataram". This order of Kingsford, the Chief

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209. Ibid

210. Jog, op.cit., p.117

Presidency Magistrate, was beyond all tolerance<sup>211</sup>. Naturally the revolutionaries of Bengal thought that bomb would be the adequate answer. The first bomb was prepared, aimed at killing Sir Bamfylde Fuller, the Lieutenant Governor of East Bengal. His notorious and repressive policies against the anti-partition agitators had won for him a place in the hit-list of the revolutionaries<sup>212</sup>. Prafulla Chaki, a young man of seventeen was deputed to kill Fuller, but he did not succeed. Another attempt resulted in the derailment of the train in which the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal was traveling<sup>213</sup>. The next attempt was to murder Kingsford who was then the judge of Muzaffarpur. To kill this villain of the Susil Sen incident, Prafulla Chaki had with him Khudiram Bose on his way to Muzaffarpur. They threw bomb at the supposed carriage of Kingsford on 30 April 1908<sup>214</sup>. But the victims proved to be Mrs. Pringle Kennedy and her daughter who were entirely innocent of all politics<sup>215</sup>. Prafulla shot himself dead before being arrested and Khudiram was tried and hanged<sup>216</sup>. Aurobindo had no connection with the incident as the Alipore trial later revealed. Indeed he and his group were opposed to such programmes of the utterly misdirected youth of Bengal. Strongly condemning it, Syam Sunder Chakraborty wrote editorially in the Bande Mataram

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211. R.C. Majumdar, op.cit., Vol, p. 259

212. Tarachand, op.cit., Vol-III, pp. 327-329

213. R.C. Majumdar, op. cit., Vol-II, pp. 258-259

214. Pandit, op.cit., p.124

215. Diwakar, op.cit., p.60

216. R.C. Majumdar op.cit., Vol-II, p.259

that "outrages of this kind have absolutely no sanction in our ancient tradition and culture" and that it was a poor imitation of the Western cult of anarchy<sup>217</sup>. But the government took quite a different view. Unleashing a ruthless repression, it tried to remove the dynamic figures and men of worth from the political field.

On 2 May 1908 the police swooped down upon the garden at Murari Pukur of Calcutta, arrested the occupants and took possession of all the articles there<sup>218</sup>. Next, the police entered the residence of Sri Aurobindo 48 Grey Street, early in the morning of 2 May 1908, and arrested him<sup>219</sup>. In the search that followed, the police could trace nothing except some books, letters, papers, essays and the like. A box which police suspiciously examined contained only some earth which was brought to him from Dakshineswar<sup>220</sup> "by a young man connected with Ramakrishna Mission". He was then taken to the police station and from there towards Lal Bazar. From there he was presented before the Magistrate Court which kept him as an under trial prisoner in Alipore jail.

Aurobindo's prison life at Alipore began on 5 May 1908 and ended on 6 May the next year<sup>221</sup>. But the prison life at Alipore proved to Aurobindo a turning point in his

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217. Diwakar, op.cit., p.60

218. Manoj Das, op.cit., p.43

219. Sri Aurobindo, Tales of Prison Life, Calcutta, 1942, p.9

220. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.59; Tales of prison Life. p.11

221. Pandit, op.cit., p. 127

spiritual life. About the prison life at Alipore Aurobindo observed: "It would have been more appropriate to speak of a year's living in an asrama or a hermitage.... The only result of the wrath of British Government was that I found God"<sup>222</sup>. In the Alipore jail Aurobindo as he claims, had direct vision of God and asked for his protection<sup>223</sup>. He heard his inner voice telling him, "the bonds you have not the strength to break, I have broken for you". For it was the intention of God Almighty that Aurobindo should not remain there so that he could continue the God's work<sup>224</sup>. He got the inspiration to be initiated more into the teaching of the Gita. Aurobindo says:

I was not only to understand intellectually but to realize what Sri Krishna demanded of Arjuna and what he demands of those who aspire to do his work, to be free from repulsion and desire, to do the work for him without the demand for fruit, to renounce self-will and become a passive and faithful instrument in his hands, to have an equal heart for high and low, friend and opponent, success and failure, yet not to do his work negligently. I realized what the Hindu religion<sup>225</sup> meant.

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222. Ibid

223. Sri Aurobindo, Uttarpara Speech, Pondicherry, 1973, p.4

224. Ibid

225. Ibid p.5

Then as he said, he had a vision of Shri Krishna. He felt everything as abiding in God. He saw God in the prisoners in jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, in their darkened soul and misused bodies and in the miniature world in the prison. He heard the voice of the divine asking him: "Behold the people among whom I have sent you to do a little of my work. This is the nature of the nation I am raising up and the reason why I raise them"<sup>226</sup>. He heard again the voice of Sri Krishna:

I am in all men and I overrule their actions and their words. My protection is still with you and you shall not fear. This case which is brought against you, leave it in my <sup>hā</sup><sub>A</sub>. It is not for you.... not for the trial that I brought you here but for something else. The case itself is a means<sup>227</sup> for my work and nothing more .

Throughout his jail life the messages of the Gita and the 'Sanathana Dharma' had sunk into every nook and cranny of his consciousness and he emerged a full-fledged and God-inspired man of vision who had seen God and felt his immanence in every action of the universe. Now all of a sudden all the arrangements which had been made for his defence were changed and another Counsel had undertaken to argue for Aurobindo. It was as if God himself had sent him to Alipore. Aurobindo says:

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226. Ibid., p.6  
227. Ibid., p.7

He came unexpectedly - a friend of mine .... you have all heard the name of the man who put away from him all other thoughts and abandoned all his practice, who sat up half the night day after day for months and broke his health to save me -  
228  
Srijut Chittaranjan Das .

Seeing him Aurobindo ceased to have all his doubts about the proceedings of the case. For, before this roaring lion of Bengal no prosecution or argument would stand, he knew. After all this arrangement itself, as Aurobindo held it, was brought about by Lord Sri Krishna himself who assured, "I am guiding, therefore, fear not.... and what I will, shall be, not what others will. What I choose to bring about, no human power can stay"  
229 .

While the case dragged on efforts were made one after another to implicate Aurobindo and secure a conviction. Elderly Norton, the great legal luminary was engaged by the Government, and the judge Beachcroft, a class-mate of Aurobindo at Cambridge, was second only to Aurobindo at the college  
230 . But the able and prophetic advocacy of Chittaranjan Das raised the trial almost to an epic level. Concluding his defence argument, C.R. Das made his final appeal to the court:

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228. Ibid., pp. 7-8

229. Ibid., p.8

230. Manoj Das, op.cit; Sri Aurobindo, Tales of Prison Life pp. 72-73.

That long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and a lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands. Therefore I say that the man in this position is not only standing before the bar of this court but before the bar of the High Court of History... To you gentlemen I appeal in the name of the very ideal that Aurobindo preached and in the name of all the traditions of our country...<sup>231</sup>

The jury gave a verdict, 'Not guilty' on 14 April 1909<sup>232</sup>. The judge Beachcroft, accepting the verdict, delivered his judgment on the historic Muzaffarpur Bomb case on 6 May 1909, acquitting Aurobindo<sup>233</sup>.

Aurobindo was a changed man after the Alipore jail life. India had also been by that time a changed one. He was transformed from a flaming agitator into a mature and serene philosopher emphasizing on "Yoga for all humanity". In his Uttarpara speech he made a reference to the change

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231. Manoj Das, op.cit., p.64

232. Pandit, op.cit., p.130

233. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, p.115

in Indian politics after Alipore. The iron hand of repression silenced many voices and many pen that worked for nationalism. There was no cry of 'Bande Mataram'. "A hush had fallen on the country and men seemed bewildered... No man seemed to know which way to move"<sup>234</sup>. Lokamanya who always sat by Aurobindo's side and was associated with his work was a prisoner in Burma. Aurobindo looked round, when he came out, for those to whom he had been accustomed to look for counsel and inspiration. He did not find them<sup>235</sup>. Also the Bande Mataram which was the mouthpiece of patriotism had ceased publication during his incarceration. During Aurobindo's jail life Bejoy Chatterjee, Syam Sundar Chakraborti and Hemendra Prasad had carried on somehow with the paper. There was no finance and the paper found it impossible to go ahead. So the Bande Mataram deliberately came out with an article which made the government come down on the paper and stop its publication. It had thus an end in all honour<sup>236</sup>.

Yet he was undaunted to carry on the work of nationalism and the eternal religion of Mother India ie., the Sanathana Dharma. "Without Suffering there can be no growth", he said and proceeded with indomitable faith in future. Now to launch a new programme on fresh and deeper gospel he published Karmayogin, an English weekly and

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234. Sri Aurobindo, Uttarapara Speech. p.2

235. Ibid., p.1

236. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself., pp.59-60

Dharma, a weekly in Bengali wherein his writings almost transcended the political plane<sup>237</sup>. 'Karmayoga', 'Dharma', 'Gita' and other major and deeper aspects of Indian culture were the subjects. Spiritual approach and higher attitude were stressed even in mundane affairs. In the columns of his new journals he dealt with politics and political problems too since he still championed the cause of nationalism. Again it was imperative that in the post-Alipore days when Aurobindo came out of jail he had to answer the criticisms of Anglo-Indian and moderate press. His columns in Karmayogin helped Aurobindo explain elaborately his political policies and programmes as well as his ideas about constructive nationalism<sup>238</sup>. Meanwhile Indian politics took an adverse turn with the British policy of counterpoise of native against the native as was revealed from the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909<sup>239</sup>. The acceptance of the scheme by moderate leaders further demoralized the political atmosphere. But throughout during all the turbulence Aurobindo kept his ideal of 'passive resistance'. In the Karmayogin he wrote "An open Letter To My Countrymen", outlining a six-point programme which included 'Swaraj', 'Swadeshi', effective boycott, self-help, passive resistance, and non-co-operation<sup>240</sup>. At the Hooghly political conference held in September 1909 Aurobindo carried the

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237. Purani, The Life of Sri Aurobindo, p.124,  
Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.34

238. Diwakar, op.cit., p.64

239. K.M. Munshi, Pilgrimage to Freedom, p.3

240. Karmayogin, 30 July 1909.

delegates with him in passing the nationalist  
241  
resolutions . . .

But Aurobindo gave more importance to spiritual and cultural aspects than politics which was also, of course a part of his spiritual life. 'Tapas' and 'Sadhana' took most of his time. 'The brain of India', his article series were essays on education wherein he defended the principles and ideals of ancient Indian education. In them he tried to seek "the secret of that gigantic intellectuality, spirituality and super-human moral force... pulsating in the Ramayana and Mahabharatha, in the ancient philosophy, in the supreme poetry, art, sculpture and architecture of India"  
242 . Equally brilliant was the article series 'A defence of Indian Culture' published in Arya. These articles, through which he replied to William Archer's superficial attack on Indian culture, brought out successfully and impressively the scientific and spiritual basis of Indian culture. In them he separately dealt with Indian art, poetry, polity, literature and external influence on Indian  
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culture .

Meanwhile during July 1909 news leaked out that the British bureaucracy had planned to round up Aurobindo. Sister Nivedita informed him of this move and of the

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241. Diwakar, op.cit., p.66

242. Sri Aurobindo, Brain of India, Pondicherry, 1986,

243. Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, Pondicherry, 1985, pp. 196-394

possible deportation<sup>244</sup>. She advised Aurobindo "not to hide" but to continue his political activity from outside the British India<sup>245</sup>. But this never worried Aurobindo. With the experiences of many prosecutions, he knew that the net of bureaucracy could not trap him. And he thought it sufficient if he would make an open pronouncement of his political views. hence his "open letter to my countrymen" which is considered to be his last political will and testament<sup>246</sup>. The letter which appeared in the Karmayogin's issue of 31 July 1909 effectively changed the intentions of the government<sup>247</sup>. In it he exhorted the nationalists not to be unnerved by changes in the leadership. He said, "all the great movements wait for their God-sent leader, the willing channel of his force and only when he comes, move forward triumphantly to their fulfilment.... Therefore, the Nationalist party, the custodians of the future, must wait for the man who is to come". He solemnly declared to be free from politics and to concentrate more on spiritual preparation. The yearnings of his mind for Yoga had gathered much momentum. He continued his political work until as late as February 1910. The decision was finally taken out of his hands. He felt the inner call in obedience of which he left for Chandranagar in the French territory<sup>248</sup>. Finding Chandranagar not convenient for

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244. Parivrajika Atmaprana, Sister Nivedita of Ramakrishna - Vivekananda, Calcutta, 1977. P. 225

245. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p.62

246. Ibid

247. Srinivasa Iyengar, op.cit., p.332

248. Diwakar, op.cit., p.67

his yogic practice he came to Pondicherry, the French territory in South India and settled there till he left the world for good on 5 December 1950<sup>249</sup>. Calls many had been to him to come back to the scene of Indian national movement and open politics. Lajpat Rai invited him to come back. Tilak offered him the editorial chair of the new nationalist journal he was to start. C.R. Das tried his best and later, on the death of Das, Rabindra Nath Tagore<sup>250</sup> too took initiative for this end. Mahathma Gandhi also made his attempt to call him back<sup>251</sup> by sending his son Devadas Gandhi as a special envoy. The whole Bengal craved for him. But he would not turn back. He had entered fully on the path of spiritual seeking, leading humanity in its onward march to spiritual salvation.

249. Pandit, op.cit., p.334  
250. Diwakar, op.cit., p.69  
251. Ibid.

CHAPTER - II  
CYCLICAL THEORY OF HISTORY

Much has been thought and written on the nature of history, and the debate whether it is linear or cyclical in development has never been resolved. It may also be asked whether the linear progress is just the course between two supposed milestones of the historical cycle i.e., the beginning and the end which are one and the same. The thought about the cyclic nature of universal phenomena in general and historical movement in particular originated from the very time when man began to speculate over them. The credit of developing the earliest idea regarding the cyclical theory goes to Anaximander of Greece, who said that everything must return again to the primal mass whence it sprang only to be produced anew<sup>1</sup>. According to his doctrine of cyclical recurrence innumerable worlds presumably succeed one another in time<sup>2</sup>.

The creation of things is, according to him, injustice in the sense that by becoming what they are, they rob the

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1. Frank Thilly, A History of Philosophy, Allahabad, 1984, p. 25. Anaximander (610-540 BC) the Student of Thales was the doyen of the pre-sophist school of thought. He believed that the universe in its beginning was an undifferentiated mass. Everything, he held, arose from this mass due to the separation of opposites, though separated things would at last come to a union. Everything must return finally to the primordial substance, completing the cycle of recurrence. Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy New York, 1961, p.63.
  2. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Paul Edwards (Ed). New York, 1967, Vol-1, pp. 117-118.

infinite,<sup>3</sup> and justice demands their return to the infinite. There is thus an eternal cyclical recurrence of the process of separation from and return to the primordial substance. The interpretation of human history in these cyclic terms evidently fascinated Plato and the same doctrine reappeared in one of the most famous passages in Virgil who perhaps used it to adorn the paean of optimism inspired by the Augustan pacification of the Hellenic world.<sup>4</sup> The question regarding the reappearance of the bygone things which Virgil did not face was answered centuries after by Shelley when he asked to the 'West Wind': "If winter comes can spring be far behind"? In the last chorus of his Hellas he began with a Virgilian reminiscence:

The world's great age begins anew,  
The golden years return,  
The Earth doth like a snake renew....<sup>5</sup>

The cyclic theory had been the core of Indian thought. The Vedas, Upanishads and all the related literature hint at the cyclic nature of things and happenings.<sup>6</sup> Sri Aurobindo derived his theory from these literature and this he used to modify the one he got from the German historiography.

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3. Ibid, p. 118

4. Arnold Toynbee, A study of History (Abridged by Somervell) London, 1962, pp. 251-252.

5. Ibid, p.252

6. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Calcutta, 1968, Vol-1, p.7

While theorising on the philosophy of history and its developments Aurobindo was not satisfied with merely the question of how and when a thing happened, but in answering why it happened too. He was more concerned with the factors that necessitated the happenings and thereby with the theory of causation which deals even with the origin of the universe. Here his thought was influenced by the ancient Indian postulation of Sathkaryavada, the rational philosophy that points to the existence of a cause behind all effects or which says that no existence can be born of non-existence<sup>7</sup>. Thus to him behind all the worldly phenomena there is a cause or the supreme spirit which works out the cosmic web. What is visible is the manifestation of the invisible. Variety originates from unity and viceversa, both being inextricably intertwined. Thus Aurobindo says:

the material object becomes something different from what we see, not a separate object on the background, or in the environment of the rest of nature but an indivisible part and even in a subtle way an expression of the unity of all that we see.

It is this unity from which everything proceeds and to which everything recedes<sup>8</sup>. Aurobindo identifies this unity as the 'Brahman' (or the ever growing entity) or the cosmic

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7. Surendra Nath Das Gupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, London, 1973, Vol-II, p.165
  8. Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, Pondicherry, 1984, p.667.

energy which is both mutable and immutable or kinetic and potential (Nirguna and Saguna)<sup>9</sup>. Thus to Aurobindo from the being there is the becoming. From a fathomless zero which occupied the world "a power of fallen boundless self awake"<sup>10</sup>. But the problem this religious truth faced was that when the age of conventionalism had stepped in the followers of different creeds tried to interpret it in conformity with their physical and material requirements. We hear of the truth discovering natural science imprisoned for long in the dark cells of the European Church. We hear of the miserable plight of Socrates, and later Copernicus whose only crime was inquisitiveness. But so far as Indian religion was concerned conventionalism got itself confined to the social realms and never had it penetrated to the realm of intellect, science or metaphysics which were still going on with their enquiry unmarred by any imposition or suppression. It may not be an exaggeration to say that what maintained the vitality of Indian culture through centuries was its inquisitiveness, objectivity and boldness to accept and proclaim the truth. The validity of Indian reading

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9. "He on whom the sky, the earth and the atmosphere are woven, and the wind, together with all life breathes. Him alone knows as the one soul". Mundaka Upanishad, 2-2-5.
  10. Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, Pondicherry, 1984, p.1. Here Aurobindo thinks in line with the vedic view of creation, i.e., the manifestation of the primordial energy through matter.  
"The sages searching in their hearts with wisdom found out the bond of being and non-being... creative force there was, and fertile power, below was energy, above impulse".  
Radhakrishnan and Moore, Tradition of Indian Philosophy, London, 1967, pp. 23-24.

about the truth of the cosmic oneness is at present supported by the modern discoveries in science. Although modern science still lags behind in reaching the realms known to the eastern mystics and is totally ineffective in imbibing the highly intuitive vision through the laboratory apparatus, there is still an apparent parallelism between the views of physics and eastern world view; both envision a basic unity<sup>11</sup>. To Albert Einstein "what is important is the force of this superpersonal content and the depth of the conviction concerning its overpowering meaningfulness"<sup>12</sup>.

The Quantum Theory forces us to see the universe not as a collection of physical objects, but rather as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of a unified whole<sup>13</sup>. The world thus appears as a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of

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11. The Eastern literatures often refer to the indivisible reality of which all things are mere parts. This point is illustrated in Milindapanho and in the teaching of Aswaghosha. "What is meant by the soul as such, is the oneness of the totality of all things, the great all including whole"  
Aswaghosha, The Awakening of Faith, D.T. Suzuki (Trans), Chicago, 1900, p.55.  
The same is revealed by Modern Physics. According to Niels Bohr, "Isolated material particles are abstractions, their properties being definable and observable only through their interaction with other systems".  
See Niels Bohr, Atomic Physics and Description of Nature, New York, 1958, p.57.
  12. Albert Einstein, Science, Philosophy and Religion, A Symposium, published by the conference of Science. Philosophy and Religion in their relation to the Democratic ways of life, New York, 1941.
  13. Fritjof Capra, The Tao of Physics, Colorado, 1976, p.124

different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole<sup>14</sup>. Modern Science has even come to a position of negating the very difference between matter and energy. In the words of Capra:

one of the strongest parallels to eastern mysticism (found in modern physics) has been the realization that the constituents of matter and the basic phenomena involving them are all interconnected; that they cannot be understood as isolated entities but only as integral parts of a unified whole<sup>15</sup>.

Thus there is a basic unity upon which the whole world is structured, by which all the phenomena are worked out. There are the visible and the invisible of which the former is an expression. Aurobindo points out, "we have therefore two fundamental facts.... a fact of Being, a fact of becoming. To deny one or the other is easy, but to find out their relation is the true and fruitful wisdom"<sup>16</sup>.

Thus from the being emerges the becoming. It was controversial among both the metaphysicists and physicists whether the being is mutable or immutable or whether it is both. We hear of Sankara's exposition of the Nirguna

14. W. Heisenberg, Physics and Philosophy, New York, 1958, p.107.

15. Fritjof Capra, op.cit, p. 299.

16. Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, Pondicherry, 1982, p.78.

Brahman (The Supreme Being without attributes) and Madhava's Saguna theory, and also of the condominium between the two<sup>17</sup>. Science also speaks on the kinetic and potential forms of energy. Energy though immutable is also subjected to mutation, for there is nothing as dead matter, but Only movement. Therefore in Sanskrit we have the term Jagath (ever moving) to denote the world. There is a permanence coincided with change, a harmonious blend of creation and destruction or what are called opposites. Here Aurobindo's thought is influenced by the teachings of the Gita and his readings in Heraclitus, both being the exponents of world beyond the opposites, where the opposites bring out a union, a poise and rhythm, where the opposites cease to exist<sup>18</sup>. The primary unity itself is in constant motion and change, its creation is destruction, its destruction, creation. The universal process is a transition from one condition to its opposites, and in this sense everything unites opposites within itself<sup>19</sup>. War, said Heraclitus, is the father of all things, War is the King of all; and the saying, like most of the apothegms of the Greek thinker, suggests a profound truth, says Aurobindo. From a clash of material or other forces everything in this world seems to

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17. S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, London, 1971, Vol-I, pp.512-513.  
Also see B.N.K. Sarma, Sri Madhva's Teachings in His own Words, Bombay, 1979, pp. 144-45.
18. Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, Pondicherry, 1987, pp. 37, 201.
19. Frank Thilly, op.cit, p.33

be born. By a struggle of forces, tendencies and principles, the beings, proceed in progressive cycles, creating the new and destroying the old. To substantiate this point Aurobindo quotes the Gita:

Thou shalt not Conquer except by battle with thy fellows and thy surroundings; thou shall not even live except by battle and struggle and by absorbing into thyself other life. The first law of this world that I have made is creation and preservation by destruction .

Creation, preservation and destruction are thus the three aspects of the being set together in an unending line, in a cyclical process. Again we hear of the vedantic theory of the eternal cycles of manifestation and the withdrawal from manifestation<sup>21</sup>. We hear of the Supreme being immersed in its cosmic sleep during each interval so as to start forth once more with all its potent force. The theory of the universal cycles is thus established by both physics and metaphysics. This is the basis of Aurobindo's cyclical theory.

As there are universal cycles, so also there are historical cycles. Aurobindo accepts the theory of the

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20. Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, Pondicherry, 1987, p.37.  
21. V.P. Verma, The Political Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry, 1989, p.35.

cyclical movement in human history instead of the linear theory of human progress. Many scholars and philosophers of History in modern times upheld the rhythmic theory though some criticized the constant motion and held that progress often brings us back to the starting point<sup>22</sup>. The concept of social cycles can be seen in the Hegelian dialectics with its clockwise three stages characterized with catastrophic movements and retrogressions<sup>23</sup>. Similar was the view of Nietzsche who revived the theory of 'eternal recurrence'<sup>24</sup>. In his exposition of the cyclical theory Aurobindo has been profoundly influenced by the German historian Karl-Lamprecht just as by the concept of the Vedic cycles<sup>25</sup>.

Aurobindo says:

..... in pre-war Germany, the metropolis of rationalism and materialism but the home .... of new thought and original tendencies.... a first psychological theory of history was conceived and presented by an original intelligence..... the German historian, originator of this theory, seized on a luminous idea .... its basic idea formulated a suggestive and illuminating truth,

22. Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Calcutta, 1969, Vol-I, p. 196. This reminds us of the French adage: "The more it changes the more it looks the same".
23. The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy, J.O. Urmson (Ed), London. 1967, p. 160.
24. Dictionary of the History of Ideas, Philip P. Wiener (Ed) New York, 1974, Vol-1, p. 624.
25. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity- War and Self-Determination, Pondicherry, 1985, p.2.

and it is worthwhile following up some of the suggestions it opens out in the light especially<sup>26</sup> of eastern thought and experience .

Lamprecht divided the German history into various successive stages<sup>27</sup> . Firstly, there was the symbolic age, the age of fancy and imagination when man had no separate legal personality. Secondly, there was the typical age when types were developed. The later middle ages witnessed the advent of the conventional age characterized by the territorial basis of political rule and emergence of urban centres. With the Renaissance and Reformation started the fourth stage, the stage of individualism which culminated in the rational philosophies. The Romantic movement with the reaction of feelings against too much of rationality ushered in the fifth or subjective age. The present age, according to Lamprecht, is one of nervous tension with no dominant ideal<sup>28</sup> . Though Lamprecht's theory of these cycles is structured on the basis of German history he thought that it could be given a generalization, for every society or nation has these various psychic and historical stages to get through. But it may not be understood that Lamprecht's was purely a psychological interpretation. Influenced by Marx, he, to a good extent, believed in the economic influence on the social and psychic life<sup>29</sup> .

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26. Ibid, pp. 1-3

27. Encyclopedia Britannica, 1977, vol-VI, p.13.

28. Ibid,

29. Sri. Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Pondicherry, 1970, Vol-15, p.2

Although Aurobindo was much influenced by Lamprecht, he points out some of the defects in the conceptual scheme of the German historian. It lacks a logical sequence. Since Lamprecht makes a mechanical jump from one stage to another. The theory of psychological cycles does not tell us anything about the inner meaning of the successive phases or the necessity of their succession<sup>30</sup>. He does not discover the ultimate teleology towards which the historical process is moving<sup>31</sup>. The concept of a spiritual ultimate reality which, according to Aurobindo, manifests itself in history and imparts an immanent meaning and a final teleology to historic development is thus missing in Lamprecht. Lastly, the role of the creative intellectuals in history is not given the due recognition and the economic factors are over-emphasized perhaps of Lamprecht's being influenced by the materialistic thought. Aurobindo speaks of the historians who deny or put aside as of very subsidiary importance the working of the idea and influence of the thinker in the development of the human institutions<sup>32</sup>.

The French Revolution, it is thought, would have happened just as it did and when it did, by economic necessity, even if Rousseau and Voltaire had never written and the eighteenth century philosophic movement in the world of thought had never worked out its bold and radical speculations<sup>33</sup>.

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30. Ibid

31. Ibid

32. Ibid, p.1

33. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p.1.

However, Aurobindo says, the suggestions Lamprecht has offered us, if their intrinsic sense and value are examined, may yet give some insight into the secret of historic evolution. It is the line on which, Aurobindo held, it would be most useful to investigate<sup>34</sup>. Therefore without discarding Lamprecht Aurobindo tries to analyse the various stages the nations and societies passed through.

According to Aurobindo every society had its maiden step to the age of symbolism, when the societies tried to express the wordless, invisible, intangible and transcendental realities with the help of symbols, when intuition, mysticism and imagination predominated. He opines that in Indian history the age of symbolism was represented by the Vedic age. During this period India's poet-seers inlaid the knowledge of their mystic experience in the flower-bed of poetic imagery. For, while interpreting the vedas he refuted the modern occidental readings in Indian history. A Europe with its materialistic approach, could hardly understand the wisdom of India couched in symbolic expressions<sup>35</sup>. Its intellect could not cut across the superficialities. For instance, the various vedic gods were the symbolic representations of the many sided aspects of the one supreme reality. "One existent, sages speak of in many ways, as Indra, as Yama, as Matariswan, as Agni"<sup>36</sup> Aurobindo says, the vedic rishis ought surely to have

34. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p.2

35. Sri Aurobindo, Benkim-Tilak-Dayananda, Pondicherry, 1970, p.9

36. Ibid p.39

known something about their own religion, more than Roth or Max Muller<sup>37</sup>. It seems that Aurobindo's thought here is further influenced by Dayananda's Yogic interpretation of the vedic lore. Aurobindo opines, the vedic texts are neither ritualistic and mythological as interpreted by Sayana nor merely materiological and naturalistic as found in European interpretations<sup>38</sup>. "We have instead a real scripture, one of the world's sacred books and the divine word of a lofty and noble religion"<sup>39</sup>. But we failed to understand this, because we read always our own mentality into that of the ancient forefathers. Therefore, we find in them only a group of imaginative barbarians<sup>40</sup>. To us poetry is a revel of intellect and fancy and imagination a caterer to our amusements, entertainer of man's ordinary psychic feelings. But to the men of old, Aurobindo says, the poet was a seer, a revealer of the hidden truths to when imagination was no dancing courtesan but a priestess in the god's house commissioned not to spin fiction but to image difficult and hidden truths<sup>41</sup>. For instance the meaning of the universe, the be-all and end-all of all lives is the progressive revelation of a great transcendental and luminous reality, an ever-broadening emergence towards the ultimate. "That luminous emergence is the dawn (Ushas)

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37. Ibid

38. Ibid p.40

39. Ibid

40. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p.5

41. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p.5

which the Aryan forefathers worshipped"<sup>42</sup>. It will be more convincing if we take for example, the 'Purusha Suktha' hymn of the 'Rig Veda' which speaks of the sacrifice of the 'Purusha' or 'Brahman' and the emergence of the four-fold division of society, from the mouth, the arms, the navel and the feet of the god respectively<sup>43</sup>. To us this is merely a poetical image with the sense that the Brahmins were the men of knowledge, the Kshatriyas the men of power, the Vaisyas the producers and support of the society, the Sudras its servants. To Aurobindo this is a symbolic expression of the idea that truth manifests in different ways, that the god has different faces-the Divine as knowledge in man, the Divine as power, the Divine as material prosperity, the Divine as service<sup>44</sup>. Gita too says that god is the satisfier of those desirous of having knowledge, wealth, etc., and that god even condescends to the level of a servant before a devotee<sup>45</sup>. Moreover, these divisions answer to four cosmic principles, "the wisdom that conceives the order and principle of things, the power that sanctions, upholds and enforces it, the harmony that creates arrangement of its parts, the work that carries out

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42. Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, p.42

43. Purushasuktha - 13  
Brahmanosya mukhamasid  
Bahurajanya kritha  
Uru thadasya yad vaisyam  
Padbhyam sudro ajayatha.

44. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p.6.

45. Gita VII. 16.

what the rest direct"<sup>46</sup>. Likewise, the Gita presents the picture of Arjuna as a man subject to the action of the Nature-Force. Travelling in the celestial chariot led by the divine guide, he is fighting against the forces of unrighteousness. With the help of divine light he surmounts all the difficulties across his path. In the Vedas also we have this image of the human soul and the Divine, riding in one chariot through a great battle to the goal of a high aspiring effort<sup>47</sup>. The Divine is there 'Indra', the lord of the world of light and immortality, the power of the divine knowledge which descends to the aid of the human seeker battling with false-hood, darkness, limitation and mortality; the goal is that plane resplendent with the light of the supreme truth with Indra as its master. The human soul is 'Kutsa' who constantly seeks the seer knowledge, as his name implies. The son of Arjuna or Arjuni, the white one, the child of 'Switra', the white mother, he is the enlightened soul open to the bliss of the divine knowledge<sup>48</sup>. A similar interpretation Aurobindo gives to the stories of Mahabharata, especially the tale of Sathyavan and Savitri which is recited as a story of conjugal love conquering death<sup>49</sup>. To him this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the

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46. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human unity-War and Self-Determination, p.6.  
47. Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, p.18  
48. Ibid  
49. Sri Aurobindo's preface to his 'Savitri'.

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Vedic cycle . Sathyavan is the symbol of the soul carrying the divine truth of the being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance. "Savitri is the divine word, the daughter of the sun, the goddess of the supreme truth who comes down and is born to save" all the fallen ones from the grip of mortality<sup>51</sup> . Aurobindo has it that this symbolism can be seen not only in vedic India but also in the Biblical genesis wherein we see Adam and Eve, eating the forbidden fruit, had fallen to the earth, a symbolic representation of the soul who, being attached to the worldliness (represented by the fruit of delusion) fall from the celestial heights to the world of ignorance and mortality.

The most notable characteristic of this age was the spiritual outlook leading to a tendency to make everything in society a sacrament, religious and sacrosanct<sup>52</sup> . But it is to be noticed that it was not rigidly binding on the social life which was free of all religious rigidities. It was an age when religion was not socialized and vitiated. Religion then was not a fetter to the human progress. It aimed at helping the individual and his soul transcend the sensual and worldly barriers and imparted to him a free and ever broadening space for his individual development. But Aurobindo says, this tendency to make everything a

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50. Ibid

51. Ibid

52. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p.6.

sacrament had its profound influence on the society in the longrun, for the ethical ideology deriving from spirituality acted as the cause to a new change<sup>53</sup>. There came in society a tendency to give everything an ethical and moral basis when the abstract spirituality and the higher truth once expressed through symbols began to recede to the background. An age of highest moral type, more psychic than spiritual thus began to crystallize. It was the dawn of the typal age.

The second stage, the typal, is predominantly psychological and ethical. Religion here acts as the sanctifier of the social dealings and activities; it becomes a mystic sanction for the ethical motive and discipline, ie., the 'Dharma'<sup>54</sup>. Its time-old duty of expressing the Divine Being or Cosmic principle in man ceases. Therefore Aurobindo says, there developed a firm but not yet rigid social order based primarily upon temperament and psychic type with a corresponding ethical discipline and secondarily, upon the social and economic function<sup>55</sup>. But the social and economic forces were not the primary or sole factors; instead the function was determined by its suitability to the type and its helpfulness to the discipline. The evolution of the theory of varna in ancient India, during the

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53. Ibid

54. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 6.

55. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p.6.

early phase of the post vedic period is an instance in point. It began to be defined on the basis of taste, character and function (Guna and Karma) and not on birth as could be seen in later periods; it was based on the idea of the honour of personal merit<sup>56</sup>. It is the idea of social honour: the honour of Brahmin which rests on his piety and reverence for things of the mind and spirit, the honour of Kshatriya based on courage, chivalry, strength and nobility of character; the honour of Vaisya which maintains itself by rectitude of dealing, mercantile fidelity, order, liberality and philanthropy; the honour of Sudra which gives itself in obedience, subordination, faithful service, a disinterested attachment perhaps coincided with a dignity of labour<sup>57</sup>. Likewise, the theories of Asrama and Purushardhas had their origin during this age, aiming at perfecting and ordering the life of a householder<sup>58</sup>. The

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56. Ibid, p.7

The Gita says that the four 'Varnas' were created according to the differences in aptitudes and actions of men (IV-13). The duties of the four sections were clearly defined according to the dispositions born of their own nature (XVIII - 41, 42, 43, 44).

57. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol. - 15, p.7.

58. (i) In the Asrama system the life of Brahmin or any man who follows the Brhaminic practices is divided into four stages - the stage of 'Brahmachari' when one spends his early life for education either in own house or in the house of the teacher, the stage of 'Grahastha' when one, after leaving the teacher's house, enters household life; the stage of 'Vana Prasthin' when he, seeing his children educated and well placed, retires to the forest in renunciation, the stage of 'Sanyasi' or the seeker of the ultimate truth, the divine.

(ii) Purushardhas are four in number - Dharma, Ardha, Kama and Moksha. Dharma is the religion or morality or the guiding principle of life that makes man adhere

early Christian principles of chastity, poverty and obedience offer a parallel, though at a lesser degree, to the Hindu life tenets. But as time passed, the types "ceased to have a living root in the clear psychological idea or to spring naturally out of the inner life of man"<sup>59</sup>. The types were getting conventionalized though in a most noble way and in the end they became just superficial traditions than a reality of life<sup>60</sup>. Thus from the very typical age the seed-cause for the appearance of a new age comes; the types naturally give way to conventions.

The conventional age ~~begins~~<sup>begins</sup> when ideas recede to the background and finally cease to exist, leaving behind mere

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strictly to such principles like truth, justice, charity, piety, etc., in his worldly dealing. Basing on Dharma, one is directed by the Dharmasasthras or scriptures to have his economic dealings (or Ardhha) so that they may not be in line with the utilitarian practices of greed and the resulting exploitation. The Ithihasa says that one who hoards more than what he actually requires needs punishment. The third element, Kama (desire) denotes any kind of desire one has in life. But the fulfilment of desires also, the Dharma sasthras say, should be done without side-tracking from the principles of Dharma. The 'Purushardhas' thus emphasize both right aims and right means. Such a life would lead man towards 'Moksha', the deliverance from the meshes of delusion, and help him attain the divine. A blend of materialism and spiritualism, it was believed, would bridle life with principles.

See Manu, II. 2, 13.

Kamathmathana prasastha II. 2 (To act solely from desire for reward is not laudable)

Ardhakameshwasthanam dharmajnanam vidhiyathe II. 13 (The knowledge of the 'Dharma' is prescribed only for those not given to desire and acquisition of wealth)

See also Apasthambha, I.6.

59. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p.7.

60. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p.7

forms and superficialities<sup>61</sup>. The conventional age beings<sup>gin</sup> with a tendency

to fix, to arrange firmly, to formalise, to erect a system of rigid grades and hierarchies, to stereotype religion, to bind education and training to a traditional and unchangeable form, to subject thought to infallible authorities to cast a stamp of finality...<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps in its beginning it has its golden age when the spirit and thought that inspired its forms were, though confined, yet living, not yet stifled to death by the growing hardness of the structure they were cased in<sup>63</sup>. And looked from a long distance of time posterity may see in it something good and noble. For instance, a modern European who would look back to the medieval Europe may find something delightful in its distant appearance of poetry, nobility and spirituality and fail to notice the folly, inequity, cruelty, oppression and all dark aspects of those harsh ages<sup>64</sup>. So too the Hindu orthodox idealist who sees in it a society perfectly ordered in with the regulations of the ethical codes<sup>65</sup>. Aurobindo agrees, in this early

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61. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p.8

62. Ibid

63. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p.9.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid

conventional age there is much indeed really fine and sound that help the human progress. But it is just like a light which gives vision ~~and~~ but due to the growing intensity dazzles and makes one blind. For, it is not the true 'Sathya Yuga' (age of truth) but an age of duplicity, age of an alloyed metal or of a "hard burnished copper with a thin gold leaf covering it"<sup>66</sup>. It is only an age of dim light extinguishing into the darkness of death and decrepitude when society falls more and more into the satanic grip of moral bankruptcy and the blasphemous ghosts of the retreated ideas. This tendency is more vivid in the evolution of caste where the outward supports of the ethical fourfold order begin to exaggerate enormously their proportions. Though in the early age birth does not have much importance in the social order due to the prevalence of faculty and capacity, it changes as education and tradition become naturally fixed in a hereditary groove. Birth and tradition gain an upper hand, and the highly ethical social outlook silently withdraws or becomes an 'ornamental fiction'. Finally even the economic basis begins to disintegrate. In the economic period of caste

the priest and pundit masquerade under the name of the Brahmin, the aristocrat and feudal baron under the name of Kshatriya, the trader and money getter under the name of Vaisya, the half-fed labourer<sup>67</sup> and economic serf under the name of Sudra .

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66. Ibid

67. Ibid, p.8

But when the economic period ceases to exist, privileges based on birth and family come to occupy the field<sup>68</sup>. Mere conventions which we saw in the pre-Buddhist India or pre-renaissance Europe come in. True, there may come movements and institutions to reform the system. But being isolated, they often fail to find out the old truth of symbolism, they being not intense in their attack on conventions. Naturally in a generation or two conventionalism would apply its iron grip on the new movement and annex the names of its founders<sup>69</sup>. This grip of conventionalism continues to exist until there comes a period when the "gulf between

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68. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 10.

69. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p.11; This can well be illustrated in the light of the 6th century (B.C) India when Buddhism took its birth. When vedic religion stagnated and drifted towards conventions Buddha appeared on the scene. Born to reform the vedic society by standing against ceremonials, caste system and exclusive priesthood, Buddha took up the old theory of Karma or the unattached (Nisanga) work that helps one attain the ultimate beauty differently called Kaivalya, Nirvana, etc. For, both Buddhism and Brahminism envision the ultimate salvation, the transcendental reality attainable to all irrespective of any distinction. The path both laid down was also the 'Middle path' (Madhyamika Marga) or the path between attachment and detachment. ie., the pure unattachment ('Vairagya' or 'Nisanga'). But it lies in the irony of history that as time passed Buddhism became a separate creed with its own conventions and subdivisions (ie. the Mahayanists and Hinayanists), making Buddha himself more an object of worship than one whose teaching, if practised, would lead to higher realities. Buddha, taken to the fold of the Brahminic divinities, began to be worshiped as one of the many incarnations of Vishnu. Brahminic fold thus annexed the name of the Buddha.

convention and truth becomes intolerable" , when the men of intellectual power strike at the bastilles of conventions and seek by their individual reason the truth society has long lost. As a result an age of protestantism is brought in along with a sense of freedom from the prison house of conventions <sup>71</sup> . However, it is not a desirable ~~from~~ <sup>of</sup> freedom, for, Aurobindo says, it is only a partial freedom and it is entirely superficial which is sought by destroying the walls of conventions and not a freedom or an eternal liberation that comes from the discovery of the ultimate truth <sup>72</sup> . However he says, it is a necessary prelude to the understanding of that creative truth <sup>73</sup> .

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70. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 10.

71. Ibid

72. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p. 11

73. Individualism never touched off the oriental life as it did in Europe. Indeed the Western dominated East never experienced it, for during the period when individualism was raging in Europe the eastern conventional principles of society were struggling against the western-imported individualism. Aurobindo opposes the opinion of those who held that Europeanism would instil among the orientals the feeling of individualism. To him it would be totally improbable. But Aurobindo holds, if such a thing would occur the East would follow its own bent and evolve a new social order that would be "rather in the direction of subjectivism and practical spirituality" so as to help the world enquire into the very core of its being or its original nature. Also see for instance the Spenglerian view that the non-European nations would inwardly abhor the modern destructive mechanism, be they "Indian or Japanese, Russian or Arab". Arthur Helps points out that the Gandhian Philosophy proves this view to some extent. But Spengler is no optimist and therefore, he doubts whether India in the long run could hold out against Industrialism, the idea of wealth, war and violence. Aurobindo's optimism cuts across all doubts. (Arthur Helps introduction to the abridged edition of Spengler's The Decline of the West, New York, 1932).

The age of individualism comes when it is convinced that truth is lost in the soul and practice of humanity and that the conventions are merely nonsensical and unintelligent. Now man, in spite of the natural conservatism of the social mind at last perceives that truth is dead and that he is living by a lie. In this individualistic age he attempts to get back from the customary belief and practice to some sort of real and tangible truth. By this individual reason, intuition, idealism, desire and a claim upon life he moves towards that desirable form of truth. He tends to remould in a more vital form religion, society, ethics, political institutions, social relations and dealings<sup>74</sup>. Aurobindo says, it was in Europe that individualism has taken its birth and exercised its full sway<sup>75</sup>. There it began with a revolt of reason, culminating in a triumphal progress of physical science. At the threshold of the individual age the practices become mere blasphemy. The individual finds everywhere a religion which does not rest upon an ever-verifiable truth, but upon the dictum of a pope, an obsolete social code or the tradition of a church<sup>76</sup>. Even in politics he finds divine rights, established privileges and sanctified tyrannies armed with oppressive powers giving a self-justification, and usurping by foul means a claim or title to exist. Society gets divided by narrow domestic walls, fixed disabilities and

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74. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p. 12.

75. Ibid

76. Ibid

privileges. Adherence to truth and justice become a thing of past, and the sanctimonious divinity appears. Therefore the individual has to rise in revolt and to turn the eye of a resolute inquisition against every claim of authority. Convinced of the utter disregard of truth and the emptiness of the puffed up superficialities, he flings off the social yoke, and declares the truth as he sees <sup>77</sup>. As a means to expose the truth he strikes inevitably at the root of every practice, momentarily perhaps even the moral order of the society, it being based on the authority he condemns and the conventions he is out to uproot <sup>78</sup>. He is there to "destroy the falsehood and lay bare a new foundation of truth". This was what we saw in the reformation movement. A personal illumination supported by a theological reasoning touched off the age of individualism in Europe. A crude primitive perception of natural rights and justice resulting from the general oppression, blind faith and injustice, <sup>79</sup> makes the individual think. This has its reverberation first in the religious field, the political and social fields getting stirred afterwards <sup>80</sup>. It questions the conventional forms of religion, the mediation of the priest-hood between soul and god and a substitution of priestly authority for scriptural authority. This was coincided with another development, the Renaissance which in fact did more good than the Reformation. For, here we saw the

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77. Ibid, p.14

78. Ibid, p.14

79. Ibid, p.15

80. Ibid

vigorous return of the ancient Greæco-Roman mentality, "the free curiosity of the Greek mind, its eager search for the first principles and rational laws and the high intellectuality, and the Roman's large practicality and his sense of harmonizing life with a robust utility and just principle of things"<sup>81</sup>. These were the factors which inspired Europe to seek the principles of order and control which all human societies call for. But there are reverts and reverse for, always this new intellectual individualism may not necessarily lead humanity to the discovery of his lost truth. In most cases it remains a perilous experiment to the imperfect human race<sup>82</sup>. Due to this the social justice, through its stark assertion, leads to continual struggle and revolution, ending in an exaggerated assertion of will<sup>83</sup>. For there are absent the two supreme necessities, a general standard of truth to which all must voluntarily subscribe and some principles of social order founded on the universally recognizable truth of things<sup>84</sup>. The truth Europe sought through the newly discovered scientific theories, though for the time being seemed to provide it, actually led the humanity to another tygal age. The new orders which were the by-products of individualism again put the individual in

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81. Ibid

82. Ibid

83. Ibid, p. 17.

84. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p.20.

chains. If there was once the religious law maker to regulate the social activities of man now there appears the scientific, administrative and economic expert. Instead of the religio-ethical sanction there is the scientific and rational or naturalistic motive and rule<sup>85</sup>. For instance, Aurobindo says, we already saw a violent though incomplete beginning of this line of social evolution in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Communist Russia where individualism was subjected to an elastic collectivism, where individuals became an organized set of robots. If to quote the Hegelian or the Marxian view 'synthesis' gives way to the 'thesis' which expresses itself quite differently as time and place vary. An individual slavery again comes into being<sup>86</sup>.

Individualism, however establishes the human dignity in two ways. Firstly, it now gets universally accepted that every individual as part of the society has all rights to the full life and full development of which he is individually capable<sup>87</sup>. It thereby uprooted the aristocratic norms which so far had ruled the society with the fasnir-like horror. "This conception has been accepted in full by all

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85. Ibid

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87. In the Fascist or Communist view the individual is nothing but only an atom of the social body. Aurobindo quotes the proclamation of a German exponent: "We have destroyed the false view that men are individual beings; there is no liberty of individuals. There is only liberty of nations or races". Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and self Determination, p. 20.

progressive nations and is the basis of the present so-  
cialistic tendency of the world"<sup>88</sup>. Secondly, there is the  
deeper truth which individualism has discovered. It is that  
man is the part of society to which he is to contribute  
creatively. He finds individualism in collectivism. He is  
something in himself as well as a part of the collective  
existence. Thus it helps man play his assigned role for his  
fellow beings and search for more truths into his own  
being<sup>89</sup>. Individualism thus leads to subjectivism.

The course of the world is thus set adrift on the way  
to subjectivism aimed at rediscovering the substantial  
truths of life, thought and action which have been long  
lost or overlaid by falsehood of conventional standard. The  
age of subjectivism sets the world on the threshold of  
something unknown and supra-sensual which Europe thought  
would be found with the help of modern physical sciences.  
The materialism of the nineteenth century gave way to the  
new philosophies like <sup>Nietzsche</sup> Nietzsche's theory of 'will-to-  
power'<sup>90</sup>. Bergson's emphasis of intuition above intellect,

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88. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p.20

89. Ibid

90. Ibid pp. 18-19.

(i). 'Will-to-power' was Nietzsche's search for the inherent  
power of spirituality latent in man. In some circum-  
stances it may appear that the whole aim of humanity is  
a 'will-to-live'. But this is not so. What man desires  
or should desire is not the mere preservation, but an  
enhancement of his state of being i.e., the greater  
power. Nietzsche says, the triumph in competition which  
was a prominent element in Greek education and culture,  
the artistic creation, the philosopher's intellectual  
conquest of the cosmos or the ascetic's self-conquest

or the latest human philosophical tendency to accept a suprarational faculty and a suprarational order of truths, Aurobindo says, . are also the best examples . Aurobindo says, these tendencies of thought were the attempts to read profoundly and live by the life-soul of the universe and tended to be deeply psychological and subjective in their method, although in their application by the lesser minds they often assumed superficial and destructive appearances. yet another characteristic of the age is the nations'

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are the manifestations of the 'will-to-power'. Man is not a seeker of the mere worldly pleasures which are fraught with sadness, for each enjoyment worldly is a death, it being fatal to the spiritual purification. There is the eternal happiness derivative of the vision of 'beauty'. The pursuit of this happiness involves a high degree of self discipline, for men lack great power so long as they are dominated by animal passions. Man should sublimate his impulses, employ them creatively and raise himself high. Those who attain this state are, according to Nietzsche, called "Übermenschen" (supermen). Man must have an intuitive acknowledgement of his intrinsic superiority. (Thilly, op.cit., p. 504).

(ii) The characteristic note of this subjective tendency may again be seen in the new idea about education and upbringing of the child which became current in the pre-world war era. In the medieval period it was customary to educate according to the norms of the conventional virtue, or by the individual interest or the ideals of the teacher. But the pre-war era brought about a change. Education went a step ahead to believe that each human being is a self-developing soul and that the business of both parent and the teacher is to enable and help the child to educate himself, "to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capabilities and to grow freely as an organic being". It was realized that he was not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material. It was nearly a road towards searching out of the inner being of man i.e., the divine, to make education the manifestation of perfection, to have a knowledge of the hidden truth. "That was the knowledge which the ancients sought to express through religious and social symbolism, and subjectivism is a road of return to the lost knowledge"; says Aurobindo.

91. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary edition, Vol-15, pp.18-

discovery of their soul or the spiritual and humanitarian missions with which destiny has commissioned them. Nowhere was the nation soul having more an outward expression than in India where the Bengal resurgence of the early 20th century spearheaded the whole national movement. For it was more subjective, a return to the spirit latent in the bosom of India. It was of course aggressive, but it got the sublime touch of spirituality, a poetic imagination, an inspiring pacifism and above all, as true to Indian tradition, a broadminded national message<sup>92</sup>. To India the national movement was more defensive than offensive; it never took to an imperialist aggression like that of the post-unification Germany. More or less the same was the nature of the Irish movement<sup>93</sup>. But Germany did err in this matter. Just seeing the mirage or the unreal German spirit she made a leap in the dark<sup>94</sup>. Nietzsche's 'will-to-power' was mistaken as an exhortation for aggression and imperialism, and Germany was on the verge of a destructive and premature adventure<sup>95</sup>. Aurobindo argues, had Germany fully understood the real purpose of the 'will-to-power' she would have been on the path to discover her real nation soul or the subjective force of which the lamp was lit by her great philosophers like Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Nietzsche, by her a great thinker and poet Goethe, by her great musicians like

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92. Ibid.

93. Ibid

94. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, pp. 34-

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95. Ibid p. 34

Beethoven and Wagner and all the German soul and tempera-  
ment which they represented<sup>96</sup>. But this real spirit was not  
fully recognized by Kaiser William II or Bismark whose  
appearance was in many respects rather a misfortune for the  
growing Germany. Because, Aurobindo says, Bismark's "rude  
and powerful hand precipitated its subjectivity into form  
and action at too early a stage"<sup>97</sup>. Bismark could not  
understand the real Germany or her spiritual strength.  
Instead he took it for cruelty and aggression, and failed  
to translate the vision of the German philosophers to a  
proper outward expression. He could not bridge the gulf  
between idea and imagination and the world of facts or  
between vision and force<sup>98</sup>. He failed to have a desirable  
transmission of the real German vision. So Germany took her  
demonic appearance, lost her sublime potential and missed  
the real goal. And she was dragged, as time passed, to the  
vortex of the two world collisions. Because, according to  
Aurobindo, two world wars resulted from an undesirable  
meeting together of, or a 'confused half struggle' or a  
'half effort at accommodation' between "old intellectual  
and materialistic and the new still superficial subjective  
and vitalistic impulses of the 

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96. Ibid p. 35

97. Ibid p.34

98. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human  
Unity-War and Self-Determination, pp.35-36.

Here Aurobindo is much ahead of Spengler, the German  
philosopher-historian. For Spengler believed that the  
doom of Germany resulted from the discontinuity of the  
Bismarkian

west" . Or it was due to the "formidable combination of a falsely enlightened vitalistic motive-power with a great force of... an accomplished materialistic science"<sup>100</sup> . The war, however, was a blessing in disguise to some extent, because it by a salutary ruin cleared the way of all the checks to a truer development towards a higher goal. It had given a clear warning to abandon the path of arms race and aggression, war and violence and emphasized the relevance and probability of the safer ways. Aurobindo therefore urges all to give an outward expression to the more subjective 'will-to-power' and look beyond the red mist of the

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tradition or from Bismark's failure to train a political elite competent to deal with the foreign affairs. He cites the training of the medieval page, cloister education, the training of the Prussian officers corps, the English Public Schools and University Training for the Indian Civil Service and the Training for the Roman Catholic Priesthood. But Bismark had started nothing like, to train a class of political elite to carry on his foreign policy. But the question that what would have happened even if there would have been a continuity of the Bismarkian tradition in German foreign policy is left unanswered. As is well known Bismark was a clever 'juggler' who operated his foreign policy which was characterized by double dealings. He put the whole of Europe in a political melting pot with his destructive tactics. Even if Bismark had trained a School of 'Jugglers' it would not have any way prevented the world war or have placed Germany in good relation with foreign States. Perhaps it would have artfully delayed the World War, but would not have avoided its possibility. For the evil cause would certainly lead to destructive results. Thus compared to Spengler Aurobindo is more a visionary than a politician, to whom the translation of an ideal vision into a proper work alone is the panacea for the worldly ills.

99. Sri Aurobindo Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p. 26-27

100. Ibid

blood of war<sup>101</sup>. Aurobindo says, the soul of a nation is something great and divine. It should not be mistaken or shut up in an Armour plated social body<sup>102</sup>. For, it can only stifle the growth of the inner reality and end in decay or the extinction of all that is 'unplastic' and 'unadaptable'<sup>103</sup> :

According to Aurobindo there is an ideal subjectivism which is the only ideal law for social development. This, he says, is in nothing other than the searching of one's own inner being ie., the cosmic unity of which all are the expression<sup>104</sup>. Aurobindo sublimates this theory of universal oneness or integral humanism with the touch of spirituality<sup>105</sup>. The ideal law is that all things are one in their being, origin, their general law of existence, their interdependence and the universal pattern of their relations<sup>106</sup>. In the course of realization of this basic unity each individual, social group or nation has its own chosen way. For though subject to differences they adhere to one particular pattern; one must work with the diversity to work out a unity. Man has the infinite potential to do this, because he is distinguished from nature's less developed creatures by a greater power of individuality. Being the embodiment of such a power, something divine or celestial,

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101. Ibid p. 36

103. Ibid

104. Ibid, p.37

105. Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, p. 497.

106. Ibid

he is to channel it for himself and for the world he lives  
in <sup>107</sup>. Man must, therefore, become an individual soul and  
find and manifest himself in each human being. He must  
think for himself and others, for a lonely salvation is not  
his complete ideal <sup>108</sup>. "Always he is the

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107. The theory of universal brother-hood has been an oft-emphasized one. Both religious philosophers and modern universalists, have been in agreement regarding this point. The vedic apothegm 'Let the whole world be happy' or the Christian saying 'Do unto others as you do unto you' or the Universal brotherhood as preached by Islam or the Buddhist principle of 'Dharma' or piety have the same connotation. But the modern world organizations, though established to save the future generation from the perils, lack a sublime religious touch. The love and mutual co-operation they preach seem to be more to save one nation from the attack of other nations or suppress a fafnir who may ruin the world peace than to perpetuate a kingdom of peace and divine love in the world of mortals. For instance we have got a U.N. peace force. This tells us that even after centuries of experience man has not learnt that what is needed is the 'force of peace' rather than a 'peace of force'. Aurobindo seems to favour the view that man, whatever religion he may belong to, must go back to his own principles of 'Dharma' so as to use them for the good of himself and others. For the religious principles are the same save for their outer shell.
108. See for instance some symbols which the ancient Indian poets and artists presented. For the ideal was to help others first and oneself the last. This is what Vyasa tells through his story of 'Akshaya Pathra' (the vessel which held a never failing supply of food and was given by the sun god) from which Draupathi took her share only after serving every one, for after her share the vessel would become empty for the day. This is more expressed in the Buddhist image of the 'Bodhisatwa' which is the statue of a saint who prays for the opening of the world of salvation for all before he enters it. Because to salvage oneself, leaving others behind is not in conformity with the Buddhist theory of 'non-ego'. The purpose which the ancient Indian scriptures offer us as the true object of all human actions is 'Loka Samgraha' or the holding together of the human race. But while translating this vision into reality, society should guard itself against slipping once more into the state of totalitarianism that quells individualism. Both society and individual must grow side by side, aiding and being aided by each other, for no

traveller of the cycles and his road is forward" <sup>109</sup> . Besides, only the growing individuals can help their nations grow, and to close them up in the armour-plated society body is to chain society's own feet. So freedom and harmony should be compatible <sup>110</sup> . True, the individual belongs to the race-type or the nation. But if by a part of himself he belongs to the nation, by another he exceeds it and belongs to humanity. Therefore the community or the nation must stand as a "mid-term and intermediary value between the individual and humanity" <sup>111</sup> .

As the individual grows so also the nation must. It is the sum total of its individual aspirations to grow along with other nations, helping them to grow and imbibing their values. But in the universal progress of the nations they have, like the individuals, the right to be themselves, their just claim, as against any attempt at domination by other nations <sup>112</sup> . They must assert this right not only for their own sake, but for the interest of humanity as well. The nations must thus help each other and progress on the path of give and take. As the individuals live by the lives of other individuals, so must the nations by the lives of other nations, subjecting the materials getting from each

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state or legislator, no church or priest can "cut him rigorously into a perfect pattern" or give him a "mechanical salvation".

109. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and self-Determination, p.60

110. Sri Aurobindo Library Centenary Edition, Vol-15, p.63

111. Ibid, p.62

112. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p.63.

other to the laws of one's own nature<sup>113</sup>. For, the means may not be the same though the end is. As the individuals grow from within "the free development of the community or nation from within is the best condition for the growth and perfection<sup>114</sup> of mankind". Therefore the ideal law of all nations should be to bring their life in harmony with the human aggregate and contribute their share for the growth and perfection of beauty. The nations must help their men transcend the human limitations of the society, race and nation and to find themselves as the parts of humanity at large which they lead<sup>115</sup>. Freedom in harmony is thus the only law of human progress.

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113. Ibid, p.63

114. Ibid

115. Ibid, p.64

modern period from dark ages and the age of feudalism<sup>5</sup>. Thus the difference between the civilized man and the natural man began to be made. In Germany Herder first used the term 'Kultur'. Goethe used the 'Geisekulture' and "characterized the four parts of a culture-its preliminary, early, late and civilized stages-with such a depth of insight that even today there is nothing to add"<sup>6</sup>. Kant<sup>7</sup> conceived freedom to be the cardinal element of culture. He gives more importance to 'reason' and to individual who is a free agent with his every act a direct expression of pure reason<sup>8</sup>. Fichte also holds more or less the same opinion. His basic insight, the one which he regards as the key to cultural growth, is the conception of freedom; it is the moving power in all progress and civilization<sup>9</sup>. He envisions an "enlightened human power armed with its own inventions" and "a mankind using its powers in complete co-operation and marching forward in step ... without arrest of progress or setback, to a culture of which we can form no conception"<sup>10</sup>. These scholars also throw light on the difference between civilization and culture. Kant says that

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5. G.H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory, New Delhi, 1973, p. 524.
  6. Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, Arther Helps (Ed), Charles Francis Atkinson (Trans), New York, 1932, p. 102.
  7. R.G. Coolingwood, The idea of History, Oxford, 1970, p.98.
  8. H.J. Paton, The Moral Law, London, 1948, p. 101.
  9. Thilly, op.cit., p. 453.
  10. Albert Schweitzer, The Philosophy of Civilization, New York, 1955, pp. 202-203.

"we have become civilized to the point of being overburdened in every kind of social behaviour and conventions" and conceives culture as "the drawing forth of a rational being's capacity for certain ends in general"<sup>11</sup>. The difference between mere superficial civilization and an inwardly directed culture has come in for further elaboration at the hands of many philosopher-historians. Spengler has elaborated this distinction. To Spengler every culture has its source in the proto-soul of humanity and has a prime symbol through which this soul often expressed itself. For instance the soul of old Egypt often expressed itself "almost exclusively by the immediate language of stone-stone, the emblem of timeless become space"<sup>12</sup>. The Chinese had its intensely directional principle of the Tao, the way which conducts him to his god<sup>13</sup>. In the Faustian Western culture this symbol was the "space" which "is a spiritual something, rigidly distinct from the momentary sense-present" that cannot be represented in linguistic expressions<sup>14</sup>. He lays much emphasis on 'Seelantum' or the soul of a culture because according to him:

"culture is born when a great soul awakens out of the proto-spirituality of the ever childish humanity, and detaches itself, a form from the formless

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11. V.P. Verma, Political Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, Bombay, 1960, p. 144.

12. Spengler, op.cit, p.100

13. Ibid, p. 102;

J Needham, Science and Civilization in China, Cambridge, 1956, Vol.II, p.88.

14. Spengler, op.cit, p.67.

a bounded and mortal thing from the boundless and enduring. It dies when this soul has actualised the full sum of its possibilities in the shape of peoples, languages, dogmas, arts, states, sciences and reverts into the proto-soul<sup>15</sup>.

The being or the essence or the soul of the culture has the innate urge and struggle to express itself through various forms. "The aim once attained - the idea, the entire content of inner possibilities, fulfilled and made externally actual the culture suddenly hardens, it mortifies, its blood congeals, its force breaks down, and it becomes civilization"<sup>16</sup>. According to Spengler "every culture has its own civilization". And this civilization is the end or the decaying stage and the "inevitable destiny of the culture". "Civilizations are the most external and artificial stages of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life, rigidity following expansion"<sup>17</sup>. Civilization is the outward expression of a culture. Culture is the spirit and civilization its expression, or the being and the become. Civilization takes birth, lives and dies whereas the culture, unlike the civilization which is its kinetic form, remains potential.

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15. Ibid, p. 72  
16. Ibid, p. 74.  
17. Ibid, p. 24.



Culture is enduring while civilization is subject to change and perishes. Civilization, to Spengler, is the end or the decaying stage of culture. Culture is the higher and civilization the lower. Civilizations "are an end, irrevocable, yet by inward necessity reached again and again"<sup>18</sup>. Each culture in its last phase reaches the period of civilization or its inevitable end. Spengler cites Buddhism, Stoicism and Socialism as the characteristic products of Indian, Roman and Western civilizations<sup>19</sup>. Greek soul was the culture and Roman intellect, the civilization. Spengler even differentiates between the 'politic of civilization today' and the 'politic of culture yesterday'. The former serves the abstract which represents the power of civilization-money. This was the 'form' of Roman State. The politic of culture, on the other hand, is related to something higher. Spengler says, "it is possible to understand the Greeks without mentioning their economic relations; the Roman on the other hand can, only be understood through these"<sup>20</sup>. Therefore he says, 'Chaeronea' and 'Leipzig'

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18. Ibid

19. But to equate Buddhism with Stoicism and Socialism jars on one's sensibility. Buddhism has not died unlike the other two. On the contrary it has merged into the main current of Indian thought and life so as to energise them. It is idealistic and not a part of the materialistic philosophy. It is the vital part of India's everlasting religion or 'Sanathana Dharma'. It has not perished and, if viewed in the light from the past, it will not perish and it can, unlike the other dead ideas of the world, claim a historical legality to find a prominent place among the living civilizations as Toynbee said. Buddhism is still a living religion. It is a living philosophy and not a part of the history of philosophy.

20. Oswald Spengler, op. cit, pp. 26-27.

CHAPTER - III  
IDEA ON CULTURE

Ideals and principles of culture have often been discussed, analysed and criticized. They are steeped in the thought of the past as they are in modern thought. From the very ancient times people developed an idea regarding the cultural values; the difference between the 'cultured' and 'barbaric' was clearly discerned<sup>1</sup>. History could weave stories around the human civilizations that sprang up in Greece, China, or India. People had notions regarding a cultured language and manners of life. For instance India's language itself was 'cultured' or 'Sanskrit' and the concept of 'Samskara' is as old as its ancient race<sup>2</sup>. Each race, each people, has its own pattern of culture which might differ one another but the idea regarding culture was universal<sup>3</sup>.

In modern times the credit of giving a definite content to the concept of culture goes to Francis Bacon. Bacon's ideas of ethics, god-consciousness, rational soul, and experience led philosophy a long way in conceptualizing the idea of culture<sup>4</sup>. The term civilization was used by the rationalists of France including Turgot to *distinguish* the

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1. Arnold Toynbee, A study of History (abridged by D.C. Somervell) London, 1962, pp. 690-92.
  2. Swami Vivekananda, Karma Yoga, Calcutta, 1984, pp. 38-39.
  3. J.G. Herder, Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind, (abridged by Frank E. Manuel) Chicago, 1861 pp. 35
  4. F. Thilly, A History of Philosophy, Allahabad, 1984, pp. 290-292.

the last battles fought about an idea<sup>21.</sup> . In the first 'Punic war' and in 1870 economic motives are no longer to be overlooked. Thus to Spengler culture is the inward aspect and civilization the end of its expressions, its last phase when man becomes merely materialist, economic and barbaric. Culture is character set by spiritual creativeness and philosophical accomplishment which bring to fulfilment idealistic principles while civilization is characterized by technology, urbanization and materialism clad in brutality. Spengler had the conviction that the western peoples were undergoing the period of civilization which is the prelude to decline. Almost all the modern philosophers, thus agree on the outward and inward aspects of civilization and culture respectively.

The distinction that Sri Aurobindo draws between civilization and culture has fundamental resemblance to the ideas put forward by Kant and Berdyaev<sup>22</sup> . He gives a metaphysical view about the successive and evolutionary emergence of matter, life and mind from the inconscient. According to him a complete immersion in a life of physical and material satisfaction is savagery and barbarism<sup>23</sup> . He cites the examples of the Red Indians, the Basuto and Fiji Islanders who though have a good many virtues, are

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21. Ibid p. 27.

22. V.P. Verma op.cit., p. 146

23. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human unity-War and self-Determination, Pondicherry, 1985, p.67.

considered barbarians because of their inadequate intellectual development, the crudeness of their technology and the absence of social and economic heterogeneity and complexity<sup>24</sup>. Civilization is the efflorescence of vital sentiments and intellectual activities which are used by man to maximize comforts and enjoyments. It is a state in which man is mad after the useful rather than the beautiful or good. This is what we see in the modern western civilization where even politics itself is not for political gains but to gain wealth and property. And all the contests Europe waged after the Franco-Prussian (1870 AD) war were purely for possession of wealth. All struggles, all efforts in Europe during the later half of the 19th century and the whole of the 20th century were purely the expressions of the mammon worship. Ideals have already receded from the soil of Europe. Aurobindo refutes the greatness of western civilization because it lacks in spiritual strength. Again its excesses are condemned by him from the standpoint of an Indian nationalist<sup>25</sup>. He does not hail "the callow civilization of the West with its dogmatic and intolerant knowledge, its still more dogmatic and intolerant ignorance, its deification of selfishness and force and its ungoverned titanism"<sup>26</sup>. The modern civilization, Aurobindo says, is characterized with commercialism, sensational vitalistic

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24. Ibid, p. 78

25. V.P. Verma, op.cit., p. 147

26. Sri Aurobindo, Kalidasa, Pondicherry, 1954, p.26.

activism and a certain amount of democratization. "The European sets great store by machinery. He seeks to renovate humanity by schemes of society and systems of government, he hopes to bring about the millennium by an act of Parliament"<sup>27</sup>. Commercialism, Aurobindo says, is the guideline of the modern western civilization. The ancient period of human society was primarily religious and to some extent political; commercial motivation was always a subordinate and dependent factor in ancient warfare and diplomacy. But this trend seemed to be giving way to the economic and commercial interest. Commercialism with its emphasis on the power of plutocracy to govern the society is the modern phenomenon<sup>28</sup>. Aurobindo says:

At present... it is the Vaisya who still predominates and his stamp on the world is commercialism, the predominance of the economic man, the universality of the commercial value or the utilitarian and materially efficient and productive value for everything in human life. Even in the outlook on knowledge, thought, science, art, poetry and religion the economic conception of life overrides<sup>29</sup> all others.

The modern civilizational value initiated by the West is thus purely commercial. As already pointed out, the Franco-

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27. Sri Aurobindo, "Karma Yogin", Quoted in Samar Basu, Social and Political Evolution of Man, Pondicherry, 1981, p.19.

28. V.P. Verma, op. cit., p. 147.

29. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 464.

Prussian war marks the end of the political motivation in European history. Since then the political motive has been mainly a cover for the commercial<sup>30</sup>. Aurobindo cites a number of historical examples to back up his thesis. The Austrian diplomacy in Serbia was purely an outcome of commercial design - the possession of an outlet to the Adriatic Sea through Salonika. Pan-Germanism was after territories in Africa and a large outlet into the North Sea for commercial reasons. "To seize African spaces of exploitation and perhaps French coal fields, not to rule over French territory, was the drift of its real intention"<sup>31</sup>. The wars the European powers fought in Africa, China, Persia and Mesopotamia are the clear examples of commercial motives determining political and military action. Aurobindo pointed out that "war was no longer the legitimate child of ambition and earth-hunger, but the bastard offspring of wealth-hunger or commercialism with political ambition as its putative father"<sup>32</sup>. World history in the 20th century presented the picture of a bifurcation based on economic policies rather than humanitarian principles. The older ideal of science - the advancement of knowledge - has been replayed by the utilitarian ideal of creating a technological framework for the modern commercial civilization<sup>33</sup>.

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31. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 467.

32. Ibid.

33. V.P. Verma, op. cit., p. 148.

Aurobindo therefore is critical of the mechanical and utilitarian economics and economic barbarism of the present age which brings down everything into a world of Philistine approach; he refers to "the reeling back into the beast which is in progress in Europe and America behind the fair exterior of science, progress, civilization and humanitarianism"<sup>34</sup>. It was this economic barbarism or commercial culture that set Europe on war track.

Aurobindo gives more importance to the psychic aspects than the material. According to him the mental progress of man was always the determining factor in the evolution of culture and world civilization with its various stages<sup>35</sup>. The various stages of cultural development man undergoes are discernible when looked to his dealings with the nature and his surroundings. Aurobindo adds that nature is the training ground for man's development and progress. Nature is for man and not man for the nature, and he has to use nature as a means for the higher life. He is to enjoy the good aspects of the nature, fight all the challenges she hurls at him till he develops a 'will-to-power', the key to further stages of mental and spiritual evolution. For, his ultimate aim is the realization of the truth within himself. But down the ages man has not possessed as a race

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34. Sri Aurobindo, The Ideal of Karma Yogin, Pondicherry, 1937, p.37

35. Sri Aurobindo, Life Divine, Pondicherry, 1982, p. 46

this truth about himself, does not now possess it except in the vision and experiences of the few whom he worships as gods incarnate, seers, saints or prophets, though mankind is unable to follow in their footsteps<sup>36</sup>. This sub-human stage, according to Aurobindo, is the beginning of the cultural evolution<sup>37</sup>. During this cycle of culture or civilization the self is identified with the body and physical life. This is the primary characteristic of complete barbarism. The mentality of the barbarian, Aurobindo says, is:

To take the body and the physical life as the one thing important, to judge manhood by physical strength, ... to be at the mercy of the instincts which rise out of the physical inconscient, to despise knowledge as a weakness and inferiority or to look on it as... no necessary part of the conception of manhood<sup>38</sup>.

In this stage of life science also adds upto his arrogance. Notwithstanding that science is the discoverer of the ultimate truth and oneness, at this stage of barbarism man comes to know only of its material power<sup>39</sup>. He may not commit the old blunders of blind faith and superstition, but uses science as a means for his material benefits which

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36. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 66  
37. Ibid, p. 67  
38. Ibid.  
39. Ibid, p. 70

at times amount upto its misuse for subduing others and enriching his economic resources. "This economic barbarism is essentially that of the vital man who mistakes the vital being for the self and accepts its satisfaction as the first aim of life"<sup>40</sup>. Life is now characterized with desires and instinct of possession; the egoistic expression becomes commonplace. Mere material success becomes the be-all end-all of his actions. "Opulence, show, pleasure, a cumbrous inartistic luxury a plethora of conveniences, life devoid of beauty and nobility, religion vulgarized or coldly formalised, politics and government turned into a trade and profession, enjoyment itself made a business", a complete commercialization of human life comes in practice<sup>41</sup>. To this economic barbarian "beauty is a thing otiose or a nuisance, art and poetry a frivolity or an ostentation and means of advertisement"<sup>42</sup>. Useful rather than the beautiful becomes his pursuit. But this stage, Aurobindo says, cannot have permanence, for if it would persist life would become clogged and perish of its own plethora; it will collapse by its own mass.

Aurobindo now gets on with what is civilization and culture. "The pursuit of mental life for its own sake is what we ordinarily mean by culture"<sup>43</sup>. But he says, "the world is still a little equivocal and capable of a wider

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40. Ibid, p. 72 .  
41. Ibid, p.72-73.  
42. Ibid, p. 73  
43. Ibid p. 76

and narrower sense"<sup>44</sup>. Culture has various stages and is many faceted. Civilization which is the early stage towards cultural development has various stages and relative significance. In early times, men frankly expressed their stand-point, stigmatising all people different in general culture from themselves as 'barbarians' or 'Mlechchas'<sup>45</sup>. The word civilization therefore came to have a relative significance or no fixed sense at all. We may, due to this, include in the word civilization all, both historic and pre-historic people, the latter being semi-civilized. But the main point is, Aurobindo says, "in any society which we call civilized, the mentality of the man must be active, the mental pursuits developed" so that there is regulation and improvement of life by the mental being<sup>46</sup>. Again, in a civilized society there is distinction between the partially civilized and the cultured. Aurobindo therefore throws light on the distinction between the philistine and the cultured man. The philistine type is he who lives outwardly the civilized life. He is subject to the passions, prejudices, conventions, and current stock of opinion but not bound to the ideas, and exercises no free intelligence<sup>47</sup>. His soul is untouched by beauty and art, vulgarises everything he touches, religion, ethics, literature or life itself. He is the half civilized vital one who possesses

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44. Ibid,

45. Ibid, p. 78

46. Ibid, p. 79.

47. Ibid.

only an unintelligent attachment to life and body. Sometimes this type may have some inclination towards religion, spirituality, art, beauty etc., but this inclination is not governed by a higher light, nor does he seek to uplift it to a freer and nobler eminence. Instead he pulls the higher faculties down to the level of his sense, his sensations, his unenlightened and unchastened emotions, his gross utilitarian practicality<sup>48</sup>. Even his moral sense is conventional, unchastened and unintelligent, darkened with likes and dislikes<sup>49</sup>. The reason and intelligent will in him is not his own but the part of the group mind he receives from the environment<sup>50</sup>.

But in the next stage man tends to show some more development though the philistine in him is not completely dead<sup>51</sup>. The old Goliath is now replaced with a new giant<sup>52</sup>. He is now awakened to the necessity at least of some intelligent use of the higher faculties and is trying to be mentally active. He can no longer be obstinately impervious to new movements and new ideas. He comes to be aware of so many problems he is to think of like ethical, social, scientific and religious<sup>53</sup>. He becomes attached to new political developments.

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48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Sri Aurobindo, Pondicherry, 19985, p. 458.

52. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self Determination, p. 80.

53. Ibid, p. 81

He is a reader of poetry as well as the devourer of fictions and periodical literature - you will find in him perhaps a student of Tagore or an admirer of Whitman; he has perhaps no very clear ideas about beauty and aesthetics, but had heard that art is a not altogether unimportant part of life<sup>54</sup> .

He is rather the modern man who is responsive to ideas and opinion and is prepared to bring about social and political changes for himself and the society he lives in. Aurobindo says, it is the coming of this type which has been the precipitative agent for the reshaping of the modern world. But still he lives in the vital substratum and is still a slave to his ideas which he wants to impart to the society. He still wants a society that can cater to his tastes, interests and manners. He wants a group of thinkers, writers, poets and artists who can satisfy him and quench his mental thirst. This is very much reflected in the mass of literature written according to the interest of the readers. However a great change is visible. The ideas and new thoughts which could not get a hearing from the Philistine can have it from this new type. New methods of education, an inclination to progress which can create a cultured humanity, come into being<sup>55</sup> . The culture latent in man begins to have its initial expression.

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54. Ibid,

55. Ibid, p. 83.

The next stage is that of a more cultured humanity which transcends the activities of the sense mind. In this stage of cultural progress knowledge and reason and a wide intellectual curiosity that are characteristic of a cultured being and enlightened mind come into being. Human actions begin to be governed by high ethical ideas, beauty and self-ruling instead of lower or average mentality. This, Aurobindo says, is the ideal of a true culture and the beginning of an accomplished humanity<sup>56</sup>.

According to Aurobindo, culture has got two sides. Both are equally brilliant and effulgent, except in some initial contradictions which in the long run lead to harmony. They are the ethical and aesthetic sides<sup>57</sup>. The first relates to the conduct and discipline deriving from a higher sense and bridles life with principles and ideals. For the conduct also is a part of the cultured life, and the ethical ideality one of the master impulses of the cultured man. Quite different is the tendency of the aesthetic man or his culture. He sees and lives in beauty which is to him the manifestation of a higher truth. This opposition which is discernible in the fabric of man's culture has always existed. It is naturally a strong tendency of human mind and therefore must answer to some real and important divergence<sup>58</sup> in the very composite elements of our being. This

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56. Ibid, p.86.

57. Srinivasa Iyengar, op. cit, p. 458

58. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 86.

is the difference Mathew Arnold drew between Hebraism and Hellenism, the former adhering to the laws and ethics of life, the latter signifying a clear aesthetic sensibility and the worship of beauty in every activity<sup>59</sup>. "There is in our mentality a side of will, conduct, character which creates the ethical man, there is another side of the sensibility to the beautiful - understanding beauty in no narrow or hyperartistic sense - which creates the artistic and aesthetic man"<sup>60</sup>. But often the world has erred in reaching a just and perfect balance between the two aspects and they often remained seemingly conflicting ideals. The aesthetic man tended to be impatient of the ethical rule. He felt it to be a barrier to his aesthetic freedom and an oppression on his artistic sense and artistic faculty. To him beauty and delight are inseparable powers, and he feels ethical rule as a stunting force on pleasure and as putting a strait waistcoat on the human impulse to delight. Therefore he considers ethics as secondary to his aesthetic pleasure. Even if he may accept it, it is as one of his instruments for creating beauty. The ethical man on the other hand considers conduct, principle and order of life supreme. To him art and aesthetic sense are something lax and emollient. Beauty with its appeals to passions and emotions is destructive of a high and strict self-control.

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59. Toynbee, op. cit., p.304;  
Mathew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy (Edited by Dover Wilson), Cambridge, 1971, pp. 99-109.

60. Sri Aurobindo, Human Cycle-Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 87.

He sees it as hedonistic and as non-moral and often immoral. Naturally he prefers to remain a puritan to the core of his temperament. This misunderstanding between these two sides of human nature, Aurobindo says, is an inevitable circumstance of the growth of human civilization<sup>61</sup>.

The contrast and opposition between individual types often reproduced itself in a like contrast and opposition between social and natural types. "To get a real, if not always quite pure examples of the type we must go back a little forth in time and contrast early Republican Rome or in Greece itself, Sparta with Periclean Athens"<sup>62</sup>. Rome and Sparta were barren of thought, art, poetry, literature, the larger mental life, all the amenity and pleasure of human existence; their art of life excluded or discouraged the delight. Roman civilization symbolized the human will which oppressed and disciplined the emotional and sensational mind in order to arrive at a self-mastery of the definite ethical type. It was this self-mastery which enabled the Roman Republic to have a mastery of its environing world and impose on other nations its public order and law<sup>63</sup>. The Spartan constitution and ways of life, if to quote from Pericles' 'Funeral Oration' wanted to make a "pattern to others"<sup>64</sup>. These ethical cultures never allowed themselves to be influenced by the aesthetic. For instance, even when

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61. Ibid, p. 89.

62. Ibid, p. 89.

63. Ibid.

64. Brian Tierney, Donald Kagan, L. Pearce Williams (Ed), Periclean Athens-Was It a Democracy? New York, 1977, p.8

Greece came under the Roman hegemony, the earlier spirit of Republican Rome closed its door to all that was Hellenic.

Thus neither the ethical being nor the aesthetic being constitutes the whole man. But both are indispensable for the growth of culture. Without the self-discipline the mental being cannot progress and without self-perfection life becomes aimless. What is needed is therefore a desirable harmony of the both. We can enlarge the sense of ethics by the sense of beauty and delight in such a way that delight can be attained through self-discipline. This ideal is seen in Indian culture which took self-discipline, the 'Tapas' as the way to delight, 'Ananda'.

'Tapas' is the energising conscious-power of the cosmic being by which the world is created, maintained and governed; it includes all concept of force, will, energy, power everything dynamic and dynamising. 'Ananda' is the essential nature of bliss of the cosmic consciousness and in activity, its delight of self-creation and self-experience<sup>65</sup>.

This highest 'Yogic' ideal had, in ancient India, its parallel in ordinary life. Bridled by the principles of morality or 'Dharma' one should attain 'artha' and 'kama' (wealth and desire) so that he gets 'moksha' or the complete deliverance into the eternal delight, the profoundest

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65. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination, pp. 92-93.

expression of Beauty<sup>66</sup>. This ideal was the end of the Indian experiment of harmonizing ethics and aesthetics.

According to Aurobindo culture reaches its perfection only when man progresses towards a spiritual attainment. For this, he says, reason, the most dominating factor of intellectual faculty should be developed. "Reason using the intelligent will for the ordering of inner and outer life is undoubtedly the highest developed faculty of man at his present point of evolution; it is the sovereign, because the governing and self-governing faculty in the complexities of our human existence"<sup>67</sup>. Man is distinguished from other beings by his capacity for seeking after a rule of life and a principle of order and self-development. Endowed with an intellectual potential, he can himself be the governor and master of his life, can conceive a progressive order in which he can evolve and develop his capacities and can initiate an intelligent evolution that would affect both himself and his society. This requires a great deal of

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66. 'Beauty' is not different from 'Truth'. Both are the same. Take, for instance, the poetic utterance "thing of beauty is a joy for ever". This joy for ever, according to the Gita, is subject to intellectual perception and is transcendental (sukhamathayanthikam yatat buddhigrahyamatindriyam - Gita, VI.21) Joy for ever, Beauty and Truth are the same. In Indian literature god was called 'Sathyam - Sivam - Sundaram' or 'Sat-Chid-Ananda'. Again the Vedic literature is replete with such words like loveliness (Sri) and beauty (Vapus) and truth (Sathya) and eternal order (Rita).  
A.C. Bose The call of the Vedas, Bombay, 1988, pp. 26-27.
67. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 94

self-discovery or the discovery of the presence of soul in things. The soul or the potential is always remaining passive, without being discovered or from giving way to self-expression. It remains self-oblivious. In animals it becomes expressed to some degree on the surface, but is still incapable of its fullest expression. But in man the soul governs the working of his nature and through the individuals and combined reason and energy of many individuals it governs the working of nature itself in man<sup>68</sup>. The idea about this spiritual progress or the stage wherein reason governs the development of mankind may appear something strange and beyond an easy perception. But if there was past from which we developed the present there must be a future as the continuation of the present. There "must surely be another, in its future in which a higher spiritual and supra-mental consciousness shall emerge..." This development of a self-conscious soul in mind, Aurobindo says, is the initial step towards that higher progress<sup>69</sup>. The intellectual reason is man's only means of knowledge, because it has advantage over the other faculties of human life. It disengages itself from work, stands back from it to study and understands it disinterestedly. Reason exists for the sake of knowledge by preventing itself from being carried away by action. It intelligently studies, accepts, refuses, modifies, alters, improves, combines and recombines the working and capacities of the

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68. Ibid, P. 95.

69. Ibid

force in operation. It leads to an organized perfection. It is science, conscious art and invention. It is the light for all human actions, it is the "Prometheus of the mythical parable", the civilizer of mankind<sup>70</sup>. But at times reason becomes dissatisfied with itself and its own limitation and often collides with its widely acknowledged rival, the faith, whose crust it breaks. Even religion has had to submit before the sovereignty of the intellect. But reason combined with an ordinary intellect can only stifle one's progress towards a higher perfection<sup>71</sup>. As a result the thinking mind tends to question itself and to ask "whether existence is not too large, profound, complex and mysterious a thing to be entirely seized and governed by the powers of the intellect". It is vaguely felt that there is some greater god-head than reason. For reason is used by man for the establishment of his own ideas which may often be partial and prejudiced. "Even the thinking man ordinarily limits his reason to the working out of certain preferred ideas" born in his own mind which is not a thinking mind proper, but is cast in the matrix of intents, need, instincts, passion, prejudice, traditional ideas and opinions of the ordinary life which constitute only "the

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70. Ibid, p.97.

71. Sri Aurobindo, Evolution, Pondicherry, 1989 p.3. Reason and science of the early renaissance period could no doubt be victorious against the medieval superstition and dogmatic church. But it was more destructive even to the ideal about a higher truth. And the world had to wait for Einstein and Plank to divest science of its materialistic arrogance and familiarize it with truths higher and even transcendental.

irrationality of human existence"<sup>72</sup>. Thus when we look to the history of mankind we see that sometime generations are carried away by certain ethical, religious, aesthetic, and political ideas or a set of ideas are swept away by the drive of the action. Even if the ideas are fulfilled to a certain extent, the very success itself brings disappointment and disillusionment, they being carried not by a free and disinterested reason for the right knowledge of existence. This, Aurobindo says, is the reason why all human systems have failed in the end; for "they have never been anything but a partial and confused application of reason to life" which made man stumble on from experiment to experiment<sup>73</sup>. Thus there are the two worlds, "the world of ideas proper to the intellect and the world of life which escapes the full control of the reason", and often a mere worldly reason fails to bridge adequately in between the two domains. For there is a principle of infinite potentiality and variation in individual as well as his life which become baffling to the reasoning intelligence. This is because, Aurobindo says, the reason deals only with the

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72. The ordinary mind in man, Aurobindo says, is not truly the thinking mind proper, it is a life mind, a vital mind as we may call it, which has learned to think and even to reason but for its own ends and on its own lines, not on those of a true mind of knowledge. Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, p. 546.
73. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 100.

settled and the finite <sup>74</sup>. But everything finite has an infinite which it feels to be its real truth. Therefore the real sovereign is something higher than the reasoning intelligence. There man is to divinise himself to become the master of nature in himself and his environment. He is to establish constant communion with his supreme will and knowledge <sup>75</sup>.

However reason is significant in helping man cover the stage of a mere unthinking savage. By constant enlargement, purification and openness, reason helps man arrive at an intelligent sense or the light that surpasses it. Its limit is reached and its function finished when it points to a soul, a self whose minister the reason has been. Man is there to take to new heights of knowing himself, discover the widest law of his being, "the true secret and the whole sense of a human and yet divine being" <sup>76</sup>. It is interesting to take notice of the Hegelian doctrine of reflection that the absolute becomes self-conscious through the world or the finite human mind, that in the finite itself there is the infinite, and that the knowledge regarding it is the highest aim of human life, history, science or philosophy <sup>77</sup>. To Hegel universe is a coherent whole; and his 'dialectic' seeks to explain everything including

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74. Ibid, p. 104.

75. Ibid, p. 104.

76. Ibid, p. 114

77. Thilly, A History of Philosophy, p. 484.

history as the work of opposites or contradictory forces which through their action and counter-action bring about a harmony in the end when they bring out the organic unity or the only reality which he variously calls - the idea, spirit, the reason or the divine mind<sup>78</sup>. What we see is a process of constant change and a changing back, or as believed by the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, "an exchange and an interchange in a constant whole managed by a clash of forces, by a creative and determinative strife"<sup>79</sup>. History is to Hegel the process by which the spirit passes from knowing nothing to full knowledge of itself, the increasing revelation of the purpose of the rational mind, or the 'soul' of Aurobindo's thought<sup>80</sup>. Therefore, Hegel says, the universal mind at work in the world has had the patience to go through many forms in the long stretch of time's extent, "and to take upon itself the prodigious labour of world's history, where it bodied forth in each form the entire content of itself which each is capable of grasping, and by nothing less could that all-pervading mind ever manage to become conscious of what itself is"<sup>81</sup>. So the rational is the real and the real the rational which is realized in the completed process of evolution. The result together with the entire process of development is the true whole<sup>82</sup>.

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78. Sabine, op. cit, p. 581

79. Sri Aurobindo, Heraclitus, Pondicherry, 1989, p.12

80. C.L. Wayper, Political Thought, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 156-157.

81. Ibid, p. 157.

82. Thilly, op. cit, p. 480

The general idea of cultural or any other type of evolution is the filiation of each successive form or state or thing to the preceding one. The outbringing and deploying of each stage is necessitated by previous stages or previous tendencies. A form contains the seed of the form that reproduces it, and also the seed of the possible new form that varies from it. The more developed grows out of the less developed organism. Thus by the successive progress the world system evolves out of the nebula<sup>83</sup>. While dealing with progress which is fully dependent on the progress of the individual, Aurobindo gives more importance to spiritual evolution than physical or hereditary. A spiritual heredity or the progress of the soul is emphasized. Aurobindo calls our attention to the conclusion arrived at by some investigators into the phenomenon of heredity that "acquired characteristics are not handed down to the posterity and the theory that it is chiefly predispositions that are inherited"<sup>84</sup>. The process is thus less material and mechanical. Discoursing on Karma Yoga, Swami Vivekananda said that culture or 'Samskara' can be translated very nearly by inherent tendency, and that what a man "just at this moment is the effect of the sum total of all the impressions of previous life". Each man's character or culture is determined by the sum total of the impressions

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83. Sri Aurobindo, Evolution, p. 2.

84. Ibid, p. 3.

gathered through the past lives<sup>85</sup>. "Even the racial soul itself is ultimately a physical stress or stresses in the universal consciousness in the form of the 'sangskaras' or the impressions left on the soul by its past incarnations, racial and individual, manifesting as mind and body..."<sup>86</sup>. Therefore to understand culture we have to "pass from the sense of an obvious superficial machinery and all-sufficient material necessity to profundities whose mystery is yet to be fathomed"<sup>87</sup>. Culture is thus purely spiritual and connected with the soul-force, and culture becomes visible wherever spirit manifests. In the Gita Lord Krishna goes on explaining that whatever thing is glorious, excellent or pre-eminent is born of the highest spirit<sup>88</sup>. Hence the need of the highest ideal that envisions a higher spirit the realization of which alone leads to the realization of culture.

Ideals are the ways towards culture. But they have not yet effected themselves for man and have not yet fulfilled themselves on the lower planes of life and matter which are the fields of ordinary human activity. Also there is the difference between idealism and pragmatism. "To the pragmatical intellect which takes its stand upon the ever

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85. Swami Vivekananda, karma Yoga, Calcutta, 1984, p. 39.  
86. John Woodroffe, Is India Civilized? New Delhi, 1979, p.46.  
87. Sri Aurobindo, Ideal and Progress, Pondicherry, 1989, p. 1.  
88. Gita, X-41.

changing present, ideals are not truths, not realities, they are at most potentials of future truth and only become real when they are visible in the external fact as work of force accomplished"<sup>89</sup>. Often the truth left unrealized is that the idea is not a reflection of the external fact which it so much exceeds; rather the fact is only a partial reflection of the idea which has created. Without an ideal there is no outward expression. Theory is that existence cannot be produced by non-existence. So behind the expression there is or must be an idea. Form comes out of the idea. Constructive work is the outcome of creative idea or intellect. The ideal is primary and the actual working is secondary<sup>90</sup>. Ideal is the force that corrects the real execution of things and the real is to bring the ideal to its full fruition. But unfortunately the idealist and visionary condemns the pragmatist and the latter disapproves the former. This, Aurobindo says, is a deplorable result of our intellectual limitations and the mutual misunderstanding by which the arrogance of our imperfect temperament and mentality shuts itself out from perfection<sup>91</sup>. To the practical worker who limits himself by patent forces and actual possibilities the idealist who made his work feasible appears an ideal dreamer floating in fancy. To the idealist the practical man who executes the first step towards his idea would appear a destroyer of his

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89. Sri Aurobindo, Ideal and Progress, p. 1

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid., p.3.

creative ideal and almost its enemy. By becoming mad after what is immediately possible the practical man does away with the greater possibilities envisioned by the idealist, and checks a larger and nobler realization. "It is the gulf between Cavour and Mazzini, between the prophet of an ideal and a statesman of a realizable idea"<sup>92</sup>. That the work which side-tracked from the ideals could only land humanity in tragedies is a fact history proved. The success of the executive man hiding away the ideal under the accomplished fact is often the tragedy of the human spirit. It is responsible for the great reactions and disappointments it undergoes, and finally man finds poverty and soullessness of the accomplished fact when compared with the glory of the vision and ardour of the effort. The ideal is always uncompromising and should be so. For a dilution of ideal can only bring things to doom. Therefore the idealist who will not compromise is an indispensable element for the realization of the true ideal. The nation and the age led by statesmanlike workers inclined to concede and compromise is a country which will never be great and an age which accomplishes no progress<sup>93</sup>. Hence the sermon of the Gita to fight all the odds till the goal or the ideal is realized. Become conquered by attachment and leniency, to compromise while one is expected to crusade mercilessly and unattached for the creative ideal is "unaryanlike, disgraceful and

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92. Sri Aurobindo, Ideal and Progress, p. 6.

93. Ibid, p. 7.

contrary to the attainment of heaven"<sup>94</sup>. There is difference however, between the fanatic of an idea and a true idealist. The former is simply the materialistic executive man directed by the idea of another, and not himself the possessor of it; he is a virtual slave. But the true idealist is not the servant of the letter or the form. Ideas are to him means towards a high goal and he would take to new ideas when that goal is reached. To him serving the ideals one after another is the step towards a higher and creative goal. What is needed is therefore a harmony of pragmatism and idealism which, though appear opposites, are the inseparable poles that bring about perfection. Man approaches his perfection when he combines in himself the idealist and the pragmatist, the originative soul and the executive power. Interestingly enough the greatest executive personalities have usually been men of considerable idealism. They combined in them an active power with an originative thought devoted to practical realization<sup>95</sup>. Aurobindo cites, as examples Napoleon and Alexander.

Napoleon with his violent prejudice against ideologues and dreamers was himself a colossal dreamer, an incurable if unconscious ideologist; his teeming brain was the cause of his gigantic force and accomplishment. The immense if shapeless ideas

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94. Gita, II, 2. "kutastva kasmalamidam vishame samupasthitham anaryajjushtamaswargyamakirthikaramarjuna".

95. Sri Aurobindo, Ideal and Progress, p. 8.

of Alexander threw themselves into the form of conquests, cities and cultures; they broke down the barriers of Asiatic prejudice and narrow self-imprisonment and created an age of civilization and soul interchange<sup>96</sup> .

This failure of understanding between idealism and reality has often led the world to the doom and destruction of civilization. This was very much visible in the middle of the nineteenth century when "this mutual misunderstanding and co-operation between ethical ideals and reality began to break down" and when in the course of the next few decades civilization itself disappeared completely<sup>97</sup> . The result was the total abdication of civilization and the appearance of the destructive and demonic forces which manifested in two world wars and the consequent ideological confusion of man pertaining to a further and final holocaust that loomed ahead. Schweitzer is of the opinion that throughout the ages gone, it had been the work of philosophy to instil in human kind the ideals of civilization, a duty she callously ignored during this time. By this time philosophy became "more and more absorbed in the study of her own past". Philosophy came to mean practically the history of philosophy, and became bereft of an creative

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96. Sri Aurobindo, Ideal and Progress, p. 8

97. Albert Schweitzer, The Philosophy of Civilization, New York, 1955, p.3.

spirit<sup>98</sup>. Having "lost the power of elemental thought", she failed to contribute anything new to a world fallen into the vortex of confusion regarding how to accommodate itself between an aggressive life impulse and an arrogant science. Deceived by her own riches, she had neglected to plant any ground with nourishing crops, and therefore, ignoring the hunger of the age, she left the world to its fate<sup>99</sup>. This philosopher of civilization thus seems to be of ardent opinion that there must be a philosophical and idealistic vision behind the progress of historical process if the growth of culture should register progress or it if should not be aborted by the forces of barbarism and savagery. Aurobindo laments, rare have been the examples where a nature force or the executive force was combined with seer force in such a way as to bring perfection towards a divine plane. Therefore a seer-will becoming commonplace is needed. But the hope and expectation regarding its possibility depends on whether men prepare their souls for its advent and rise in the effort of their faith, life and thought to the light and purity of a clearly conceived ideal. In such a condition, Aurobindo says, comes the hour of god or the highest culture with the divine seer-will descending on the human consciousness to reveal to it the divine meaning of man's half blind action and to give along with the vision an exalted will that is faithful and the ideal force which

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98. Ibid, p. 6.

99. Ibid, p. 7.

executes in with the vision <sup>100</sup>. Such moments of higher culture often appeared in human history though not in full vigour. Nations experienced the hours of cultural glory according to the national characteristics. To Greece it was the age of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. To India, it was the age stretching from antiquity upto the end of the ancient period, when she abounded in intellectual and artistic activities, when she discovered the spirit, completed the discovery of 'Dharma' and formulated her science, when the Vedas, the Upanishads and other classics sprang up. To England it was the age of Shakespeare when Elizabeth presided over an age of literary, commercial and political greatness. Each nation has thus enjoyed this rare moment of cultural height.

The endeavour should thus be to arrive at a harmonised inner and outer perfection, at its maximum height to culminate in the discovery of the spiritual truth behind all actions and the shaping of human life in with this highest ideal <sup>101</sup>. For this, Aurobindo says, man should seek in somewhere else than in the ancient Hellenic ideal of life and in the modern ideal of the age of material arrogance.

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100. Ibid, pp. 8-9

101. Sri Aurobindo, Ideal and Progress, pp. 10 - 11.

The Hellenic ideal was roughly expressed in the old Latin maxim - a sound mind in a sound body. A sound body denotes a beautiful and healthy body well fitted for the practical use and enjoyment of life. A sound mind meant a clear and balanced reason and an enlightened and well-trained mentality. The ancient Greek mind was philosophic, aesthetic and political<sup>102</sup>. The modern mind is scientific, economic and utilitarian. Laying very little or no stress on beauty, it prefers rational and practical soundness, useful adaptation, just mechanism. It seeks to build up a well-ordered, well-informed and efficient human life. Both view that man is partly a mental or partly a physical being with a mentalised physical life<sup>103</sup>. But if we follow to the end the new vistas opened by a subjective age we will come to a point which overtops both the Hellenic and modern levels. We will seize the idea that man is a developing spirit, and perceive a greater ideal of a deeply conscious, self-illuminated, self-possessing, self-mastering soul in a pure and perfect psycho-physical being<sup>104</sup>. Gradually there evolves the hope of a new spiritualised life inward and outward by which the perfected internal expresses itself in a perfected external living. There "opens the old religious and spiritual ideal, the hope of the kingdom of heaven within us and the city of God upon earth"<sup>105</sup>.

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102. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle- The Ideal of Human Unity War and self-Determination, p. 115.

103. Thilly, op. cit, pp. 17-18.

104. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle- The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination, p. 116.

Aurobindo makes us convinced of this higher being and the higher faculties by bringing out the dealing of reason with the trend towards the absolute in the ordinary faculties or in the divergent principles of the complex existence. He therefore throws light on reason's dealings with the two extremes like the 'Supra-rational' and the 'Infra-rational' between which the human intelligence is some sort of mediator. "The spiritual or the supra-rational is always turned at its heights towards the absolute; in its extension, living in the luminous infinite, its special power is to realize the infinite in the finite, the eternal unity in divisions and difference"<sup>106</sup>. The path of spiritual evolution or even of the ordinary understanding lies from the relative to the absolute, from the finite to the infinite and from all divisions to oneness<sup>107</sup>. To search out the inner meaning and the final truth of the mundane existence that lies at random therefore is the true ideal. Here the intelligence is concentrated, poised, one, homogeneous and is directed singly towards the truth; it is characterized with unity with concentrated fixity its being<sup>108</sup>.

Infra-rational, on the other hand, has its origin and basis in the obscure infinite of the inconscient; it wells up in the instincts and impulses

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105. Ibid.

106. Ibid, p.118

107. Ashvaghosha, The Awakening of Faith, D.T. Suzuki (Trans) Chicago, 1900, p. 55.

which are really the crude and more or less haphazard institutions of a subconscious physical, vital, emotional and sensational mind and will in  
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It struggles for definition, self-creation and some finite order of its obscure knowledge and tendencies. It has, of course, the instinct and force of the infinite whence it proceeds, but tries to pull down the intensities of the absolute or some touch of them into its finite actions. It cannot truly succeed since it proceeds from ignorance. The life of the reason and intelligent will stands between that upper and this nether power. On the one side it takes up and enlightens the life of instincts and impulses and helps it to find on a higher plane the finite order it gropes for. On the other side it looks towards the absolute or infinite, but without being able to grasp and hold the realities. It looks to the absolute only with derivative and remote understanding. Since it moves in the relative and is itself limited and definite it can act only by definition, division and limitation. These planes of psycho-spiritual experiences are present in all our activities though with infinite variations.

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108 Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, Pondicherry, 1987, p. 88.

109. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 119.

But an ordinary human reason of the materialistic world cannot discern and read into these super-sensual planes of the spiritual progression. An unaided intellectual reason views the whole religion as superstition, non-sense, a bunch of ignorant barbaric survival. This is mere ignorance like that of a foreigner who thinks every thing in an alien country absurd and inferior and tries to judge a civilization by outward peculiarities<sup>110</sup>. There is also the more moderate attitude of the rational mind whose attempts to explain religion have, actually resulted in perversions such as certain pseudo-scientific attempts aimed at developing a comparative science of religion. Both can, however, only fail in either attacking it or reforming it. That is why "reformations which give too much to reason and are too negative and Protestant, usually create religions which lack in wealth of spirituality and fullness of religious emotion..."<sup>111</sup>. Their form and too often their spirit is impoverished, and their teachings can only replace the old monstrosity with new idiotism as history often revealed. The religious reformation of Europe, for instance, was of course, inspired by lofty ideas. But it could bring in only a more ruthless system than what existed before. It resulted only in a more chaotic state. Here it may be interesting to think in line with what the historian of the Roman Empire holds. According to Gibbon, in Europe,

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110. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 121.

111. Ibid, p. 125.

the chain of authority was broken down which restrains the bigot from thinking as he pleases... reformers were ambitious of succeeding the tyrants whom they dethroned. They imposed with equal rigour their creeds and confessions. They asserted the right of the magistrate to punish heretic with death<sup>112</sup>.

The new reformers of Europe were not different in tyranny and absurdities from the old catholic Bishops whom they sought to replace. "The nature of the tiger was the same, but he was gradually deprived of its teeth and fangs"<sup>113</sup>. The reformation of Europe could thus touch only the shell, not the kernel. Luther or Calvin could not rise to the level of Aquinas or Augustine who read into the heart of the Christian Gospels and interpreted them. Therefore, Aurobindo says, what is needed is not an unaided and unenlightened reason, and that relations of the spirit and the reason need not be hostile and without any point of contact. "What is impossible or absurd to the unaided reason becomes real and right to the reason lifted beyond itself by the power of the spirit and irradiated by its light"<sup>114</sup>. It was this enlightened reason that made Buddha successful in revitalising the Vedic truths through his new sermons and made his reformation a success. Reason is thus the true religion; it is realization.

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112. Edward Gibbon, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, New York, 1972, Vol. III, p. 314.

113. Ibid.

114. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 126.

Religion is the seeking after the spiritual or the supra-rational. Therefore the intellectual reason may not of course be a sufficient help in the realm of a power and a light higher than its own. But it is of much value in the border land where the rational and infra-rational meet, where the impulses and instincts of man require light and direction of the reason<sup>115</sup>. On either side of the reason stand closely the two aspects of man's being—the aesthetic and ethical, or his search for 'Beauty' and the search for 'Good'. Man may intensely search for beauty in the great creative arts like poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture or music. A complete and universal appreciation of beauty is surely a necessary character of a perfect individual and perfect society. But Aurobindo believes that in its origin this seeking of beauty is not rational. "Starting from the infra-rational parts of our being this instinct and impulse begin with much imperfection and impurity and with great crudities both in creation and in appreciation"<sup>116</sup>. It is here that the light of reason comes to correct and purge our aesthetic sense of its crudities and to lay down the laws of aesthetics, improved tastes and right knowledge. There the aesthetic sense becomes rationally discriminative in its work and enjoyment. But again

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114. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination p. 126.

115. Ibid, p. 120

116. Ibid, p. 128.

this is true only in a restricted bound. Beauty is entirely different and cannot be made as if one from an inert plastic material. The creation of beauty in poetry and art does not fall within the sovereignty and sphere of the reason. "The intellect is not the poet, the artist, the creator within us; creation comes by a supra-rational influx of light" which works always by vision and inspiration<sup>117</sup>. Beauty is the divine manifestation in the physical. Supra-mental is the highest divine beauty manifesting in matter, and its principle and law is something inward and spiritual<sup>118</sup>. Beauty is 'Bliss' (Ananda) taking form and is the way towards the ultimate joy. Beyond manifestation beauty loses itself in 'joy' or beauty and 'bliss' become indistinguishably one<sup>119</sup>. It is the stage where the artist who seeks beauty becomes one with it. This beauty can never be measured "for it does not exist apart from the artist himself, and the 'rasika' (devotee) who enters into his experience"<sup>120</sup>. When the beauty recedes to the 'joy' and the forms are resolved the artist attains to the unity of the 'person' and is released from the meshes of 'ego'<sup>121</sup>. Thus the artist or the adorer breaks out from his ego when

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117. Ibid, p. 128

118. Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Poetry and Art, p. 201.

119. Ibid.

120. A.K. Coomaraswamy, The Dance of Siva, Delhi, 1982, p.66.

the ego either disappears in impersonality or fuses into a larger 'I' or the wider cosmic 'I' which comprehends all smaller selves<sup>122</sup>. This is why the anonymity of the artist belongs to a type of culture dominated by the longing to be liberated from oneself. In the words of Coomaraswamy

All the force of this philosophy is directed against the delusion 'I am the door'. 'I' am not in fact the door but the instrument; human individuality is not an end but only a means. The supreme achievement of individual consciousness is to lose or find (both words mean the same) itself in what is both its first beginning and its last<sup>123</sup> end.

Here the path of devotion reaches its goal where the artist and the object he seeks are unified and difference is abolished in the ecstasy of a divine oneness<sup>124</sup>. Lifted into this highest state of the supra-mental light, everything of human life, pain, pleasure and indifference become

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121. Maitri Upanishad, IV-5 quoted in A.K. Coomaraswamy, Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art, Delhi, 1982, p. 52.

122. Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, Pondicherry, 1984, p. 343.

123. A.k. Coomaraswamy, Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art, p. 41.

"That person who is giving up all sense objects goes about unattached, devoid of the idea of ownership and free from egoism-he attains peace". Gita II, 71.

124. Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 347.

converted into joy of the one self-existent delight<sup>125</sup>. Interestingly enough Jon Keats had sung: "thing of beauty is a joy for ever". The joy is the outcome of the detachment from self and lives in freedom of spirit. Beauty is that profound expression of reality which satisfies our hearts with its own ultimate value. The artist is thus a high priest to search out this beauty, and poetry a priestess appointed in the god's house to image the hard and secret realities deriving from a higher and transcendental vision.

The Spirit of the real, the great classical art and poetry is therefore to bring out what is universal and subordinate individual expression to the universal truth and beauty<sup>126</sup>. All artistic and cultural works in order to be perfect must indeed have in the very act of creation the guidance of an inner power, corrected and purified by the divine light or the supra-rational beauty. According to Aurobindo there have been nations, civilizations and ages in which the expression of beauty reached its climax. The earliest creative works of India were philosophical and religious, vedic and Upanishad, and the miracle of these ancient writings is their perfect union of beauty, power and truth, the revealed utterance of that universal spirit. The expression of the spiritual through the aesthetic sense

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125. Ibid, p. 405.

126. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, pp. 130 - 131.

is the constant sense of Indian art <sup>127</sup>. Take for instance the great Buddha statues (not Gandharan but the groups in the cave cathedral, the best of the later southern bronzes) which are of the superb finish in conception and execution and with their greatness increased by the spiritualised aesthetic vision. "The figure of the Buddha achieves the expression of the infinite in a finite image to embody the illimitable calm of 'Nirvana' in a human form on visage" <sup>128</sup>. The image of the 'Kalasanhara Siva' is noted for its majesty, power, calmly forceful control, dignity and the idea of harmony behind the existence which the whole spirit and pose of the figure visibly incarnate. It is much more elegant by the concentrated divine passion of the spiritual overcoming of time and existence which the artist has successfully initiated and put into its every feature. Much more marvellous is the genius and skill in the treatment of the cosmic movement and delight in the dance of Siva, the success with which the posture of every limb is executed to bring out the rhythm, the rapturous intensity and abandon of the movement itself and yet the just restraint in the intensity of the motion, the subtle variation of each element of the single theme in the seizing idea of a master sculptor <sup>129</sup>. The expression of this divine beauty and grace is often the aim of Indian art

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127. Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry, Pondicherry, 1991.

128. Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, p.232.

129. Ibid, p. 233.

whether it is in the 'Descent of the Ganga' at Mamallapuram, or the sculptures of the 'Dasavatara' at Deogarh, or the image of the multi-armed goddess, 'Mahishammardini Durga' or the Dryad of Sanchi. Japan and China, more especially perhaps the southern China, had in a different way perfected this fusion of spiritual and aesthetic mind and it is a distinguishing feature of their art and culture. The Persians had a sort of sensuous magic of the transforming aesthesis born of psychic delight and vision<sup>130</sup>. "Ancient Greece did all its work of founding European civilization by a union of a subtle and active intelligence with a fine aesthetic spirit and worship of beauty. The Celtic nations again seem always to have had by nature a psychic delicacy and subtlety united with an instinctive turn for the imaginative beauty to which we surely owe much of the fine strain in English literature"<sup>131</sup>. But there end these spontaneous miracles of fusion, Aurobindo laments. The modern mind, though inheritor of all these past experiences is a divided and complex mind that suffers under a mechanical and utilitarian civilization from which it cannot be free. Aurobindo says, only the day we get back to the worship of delight and beauty will be our day of salvation. "For without these things there can be neither an assured nobility and sweetness in poetry and art nor a satisfied dignity and fullness of life nor a harmonious perfection of the spirit"<sup>132</sup>.

130. Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry, p. 227.

131. Ibid, 227 - 228.

132. ibid, p. 228.

Like the supra-rational beauty there is the supra-rational good or the supra-rational ethics. As already noticed ethics or the good is the highest law that arranges and orders the activities of life and has the same value like the aesthetic elements. The highest ethics or the supra-rational ethics of life also leads man towards the highest or the ultimate reality. It is to be noticed that almost all original thinkers, eastern as well as western, have laid equal emphasis on the ethical aspect and have believed alike in the divine nature of the ethical ideal. Mathew Arnold pleads that men should follow not their ordinary but their best self<sup>133</sup>. Like Arnold many English philosophers were deeply influenced by the idealism of the early German thought. Thomas Hill Green, for instance, wholeheartedly believed in the existence of Hegel's 'Divine spirit' or 'Reason' which constantly pushes forward to its goal which was perfect realization. History, for Green as for Hegel, was a constant progress embodying the "eternal consciousness"<sup>134</sup>. To him ideal is more real than the actual life. According to Green man is a spiritual being and as such not a member of the phenomenal series of the natural events. In man there is a principle which cannot be seen in other creations of nature and whose specific function is to render knowledge possible. "This spiritual principle underlying knowledge also has an ethical func-

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133. Wayper, op. cit, p. 174

134. Ibid, p. 175

tion, the consciousness of a moral ideal, and the determination of human action thereby"<sup>135</sup>. This ethical ideal is also the true good of a man's life and an end in which the effort of a moral agent can find satisfaction. The main ethical insight, therefore, is that the purpose of all social reform is the perfection of man on a spiritual side, the development of man of character and ideals. Green very clearly brings out the relation between civilization and ethics and determines that all the achievements of human activity, especially the political and social perfecting of the society, are nothing in themselves, and have a real meaning only so far as they render attainable by individuals a more thorough perfection of heart. A spiritualised conception of civilization, Green believes, is therefore most desirable in historical studies. The ultimate form of moral endeavour is spiritual act whereby the heart is lifted upto god or in which the entire self aspires to an ideal of personal holiness. The practical expression of this good or ethical ideal will have an additional value. It results in the amelioration of human society. But this is only secondary; the primary aim is the spiritual refinement of human soul<sup>136</sup>. Indeed the finest expression of this ideal can be seen in the oriental philosophy where Gita declares that "the end of all actions is the attainment of the divine knowledge"<sup>137</sup>.

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135. F. Thilly, op. cit., pp. 558-559

136. Ibid, p. 561

137. "Sarvakarmakhilam partha jnane parisamapyathe" Gita, IV

Sri Aurobindo is of the firm conviction that if only man becomes aware of this highest knowledge all the present problems of the world can be solved. If we come to realize ourselves as the contributory values of that highest truth, fractional measures of that highest and common measure we can attain that perfect and highest term whereby "all our imperfect lower terms can be justified and their discords harmonised"<sup>138</sup>. The end of knowledge is to make life aware of its true meaning and transform itself into the highest and the most possible harmonious expression of a divine reality. This truth we can easily make out in religion and art, the cults of spirit and beauty, for they have an enduring bearing on the human soul in its making. "It is precisely the cultivation of the spirit" which is the end of all our education, and the pursuits that can help it, language, literature, the arts, music, painting, sculpture or the study of these, philosophy, religion, history, the study and understanding of man through his works and of nature and man through the interpretative as well as through the analytic faculties<sup>139</sup>. "Aristotle assigns a high value to tragedy because of its purifying force". He describes its effect as 'Katarsis' which is the purification of mind or the mass of established ideas, feelings and actional habits in man. The art purifies by beauty.<sup>140</sup>

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138. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination, pp. 136-137.

139. Sri Aurobindo, The National Value of Art, Pondicherry, 1970, p.6.

140. ibid, pp. 7-8.

This is the immense value of religion, art and poetry to human spirit.

But in our practical life we are less ready to recognize the universal truth because there we content to be the slaves of outward necessity. "Yet even there we must arrive eventually at the highest truth. We shall find out in the end that our daily life and our social existence are not things apart, are not another field of existence with another law than the inner and ideal"<sup>141</sup>. A mere utilitarian ethics discovered in the 19th century, the century of science, reason and utility is now deservedly discredited. For all formulae it brought out, all the rational arrangements it made were purely to cater to the pleasure and satisfaction of mind and body. The real ethical being escapes from all these formulae, for it is a law to itself and finds its principle in its own eternal nature; it is a light from the ideal, a reflection in man of the divine<sup>142</sup>. Of course as already noticed the truly ethical life in the end brings in a stage wherein man can find utility, for the ethical man would like to effect the good of others and most widely the good of all. But this is only a result and not the end of ethics. This should not be aimed at; for, abide by the ethics to get a life of utility itself is

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141. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 138.

142. Ibid, p. 139.

unethical, because there man becomes the embodiment of selfishness which hinders his way to the ultimate divine perfection. That is why Gita makes it obligatory on man to work unattached either to the work or to the fruit there of <sup>143</sup>. The virtue comes to the natural man by a struggle with his pleasure seeking nature and is often a deliberate embracing of pain, or the cultivation of strength by suffering. The ethical man is not motivated even by an inner pleasure. Even the desire to be free from desires does not or should not touch him as envisioned by the Buddha. His sense is always strictly adhered to the idea of a higher truth and desire to see everything its reflection. This is why the ethical demand does not always agree with the social demand, nor the ethical standard always coincide with the social standard <sup>144</sup>. Ethical man follows an inner ideal, not an outer standard. He is the master of his surroundings, not the surroundings his master. He is the maker of ages, empires, systems and standards, all in line with the ideal he strictly follows. For, to him the ideal is supreme, it being the or path towards the supra-rational good. "Rising from the infra-rational beginnings through the intermediate dependence on the reason to a supra-rational consummation, the ethical is like the aesthetic and the religious being of man a seeking after the eternal" <sup>145</sup>.

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143. Gita, II. 47, 48.

144. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 141.

145. Ibid, p. 144.

Thus to get at the supreme truth is the aim of religion, the aesthetics, ethics, science, philosophy and all our insistent drive towards knowledge. But usually all these seem to be above man's normal and usual being. He is content to follow his own inherent principle of vital satisfaction, necessity, utility and efficiency. In the ordinary planes of life man gets to another aspect of his being which is at labour in matter to express in terms of conscious force. Human life is the "human being at labour to impress himself on the material world with the greatest possible force and intensity and extension"<sup>146</sup>. His aspiration is to spread himself over the whole earthly life and dominate, an idea the Darwinians have tried to express by their idea of the struggle for life. Aurobindo throws light on the two equally powerful impulses. They are individualistic self-assertion and collective self-assertion, and they work by strife as well as mutual assistance and united effort<sup>147</sup>. Though seemingly contradictory, the 'competitive endeavour' and 'co-operative endeavour' are co-existent, leading to the dynamism in the formation and maintenance of society. This theory acted as the foundation of the modern European idea of society. This was particularly so ever since the European civilization came to have Teutonic influence. The Teutons could hold their own against the Hellenic impact and could leave behind what Toynbee calls<sup>148</sup> "the Teutonic layer of European barbarians". Though

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146. Ibid, p. 147

147. Ibid.

148. Toynbee, op.c it, p. 152.

Toynbee argues that Teutons came in at the death of the Hellenic society only to receive their own death below, it is clear that the Teutonic element left behind its impact on the later European civilization through the external proletariat of the Hellenic civilization till it had been either converted to Catholicism or erased out of existence. Though the new civilization of modern Europe was the result of the Catholic Church with its fine culture this Teutonic temperament often had expressed aggressively on the surface and triumphed over the traditions of the Christian piety and Latinistic culture<sup>149</sup>. This vital life instinct and its mastery over man and his motive have been the whole significance of the economic and political civilization of the 19th century which considered everything as aide to the betterment of man's material progress. The modern world has long travelled from ancient cultures which regarded life as an occasion for the development of the rational, ethical, aesthetic and spiritual being in man.

Modern world has been proudest of its economic organization, its political liberty, order and progress, the mechanism, comfort and ease of its social and domestic life, its science, but science most in its application to practical life, most for its instruments and convenience, its railways, telegraphs, steamships... which help man to master<sup>150</sup> the physical world

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149. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, pp. 147 - 148.  
150. Ibid, pp. 148 - 149.

All what he does and labour are to feather his nest, for himself and the society he lives in. Whether it is individual or collective life this is very much manifest.

But there is always the conflict between the practical and ethical. "To the vital instinct for wealth and well being" the ethical and religious preach the "ideal of a chill and austere poverty", and develop for a time a new social vigour as happened in India in the early Buddhist centuries<sup>151</sup>. Such an ideal-prone society often discourages the ordinary vital instincts and render them in the end calmness and balanced thoughts. "That was the final result in India of the age-long pressure of Buddhism and its supplanter and successor illusionism"<sup>152</sup>. Aurobindo is of opinion that a society not bound to ideal and persistently or wholly dominated by the material instincts cannot flourish or grow to perfection. This was the truth that made life in ancient India a success. Recognizing this truth, India's ancient philosophy made life a harmony of both the ethical and the practical, leading to the cultivation of a cultured and divine race. In the ethical development also, Aurobindo says, there are the infra-rational and supra-rational stages. The instinct of the former is also noble. But it is only a lower one and unpolished form wherein we interpret the ideal so as to bring them down to our world of actions and vital life instincts. But the supra-rational

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151. Ibid, pp. 152 - 153.

152. Ibid, p. 153.

involves the growth of absolute ideals and the elevation of our world and activities to height of divinity. There all human activities are done as part of a divine fulfilment; politics, economics, science and everything become more idealised. They become means to fulfil the ideals. There man comes to know of the supra-rational ultimate of life the realization of which is the "spiritual meaning of the seeking and striving life nature"<sup>153</sup> .

Culture in its ordinary meaning cannot be the directing light, regulating and harmonizing principle of all our actions. Therefore what is needed is a spiritual culture which is something more than an intellectual, aesthetic, ethical and practical training. This ideal pertaining to the spiritual culture, Aurobindo says, is "not peculiar to Asian civilizations, but has always been more or less the normal state of the human mind and of human societies"<sup>154</sup> . Speaking about spiritual culture, Aurobindo draws a difference between religion and religionism or what can be called organised fundamentalism. The former was purely spiritual while the latter was authoritarian and superstitious, a sect controlled by a religious society or church. The latter has always been the weapon of oppression and mutual hatred. "Churches and creeds have, for examples, stood violently in the way of philosophy and science,

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153. Ibid, p. 161.

154. Ibid, p. 163.

burned a Giordano Bruno, imprisoned a Galileo" and thereby<sup>155</sup> stifled the growth of reason, science and philosophy . The true religion on the other hand is bent upon the kingdom of god in man and not the kingdom of a pope or priesthood. What is desirable is religion or true spirituality and not religionism.

But now arises another ambiguity. Spirituality seems often to mean something unearthly having no worldly relevance or the one which compels man to abandon this nether life. One may ask what relevance such a philosophy has to a man living on earth except that it can make him dream of something which he cannot attain in his life, or what relevance it has in human history. If a life transcendental is the true sense of religion, then obviously it has no positive message for human society in the proper field of social effort, it may be doubted<sup>156</sup> . Here Aurobindo has the unambiguous answer. He says, the recoil from religion is always an error. Making the ordinary earthly life our one pre-occupation was an error which the post-Renaissance or post-Reformation Europe had done, and it could only lead the society of Europe to a much more dark and ugly plane which could not give perfection to European life. It was an error because perfection could not be found in such a limitation and restriction which reason placed on religious

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155. Ibid, p. 165.

156. Ibid, p. 167.

ideas. It denied the deepest urge or the most secret impulse of human spirit. Sometimes it may be argued that in the civilizational progress beginning with the Renaissance "there were both material and the spiritual-ethical forces... at work". However as the movement rolled on what happened was something unprecedented; "man's ethical energy died away, while the conquests achieved by his spirit in the material sphere increased by leaps and bounds"<sup>157</sup>. Down the decades European civilization was enjoying the material progress while it seldom cared the ethical aspects. Europe went on with its material arrogance, and in the conditions the new movements produced it could not discern that its position was no more tenable and that it was about to face the storm that was brewing between the nations and within nations themselves. It arrived at the opinion that progress of civilization depends primarily on scientific and technical achievements<sup>158</sup>. Ethical aspects were thus relegated to a tertiary importance. Religion and its truth which hitherto had ruled the life were considered insignificant. Aurobindo says that "only by the light and power of the highest can the lower be perfectly guided, uplifted and accomplished". Only by a man who has attained this highest perfection can the society be led towards a harmonious perfection of life on earth. This spiritual man is typified in the ancient Indian idea of the 'Rishi' who living fully

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157. Albert Schweitzer, op. cit, p. 24

158. Ibid.

the life of man, found the world of the supra-intellectual,  
supra-mental, spiritual truth<sup>159</sup>. Risen above the lower  
limitation, he can view everything from an exalted plane  
and can be in sympathy with the ordinary human effort.  
Having a complete inner knowledge and the higher surpassing  
knowledge, he can guide the world humanly as god guides it  
divinely. Because like "the divine he is in the life of the  
world and yet above it"<sup>160</sup>. More over spirituality often  
preaches the philosophy of freedom as it proclaims the  
freedom of spirit from the human bondage. Liberty is given  
to all the fundamental parts of our being. "It will give  
that freedom to philosophy and science which ancient Indian  
religion gave-freedom even to deny the spirit, if they  
will-as a result of which philosophy and science never felt  
in ancient India any necessity of divorcing themselves from  
religion, but grew rather into and under its light"<sup>161</sup>.  
This philosophy of freedom is best expressed in the Gita.  
Sermoning on the highest spirituality to Arjuna, Krishna  
concludes: "Thus has knowledge more secret than all the  
secrets been declared to you by me; reflect on it fully

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159. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 169.

160. Ibid. The ancient thinkers envisioned an ideal king or leader for the society. Manu visualised a philosopher-king when he said that "the king must work day and night strenuously to control his senses, for only he who has command over his senses can command the obedience of his people". Manu VII. 44. Plato also envisioned the same when he coined the concept of philosopher-king. Republic, V. 473, The Republic of Plato (trans F.M. Conford) Oxford, 1945.

161. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 170

and act as what you deem right"<sup>162</sup>. A spiritually enlightened sense of liberty will "give the same freedom to man's seeking for political and social perfection and to all his other powers and aspirations". A spiritual ideal alone can thus illuminate all the human faculties, or help them grow into the light and law of the spirit, not by suppression and restriction "but by a self-searching, self-controlled expansion and a many-sided finding of their greatest, highest and deepest potentialities. For all these are the potentialities of the spirit"<sup>163</sup>. This explains Aurobindo's call to accept religion as the law of life. For, the real manifestation of spirit, the fulfilment of the spiritual ideals in life alone can lead to a cultural florescence.

Aurobindo has given his views on the decline and fall of cultures and civilizations. Like all the philosophers of history of the 20th century Aurobindo believes that there is "a cycle of birth, growth, youth, ripeness and decline". But if the spirit of a culture is nourished without making it subject to compromise, and if its ideals are cherished it can store within itself the elements of immortality. This is the essential part of the social cycles, and the society or civilization will perish if the trend of decline

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162. Gita, XVIII-63. "Ithithe Jnanamakhyatham guhyathguhyataram maya vimrisyaithathaseshena yathechchasi thatha kuru".

163. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 170.

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persists unarrested. . But Aurobindo is optimistic of re-kindling the wick of an extinguishing lamp. He sees the possibilities of a renewal and recovery of the life of the collective being. Unlike the western theories of culture which miss the idea pertaining to the spiritual force that can sustain a culture, Aurobindo's idea envisions a "self-prolongation by constant self-renewal which is the principle of immortality". Greater the aim of culture and the larger the body of civilization more are the flaws likely to creep in <sup>165</sup> .

Aurobindo concentrates more on the loss and exhaustion of internal strength and vitality, than on the external migrations and barbarian invasions while analysing the causes of the decline of cultures <sup>166</sup> . He cites the examples of the Mughal Empire in India and the Roman Empire to illustrate his argument <sup>167</sup> . The Mughal Empire was nothing more than an expression of the fancy and imagination of an empire builder. It was not based on any ideal or civilizational or cultural value. The feuds and rivalry among the princes leading to the war of succession, a group of un-Islamic kings including the one who tried to socialize religion which was only the expression of his dilettantism or a monument of folly, and a Mansabdari system which led

164. Sri Aurobindo, The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity, Calcutta, 1942, p. 19.

165. Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, p. 174.

166. Verma, op. cit., p. 160

167. Sri Aurobindo, The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity, p. 89.

to an inefficient decentralization of administration combined in presenting the picture of an internally exhausted kingdom. By the time of the Maratha invasions and the advent of the British the Mughal Empire with its huge mass had presented the scene of collapse and it cost the invaders nothing to eat into the already decaying body of the empire. In the case of Rome internal dissension led to the division between the eastern and western parts. The centre of the Roman life had been fading and "it was not till this central life faded that the pressure of the barbarian world without, to which its ruin is wrongly attributed, could prevail over its magnificent solidarity"<sup>168</sup>. By conquering Gaul, Spain, Africa and Egypt, Roman Empire became a huge mass. But the spirit of the newly assimilated units Rome began to destroy. They were killed, "turned into dead matter and their energy drawn into the centre, Rome, thus the empire became a dying mass on which the life of Rome fed for several centuries"<sup>169</sup>. Thus on the eve of the barbarian invasion Rome had turned into merely a "decorous, magnificently organized death-in-life incapable of new organization or self-regeneration"<sup>170</sup>. The Pax-Romana could not stand the vandalism and barbarism of the invaders. The empire which lost its inner strength could only fall before the advancing forces. Aurobindo believes that culture can

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168. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 295.

169. Ibid, p. 346.

170. Ibid.

be reinforced with the elements of immortality provided its inherent vitality and strength are preserved. A profound optimist, he thinks that an effort to concretise the spiritual force in social and political life can keep the lamp of culture ever-burning. What we see in the West at present, according to Spengler, is the civilization or the last stage of its culture. But Aurobindo sees an optimism about the western civilization in the present subjectivism, as visible in its education and the truth-seeking science which is now completely free of the arrogance which it had in its initial stage of development. This subjectivism, Aurobindo believes, would direct Europe once again to discover the primeval truth which it once possessed. As Albert Eienstein rightly observed

.... science can only be created by those who are thoroughly imbued with the aspiration towards truth and understanding. This source of feeling, however, springs from the sphere of religion... The situation may be expressed by an image: science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind .

Armed with his new discoveries in science, his theories on energy and Unified Field which hint at the existence of an unseen, all-comprehending and all-directing power, Einstein

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171. Albert Einstein, Science, Philosophy and Religion, A Symposium, Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion in their Relation to the Democratic way of life, New York, 1941.

had the hope as well as doubt about discovering this transcendental power. The discovery of this power, many a scientist of modern period believe, is possible if only one treads the way shown by the eastern mysticism, and that this is the only way to save the world civilization from the impending peril. Fritjof Capra believes that "the world view implied by modern physics is inconsistent with our present society, which does not reflect the harmonious inter-relatedness we observe in nature"<sup>172</sup>. He observes, to achieve such a state of dynamic balance, a radically different social and economic structure will be needed. He believes in the need of a cultural revolution in the true sense of the word. The survival of all our civilization, he says, may depend on whether we can bring about such a change. He has the firm conviction that it will depend ultimately on our ability to adopt some of the attitudes of eastern mysticism; to experience the wholeness of nature and the art of living with it in harmony<sup>173</sup>. Capra seems to believe that answers to the puzzles confronting the present world and its survival can be given by the oriental thinkers among whom Sri Aurobindo pioneers. Aurobindo held that European history did not fully realize the importance of soul and had emphasized the material aspects like action and gain which led to commercialism and war. The decline of a culture according to him, could be checked by awakening

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172. Fritjof Capra, The Tao of Physics, p. 298

173. Ibid

the spirituality of the people. "A deeper, wider, greater, more spiritualised subjective understanding of the individual and communal self and its life and a growing reliance on the spiritual light and the spiritual means for the final solution of its problems are the only way to a true social perfection"<sup>174</sup>. Aurobindo hoped that there were in operation forces which could modify the development of European commercialism before it reached its menaced consummation. "Age of reason is visibly drawing to an end; novel ideas are sweeping over the world and are being accepted with significant rapidity"<sup>175</sup>. According to Aurobindo, Nietzsche and Bergson were the two great heralds of a new type of orientation to civilization. Bergson's exaltation of intuition above intellect and his refutation of science and logic as incapable of penetrating the ultimate reality certainly left an impact on the European thought<sup>176</sup>. The later German philosophical tendency to acknowledge a supra-rational faculty and order of truth was to herald a new age in European thought. Aurobindo was optimistic as to "whether we are not already in the morning twilight of a new period of human cycle"<sup>177</sup>. The revival of the eastern ideals could brighten up civilization. He is of the opinion that the spirit of the East and especially of

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174. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and self-Determination, p. 171.

175. Ibid, p. 18.

176. Thilly, op. cit, p. 579

177. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self - Determination, p. 19.

India has already begun to influence the western life. Europe is labouring, he wrote:

to outgrow the limitations of its own conceptions and precisely by a rapid infusion of the ideas of the East - naturally essential ideas and not the mere forms which have been first infiltrating and are now more freely streaming into western thought, poetry, art and ideas of life, not to overturn its cultures, but to transform, enlighten and aggrandise its best values and to add new elements which have too long been ignored or forgotten<sup>178</sup>.

He firmly believes that India can best develop herself and serve humanity by being herself and following the law of her own nature<sup>179</sup>. Toynbee also shares the same opinion and says:

If India were ever to fail to live up to this Indian ideal which is the finest, and therefore the most exacting, legacy in... Indian heritage, it would be a poor look-out for mankind as whole... a great spiritual responsibility rests on India<sup>180</sup>.

He therefore exhorts the western world to turn to India because "the spiritual gift that makes man human, is still

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178. Sri Aurobindo, Renaissance in India, p. 49

179. Ibid, p. 51

180. Arnold Toynbee, "India's contribution to World Unity", A Toynbee Anthology, V. Sachithanandan (Ed), Madras, 1979, pp. 41-51.

alive in Indian souls... Nothing else can do so much to help mankind to save itself from self-destruction". For Toynbee has got the firm conviction that Indian Civilization contains in it the elements that would render it eternal<sup>181</sup>.

The theory of civilization and culture as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo is of great significance to the present world. To a world fraught with war, violence, mutual suspicion and hatred he offers the solution of ethics and spirituality which help the growth of a true and harmonious culture. Ethics solidifies a culture because it illuminates the soul of man and thereby the group-soul, the soul of the nations and humanity at large. Almost all the visionaries stress the need of an ethical foundation of culture and victory. "Wherever there is moral righteousness victory is compatible", thus goes a Mahabharatha aphorism. This is why Indian systems made 'Dharma' the life's cardinal element with which they tend to control all the vitalistic activities of life. While making a philosophical enquiry into the idea of culture and civilization Albert Schweitzer comes out strongly in favour of an ethical foundation of culture which is, to him, "a mysterious chord in which life-affirmation and world-affirmation" is the key-note<sup>182</sup>. Philosophers and historians believe that moral force alone can build up and sustain the character and history of the

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181. Arnold Toynbee, Study of History (op. cit), p. 20.

182. Albert Schweitzer, op. cit, p. 291.

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people . The views of Aurobindo are of special warning to the world in general and India in particular. Though Aurobindo sees the silver linings of subjectivism, the over-all nature of Europe is still fraught with sensationalism, commercialism and struggle for economic mastery. If the world took to the path of open war upto 1945, now it is the cold war based on economic ideologies. The tendency of exploiting others or to make them one's own political and economic satellites still persists. Savagery is done in the name of civilization; inhumanity is perpetrated in the name of human rights. Indeed the two terms civilization and human rights had so badly been used as to camouflage the inhumanity done by the nations. India also experiences an erosion of values because of the western influences. Against this Aurobindo suggests the ways to retain in Indian culture all that is fundamental in it, and warns against the nature of Indian intelligentsia who, being inspired by the phenomenal world supremacy of the western civilization, are busy copying the superficial aspects of the West. His ascetic and seer-like vision therefore places the supreme emphasis on the ethical aspects of eternal relevance. This is why, while addressing the people of Uttarapara, Aurobindo gave the exhortation to preserve the 'eternal religion' or the 'Sanathana Dharma' of India. "When the Sanathana Dharma declines, then the nation

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183. Albert Einstein, "The Need For Ethical Culture" (Letter read on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Ethical culture society), New York, January, 1951.

declines, and if the Sanathana Dharma were capable of perishing, with the Sanathana Dharma it would perish"<sup>184</sup>. So if India and all what she stands for are to be preserved her eternal religion must be preserved. Ethical values are the corner stones of all cultures. Aurobindo thus looks towards a more perfect society characterized with human and divine values than a mere mechanical life. He asks man to look into himself, realize himself and express himself; for the expression of the soul alone can bring about a spiritual culture.

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184. Sri Aurobindo, Uttarapara Speech, Pondicherry, 1973, p.14.

CHAPTER - IV  
ON NATIONALISM AND HUMAN UNITY

Nationalism is a time-tested ideology that determined the evolution of human history and civilization. It was a <sup>feeling</sup> religion that brought the people together into a single unit based on some basic values of culture, civilization and common brotherhood. Not only did they uphold this idea but championed as well to take it towards far off regions. Thanks to this we come to hear of the relations between different nationalities which to a good deal helped their ideologies to have a common platform for give and take. We hear the souls of Greece and India whispering each other in the solitary corridors of antiquity, of the Greek civilization which again saw its outburst, though at a lesser degree, in the literary and artistic renaissance of modern Europe. It has been agreed by all philosophers and historians that each nation or culture has its own soul determined by the potency of culture or the ideas it nourished down the centuries. However as time passed by some nations perished and some survived. Some national ideologies are still undergoing transformation. Some historians, studying on civilizations, categorised them as dead, aborted and living ones. Why is that some are living or how could have others been saved from the perils of decadence or what are the elements that determined the progress or decline of national souls or culture? These are questions confronting a student of the philosophy of nationalism.

Among the modern philosophers Sri Aurobindo was one of the foremost to answer these questions. According to him a nation "is a persistent psychological unit which nature has been busy developing throughout the world in the most various forms and educating into the physical and political unity"<sup>1</sup>. However, it may be noted that Aurobindo was no narrow-minded nationalist. He was of the opinion that nationalism was not so cheap an object as to be sacrificed at the altar of internationalism<sup>2</sup>. Instead he envisioned a world unity composed of the various nationalities, each retaining its identity. Nationalism should play its proper role in the making of human unity and Aurobindo emphasized that it should neither be suppressed nor ignored<sup>3</sup>.

History, to him, is the story of ever vibrant nationalisms which manifested their eternal spirit and renaissance. These national elements have retained their vitality and withstood all challenges history flung at them<sup>4</sup>. Aurobindo emphasizes the need of strengthening the national communities as he had firm faith in their vitality and spirit

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1. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination, Pondicherry, 1985, p. 290.
  2. V.C. Joshi, Sri Aurobindo - An Interpretation, Delhi, 1973, p. 97.
  3. Bande Mataram, Calcutta, 16 November, 1907.
  4. Joshi, op. cit, p. 97.

which coloured human life in previous times. He says,

If we consider the past of humanity so far as it is known to us, we find that the interesting periods of human life, the scenes in which it has been most richly lived and has left behind it the most precious fruits, were precisely those ages and countries in which humanity was able to organize itself in little independent centres acting independently upon each other but not fused into a single unity<sup>5</sup>.

According to him the small human units always were the centres of growth and progress irrespective of continental difference. Modern Europe owes two thirds of its civilization to three factors: Jews, ancient Greek city states and medieval Italy. The same happened in the Asiatic life. Here it was either India or China which played the enlightening role. India, kept aloof from the rest of the Asiatic continent by natural frontiers, could develop a civilization of her own, but it may be remembered that she also kept in touch with contemporary cultures. Aurobindo goes further and says that India produced the best and most enduring fruits of her contact when she was divided into small kingdoms<sup>6</sup>. India's vigorous activities belong to the period

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5. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p.263.

6. Ibid

when comparatively small kingdoms like those of the Pandyas, Pallavas, Chalukyas, Cholas etc., existed. These small kingdoms could do more in the arts of human life. Aurobindo holds, in comparison India received little from the great empires that rose and fell within her borders, the Maurya, the Gupta or the Mugal, except polity, some fine arts or literature.<sup>7</sup> "Their impulse was rather towards elaborate organization, like impermanence, internal disorder and defencelessness against being swallowed up by bigger ones. Thanks to this history willed the disappearance of the early form of collective life which merged into larger political entities. However even at this stage it was the groupments of smaller nations and not the huge states and colossal empires that fulfilled the life's dream and helped all walks of human life flourish. "Europe has lived in England, France, Netherlands, Spain, Italy, the small states of Germany - all her later civilization and progress evolved itself there, not in the huge mass of the Holy Roman or Russian Empire"<sup>8</sup>. Even in modern times,

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7. The village administration organised by the South Indian powers like Cholas was more advanced than what was envisioned even by Kautilya.  
B.N. Puri, History of Indian Administration, Bombay, 1975, Vol. II, PP, 54-56.

8. Aurobindo says that the organization of Roman Empire had its merits and demerits. The merits are the law-based peace and order and widespread state organization. But it killed the regions, sacrificed their independence and they became mechanical parts of a machine. Life lost its colour, richness, variety, freedom and victorious impulse towards creation. In the early phase of the Empire it appeared strong, but it declined due to the lose of vigour which its small provinces stored in their independent periods. While discussing the various factors that brought about the ruin of the Roman Empire Gibbon points out some main causes like the injuries of nature and time, the hostile attacks of ———— →

Aurobindo says, human life and cultural activities became more active and vigorous "when vitality was concentrated into some head, centre or capital, London, Paris, Rome"<sup>9</sup>. According to him,

By this device nature while acquiring the benefits of a larger organization and more perfect unity, preserves to some extent that equally precious power of fruitful concentration in a small space and into a closely packed activity which she had possessed in her more primitive system of city states or petty kingdoms<sup>10</sup>.

But Aurobindo agrees, this modern artificial creation

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Barbarians and Christians, the use and abuse of the materials and the domestic quarrels of the Romans. However Gibbon points to the lack of ancient vitality which dwindled to nothing during the last phase of the Roman imperialism. The Romans were becoming "insensible to the beauties of art" as it appeared to Poggius on the Capitolin hill. They had "abolished the ancient games" which were the expressions of the once vital souls of the Roman cities. (Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and fall of the Roman Empire*, New York, 1972, Vol III, pp. 873-887) Still to Gibbon it is not the main cause of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. But Aurobindo believes that had the city states retained their inner spirit refined and strengthened by the cultural, aesthetic and many sided genius of the nation soul the Empire would have stood as it was. The small groupments are always, to Aurobindo, the citadels of cultural growth. Likewise is the case of the Russian Empire of both middle and modern ages. Russia consisted of various nationalities. They were held together with the Communist ideology. This policy was followed by the leaders of the USSR without understanding the various nationalities with their nation souls always yearning for a real and true expression. No wonder the moment Gorbachev, the Soviet President introduced Glasnost and took the initial steps to loosen the tight grip of totalitarianism the various republics tended to declare their independence, showing that the vitality of national minorities cannot be put in chains for long.

9. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 265.

10. Ibid.

cannot generate a vitality equal to that of the ancient city state or to that inherent in the nation souls. As already noted the city or clan-life of ancient India generated the spirit that maintained its vitality through the ages. Of course she could not build herself into a single united nation because the old polity of the Hindus allowed the province, the city or clan unit to live to itself<sup>11</sup>. Above all, these small units were not much interested in political strife of the time; they were left to their little isolated republics with no further interest than the payment of a settled tax in return for protection by the paramount power. According to Aurobindo these clans and the vitality they generated could have been utilized for the nation-building process if there was so great a political upsurge as to shatter their territorial identity and bring them to fusion without tampering their common cultural identity. The early stage which saw the clan's segregation being destroyed was when Srikrishna created an empire out of destruction in the battle field of Kūrukshetra. Aurobindo writes :

It is worthy of notice that the Indian race in which the national idea attained its most conscious expression and the most nearly attained

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11. Bande Mataram, 8 March, 1908. Take, for instance, the 'Ganas' or Arjavishayas' or 'Sanghas' (The republican clans) mentioned in Arthasasthra. These non-monarchical provinces enjoyed their independence during the very time when the Mauryas framed their imperial Constitution.

Hema Chandra Raychaudhuri, Political History of Ancient India, Calcutta, 1950, pp. 121 ff.

realization, was the Maratha people who drew their strength from the village democracies and brought them to interest themselves in the struggle for national independence<sup>12</sup>

It was the inspiration they drew from the experiences of village life that helped them carve out an empire of their own, and if they had been able to rise above the idea of provincial or racial separateness they could have established a permanent empire which no foreigner would destroy, either in diplomacy or in the battle field. Once the territorial and geographical segregation is forgotten these villages can accelerate the progress of the national idea. That is why, Aurobindo says "We are now turning our eyes again to the village under the stress of an instinct of self-preservation"<sup>13</sup>. But it should not be understood that Aurobindo advocated in favour of separate entity so that the village vitality may be retained. To shrink to the village, forgetting the national ideal would be a dangerous

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12. Bande Mataram, 8 March, 1908.

13. Many leaders of India's freedom movement took care to revitalize the village, for they knew, India lived in her villages. The feelings enkindled by the folklores or the local faiths, they knew, can fire the national imaginations and sentiments. The cults of Ganapathi and Sivaji propagated by Tilak in Maharashtra or the cult of the divine Mother that inspired Bankim or Aurobindo in Bengal were the attempts at rediscovering the spirit of India's village life. Likewise, the Gandhian thought which envisioned the self-sufficient village units was to reinstate them to the prosperity they once enjoyed.

step. Aurobindo insisted that nothing should draw us away from the mighty ideal of Swaraj, national and pan-Indian<sup>14</sup>. He stated :

The organization of our village is an indispensable work to which we must immediately set our hands but we must be so careful to organize them as to make them feel that they are imperfect parts of a single national unity, and dependent at every turn on the cooperation, first of the district, secondly of the province, and finally of the nation<sup>15</sup>.

Aurobindo was of the opinion that patriotism could be infused into a people only by instilling in them a pride steeped in the past by bridging the gulf between the present and the past so as to restore the continuity to the political life of the nation. In this context Aurobindo admires Bala Gangadhara Tilak for having started the Sivaji and Ganapathi festivals to help the people of India imbibe their glorious heritage. They provided the basis for the "Swadeshi movement"<sup>16</sup>. He also admires the role of Mazzini in energising the Italian nationalism. The prostration and loose weakness of the pre-unification Italy, Aurobindo says, was the inevitable result of the defect of its period

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14. Bande Mataram, 8 March, 1908

15. Ibid.

16. Sri Aurobindo, Bankim - Tilak - Dayananda, p. 15

of fine culture and it required for its revival the new impulse of thought, will and character given to it by Mazzini<sup>17</sup>. Like Mazzini in the days of Italian nationalism, Aurobindo believed that new India should be energised from her philosophies and teachings because national development steeped in the past and springing from the very core of India's inner being cannot be suppressed.

Individual liberty is to Aurobindo another pre-condition to nationalism<sup>18</sup>. For if the individual is unduly hampered the richness of the national life suffers and is impoverished<sup>19</sup>. When we study the history of the nations or civilizations we are inferred of the progress they achieved thanks to the individual or intellectual effort. The civilizations as well as revolutions were the works of great men. If Roman civilization was the work of Virgil, Greece also has such intellectuals like Plato or Aristotle. It was the aesthetic sense of the Greek thinkers which was more individual than communal that imparted energy to its thoughts and civilization. Thus light from the past tells us that individual liberty and freedom of thought are pivotal to progress.

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17. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 92.  
18. Bande Mataram, 29 April, 1907.  
19. Ibid.

If the individual is given free room to realize himself, to perfect, specialise and enrich his particular powers and attain the full height of his manhood variety and rapidity of national progress is immensely increased. In so far as individual is fettered and denied scope the development of the nation is cramped and retarded<sup>20</sup>.

It is due to this that whenever a foreign government enslaves a particular country it ensures the suppression of individual. However, this individualism always cuts across all checks erected by the foreign governments; and only the enlightened group alone can energise the spontaneous flow of national current. Thus liberty must be of such an extent as to channel the human or national intellect to all sides of development.

The nation must develop military and political greatness and activity, intellectual and aesthetic greatness and activity, commercial greatness and activity, moral sanity and vigour; it cannot sacrifice any of these functions of the organism without making itself unfit for the struggle for life and finally succumbing and perishing under the pressures of more highly organized nations<sup>21</sup>.

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20. Ibid.

21. Bande Mataram 29 April, 1907

Aurobindo cites various examples from history which back up this argument. The purely commercial state like Carthage could not stand long against Rome which had developed military, commercial and political energies<sup>22</sup>. A purely military state like Sparta, Aurobindo says, could not stand against rivals with military, scientific, intellectual and political ability. A purely intellectual and aesthetic state like Greek colonies in Italy or a purely moral or spiritual community like the empire of Peru are forced out of existence in the clash with more vigorous and many sided organisms<sup>23</sup>. But Israelites, with the military, moral and intellectual abilities survived all the ordeals of history into an unchallengable nationhood. Therefore, Aurobindo says, full scope should be given to the development of all the national activities, capacities and energy so that the nation can be self-sufficient and self-standing whatever calamity may befall it. This self-sufficiency and self-government are called for not only to the nation but to all the people and communities as well. The social and communal discrimination has for long been a curse to India's national unity. Aurobindo was unlike Gandhi who saw in eradication of social discrimination the first step towards Swaraj; he saw independence as a precondition to all national developments. But this does not mean that Aurobindo never

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22. Ibid

23. Ibid.

cared for social quality. Indeed he was among those who gave a passionate utterance regarding the dangers of inequality. "If certain classes are dominant and others depressed, the result is that the potential strength of the depressed classes is so much valuable force lost to the sum of national strength"<sup>24</sup>. To be sure, the dominant classes may show a splendid development and make the nation great and famous in history. It was the Italian families of Florence or Milan that helped the growth of Renaissance. But this growth of the rich was no doubt at the cost of the poor. In the past the nations could utilize only the talent of the elite and never tap the dormant genius of the poor which could have doubled the might and culture of the nations. Aurobindo holds the view that no nation could ever achieve and express its full potency owing to the suppression of half of its people who were never given opportunity of free and successful expression and whose talent had never been channeled to the main stream of national growth. "The great weakness of India in the past has been", Aurobindo says, "the political depression and nullity of the masses of the population"<sup>25</sup>. It was on account of this India became a prey to the foreigners. "It was not from the people of India that India was won by the Mugal or Britain, but from a small privileged class"<sup>26</sup>. It was due to this

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24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Bande Mataram, 29 April, 1907.

that whenever the Mugals or Britons controlled India they tried their best to perpetuate this inequality. The Mugals for instance won the support of a good number of aristocracies including the Rajputs. Indeed it was on the strength and talent of a few Rajputs the Mugal Empire built up its glorious days. Not different from this was the British policy which with its administrative system feudalised Indian economy and society<sup>27</sup>. Even at the time of the genesis of Indian National Congress which was the handiwork of the British officials, its doors were opened only to wealthy class. By winning the support of the wealthy and suppressing the peasants the British fulfilled the policy of 'divide and rule'. For it is that "foreign rule can endure so long as political consciousness can be either stifled by violence or hypnotized into inactivity"<sup>28</sup>. It is interesting to take notice of the Maratha and Sikh history. The strength and success of the Marathas and Sikhs in the eighteenth century was due to the policy of Sivaji and Guru Govinda which called the whole nation to the fighting line. Marathas were the nation of an enlightened peasant community ready to respond to any challenge the foreigners flung at them. Similarly the Sikhs also contributed admirably to

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27. The various British land reforms in India also resulted in the social and economic inequality. Both the 'Ryotwari' and 'Permanent Settlement' created a new type of landlords and money lenders. They could only add to the poverty of the peasants who were now exploited by the landlords and money lenders.

Bisheshwar Prasad, Bondage and Freedom, New Delhi, 1977, Vol. I, pp. 294-330.

28. Bande Mataram, 29 April, 1907.

Indian nationalism. But both began to decline when they forgot the cohesion and unity of the race which Sivaji and Guru Govind Singh imparted to them. Therefore what is needed is that the nation must provide all its people the opportunity to grow so that nation can derive full strength and potency. A nation should be the sum total of her man<sup>29</sup> power in its irredeemed form .

In this economic degeneracy and suppression of the poor, Aurobindo saw the reason of moral bankruptcy of the nation. Aurobindo says, "the condition of the poor classes in the country is a subject which has till now been too much neglected, but it can be neglected no longer if the blessing of god is to remain with our movement"<sup>30</sup> . The worship of the poor was to him the worship of the god. It is significant to remember the words of Swami Vivekananda who exhorted the Indians to worship and serve the 'Daridrya Narayanas'. Like Vivekananda, Aurobindo also believed that wherever the poor are neglected and trampled underfoot there the god's curse is the result. But while raising them, he holds, simultaneous importance should be given to economic and social aspects. "We have been accustomed to deal only with the economic side of this poverty, but there is a moral side which is even more important"<sup>31</sup> . According

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29. Bande Mataram, 29 April, 1907.

30. Bande Mataram, 31 March, 1908.

31. Ibid.

to Aurobindo the Indian peasantry have always been distinguished from the less civilized masses of Europe by their superior piety, gentleness, sobriety, purity, thrift and native intelligence. But they were dragged to a moral degeneracy with the advent of the British. Of this moral degradation of the peasantry he gives a touching description:

They are now being brutalized by unexampled oppression; attracted to the shops which a benevolent government liberally supplies, bestialized by the example of an increasingly immoral aristocracy and gradually driven to the same habits of looseness and brutality which disgrace the European proletariat. This degeneration is proceeding with an alarming rapidity... we have heard of the districts in which peasantry are so far reduced to poverty by the exactions of zemindars, planters and police that the sturdiest classes among them are taking to highway robbery and decoity as the only possible means of livelihood. We have heard of the villages where the liquor shop and the prostitutes... have now mastery over the poorest villagers. Many of the villages in West-Bengal are now well supplied with these essentials of western civilization .

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32. Ibid, Also it is interesting to note that creating moral bankruptcy and the resultant poverty have usually been the colonial policy of Britain. Take, for instance, the very case of China where the British fought

So he called the attention of all the national minds to this grave danger and warned that unless something is done to stem the tide of this evil it would sweep away the soul of India and leave only a shapeless monstrosity of all that is worst in human nature. So what would be needed to make a recovery feasible is to prepare an atmosphere and purify it with our own deeds of love, strength and humanitarian self-sacrifice. Aurobindo entrusts the educated community with the duty of elevating the poor. Along with other various organizations, Aurobindo says, we need 'Samithis' for giving help and light to the poor<sup>33</sup>. He was of the firm conviction that we must be men of sacrifice; we must respect our own people before we claim the respect of others, and that in the development of the whole people lies the manifestation of the strength of the nation<sup>34</sup>.

Unanimity of vision, Aurobindo says, helps nationalism grow a good deal<sup>35</sup>. A nation bereft of such vision of unity underlying the patterns of national life cannot thrive even if it is provided with solid foundations in polity, geographical definiteness, society or arms power. There must always be some ideals, cultural or spiritual that can hold a people together and keep the lamp of patriotism burning.

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recurringly against the Chinese prohibition of opium sales the very time when the opium sales in Britain was prohibited by parliamentary regulations.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, p.127.

Take, for instance the civilizational aspects of ancient Greek people. To be sure, the civilization of Greece sprang up from the city states standing apart and cut off from one another like Athens, Sparta, Ionia or Corinthia, but they still cherished some notion of their common ancestry. Calling themselves the children of Hellas, they assembled in the arena of Olympic games to propitiate their gods and forefathers. The same is the case of Jews. Centuries of trouble and tribulations, exodus and catastrophe could not extinguish the spirit instilled in them by the vision of unity imparted by their prophets like Moses. "The religious culture of the Juda is not disproved by the destruction of the Jewish state"<sup>36</sup>. Their temples were shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. Deprived of home land, they were destined to live in other countries for centuries. But their strong determination and their religious vision always acted as the unifying bond which threaded them together into the new nation of Israel. So strong was their vision of unity. Nowhere has this vision of unity found its greater expression than in India, the land of diversities. Indeed for centuries destiny had commissioned her to forge unity out of diversity. This vision of unity helped India accept all the good and noble values and harmonize them into her own being<sup>37</sup>. She developed even the metaphysical vision on the basic interconnectedness of all events and things<sup>38</sup>. The

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36. Ibid, p. 63.

37. Ibid, p. 131.

38. Gita, III, 27-28.

unanimity of godhead, ideas and the vision of geographical unity always determined the cultural height of Indian nationalism and forged the national unity.

Again Aurobindo is not satisfied in going ahead with what had been stereotyped. He advocates the law of progress instead of stagnation. Above all it is the very ideal envisioned by India which has coined the word 'Jagath' (ever moving) to denote the world. That progress and not retrogression is the world's order was a fact known to the Indian race centuries back. Aurobindo says :

The past has to be used and spent as mobile and current capital for some larger profit and acquisition and development of the future, but to gain we must release, we must part with something in order to grow and live more richly - that is the universal law of existence... to shrink from enlargement and change is too a false conception of impotence<sup>39</sup>

Each nation has a spirit which is immutable and mutable. "Immutable in its being and in the powers of its being but richly mutable in life, that is the very nature of the spirit's manifested existence"<sup>40</sup>. But Aurobindo warns, when the ideal of mutability is given material translation it

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39. Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, p. 21.

40. Ibid, p. 22

should never tamper with the inner immutable being. Each nation or culture has its own pattern, one entirely different from the other. Greece developed the intellectual reason and the sense of form and harmonious beauty, Rome founded itself firmly on strength, power and patriotism, and law and order, modern Europe has raised to enormous proportion practical reason, science, efficiency and economic capacity. India "developed the spiritual mind" working on the other powers of man and exceeding them, the intuitive reason, the philosophical harmony of the Dharma informed by religious spirit, the sense of the eternal and the infinite"<sup>41</sup>. Thus out of the real being every culture should develop. Retaining the original, novelties must be accepted. India has been down the centuries, moving in line with this principle. "An alert readiness to acknowledge new light capable of enlarging the old tradition has always<sup>42</sup> been characteristic of the religious mind in India". Liberty of religious practice and a complete freedom of thought in religion as in every other matter have always been the vital elements of her tradition. The atheist and<sup>43</sup> agnostic were free from persecution in India. Buddhism

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41. Ibid, p. 176.

42. Ibid, p. 130.

43. The views of Charvaga which give importance only to 'appearance' (prathyaksha) and refuted 'perception' (anumana) belong to this category. But as time passed this concept of atheism also became a part of Indian philosophy. Though a misnomer, it later began to be called 'charvagadarsana'.  
M. Hiriyanna, Outlines of Indian Philosophy, Bombay, 1976, pp. 187-188.

and Jainism might be looked as unorthodox religions, but they were allowed to flourish along with the orthodox creeds and philosophies. In her eager thirst for truth India offered these religious systems their full chance and tested all their values. That ageless continuity was carefully conserved, but it admitted light from all quarters. In later times the saints who realized the common background of the Hindu and Islamic teachings were freely and immediately recognized. The ascetic who innovated a new path of Yoga, the religious teacher who founded a new order and the thinker who made expositions on the many sided truth of spiritual existence faced no obstacles to their practice or their propaganda. True, at times there were checks, but as time passed everything was "received into the free and pliant body of the national religion and its ever plastic order"<sup>44</sup>. India always represents a life's urge towards growth. Thus an ever widening intellectual horizon and the readiness to accept novelties are the essentials that can impart eternity to a national culture.

Another powerful factor that can sublimate a race and national soul is art. Art, according to Aurobindo, has a national value. Art has got a great significance in enriching the culture and inner spirit of the nation. "The work of purifying conduct through outward form and habitual and

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44. Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, pp. 130-131.

seemly regulation of expression, manner and action" have been something great which the artistic sense has done to humanity<sup>45</sup>. Wide is the field it covers and important and indispensable have its workings been to the progress of civilization.

"A still more important and indispensable activity of the sense of beauty is the powerful help it has given to the formation of morality"<sup>46</sup>. Yet another activity of the aesthetic faculty, Aurobindo holds, is the direct purifying of emotions. Aurobindo says, this is the 'Katharsis' Aristotle spoke. This in fact is the first mighty utility, "the triumphant activity of the most energetic form of art and poetry"<sup>47</sup>. According to Aurobindo this emotional purification of the heart or 'Chittasudhi' is the appointed road by which man arrives at his higher fulfilment. "If it can be shown that poetry and art are powerful agents towards that end, their supreme importance is established"<sup>48</sup>. Music, poetry and art are a perfect education for the soul; they make and keep its movements purified, self controlled, deep and harmonious. These are the agents which cannot be neglected by humanity on its onward march. "They are when properly used, great educating, edifying and civilizing forces"<sup>49</sup>. Also art enriches our intellectual

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45. Sri Aurobindo, The National Value of Art, p. 10.

46. Ibid

47. Ibid, p. 13.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid, p. 16.

and spiritual faculties which reinforce the vitality of the national soul. Therefore Aurobindo opines, if in the system of national education proper importance is given to music, poetry and art it can help cultivate a developed national culture, but in such a case there must always be an artistic ideal. Art should not be an expression of dilettantism. Aurobindo, therefore says :

The spirit of old Indian art must be revived, the inspiration and directness of vision... the inborn skill and taste of the race, the dexterity of Indian hand and the intuitive gaze of Indian eyes must be recovered and the whole nation lifted again to the high level of the ancient culture -  
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and higher .

But these, according to Aurobindo, constitute only the internal limbs that nurture the feeling of nationalism and are not sufficient to defend a national culture from being infringed upon by an external power. History tells us on the encroachment nations had on other ones through political, cultural and ideological subjugation. Greece was conquered by Rome, Jews were persecuted down the ages, India was enslaved by the British, and Irish nationalism had been fighting against the British supremacy throughout the preceding times. While pleading for the enslaved nation, Aurobindo never advises a passive patriotism, and is not

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50. Ibid, p.23.

prepared to accept anything short of the complete independence or national self-determination. He admires those nations which held out strongly against foreign conquests.

The nation in modern times is practically indestructible, unless it dies from within. Poland torn asunder and crushed under the heel of three powerful empires ceased to exist; the Polish nation survived and is once more reconstituted. Alsace, after forty years of German rule remained faithful to her French nation-hood despite her affinities of race and language with the conqueror. All modern attempts to destroy by force or break up a nation are foolish and futile... the nation is immortal<sup>51</sup>.

So is the case of the ever restless Irish nationalism. The policy of political subjugation was tried with considerable thoroughness in Ireland. Irish speech was completely destroyed except in the wilds of Connaught and all distinctive signs of old Irish culture disappeared. However the unrelenting nationality simply clung to other means of distinctiveness it could find, and even when it was anglicised it refused to become English<sup>52</sup>. The Irish movements of Home Rule and separation were the natural and inevitable expressions of Ireland's will to survive; but they amounted

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51. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 291.

52. Ibid, p. 299

to nothing more than the instinct of self-preservation. The instance of the Jewish nationalism is not different. Jews, used to be persecuted from time immemorial, were left homeless wanderers. But their assertive national will won for them the new state of Israel which right from its inception had only troubled relations with its neighbours. They are ready to fight to the very finish for the cause of the state. Live with honour or die a martyr is what a Jewish national would prefer to slavery and national dishonour. Aurobindo is thus full of admiration for the national cultures and their determination to stand all the calamities of history.

This militancy is seen well reflected in Aurobindo's political career. He was greatly shocked by the policy of political mendicancy followed by the Indian National Congress in its early phase. As already pointed out, the Congress followed the 'pray-Petition-Protest' policy under its moderate leaders like Surendra Nath Banerjea. But Aurobindo could not accept such a weak policy and disparaged the Congress "a blind led by the blind... into a ditch"<sup>53</sup>. Unlike the Congress leaders of the time Aurobindo had no faith in English liberalism. He saw in the Acts the British parliament ~~and~~ passed successively for India nothing but a change without substance. Commenting on the Indian Council's Act of 1892 he thus wrote :

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53. Indu Prakash, Bombay, 21 August, 1893.

After years of constant effort and agitation a bill was brought forward in parliament professing to remodel the legislative councils. This bill was nothing short of an insult to the people of India. We had asked for wheaten bread, and we got in its place a loaf made of plaster-of-paris.

He further wrote, when it was complained of, Gladstone assured that the "executive authority in India would do its best to make plaster-of-paris taste exactly like wheat"<sup>54</sup>. Aurobindo pointed out that India should not expect to get from the British Parliament anything better than nominal redress, or at the most a petty and tinkering<sup>55</sup> legislation. Not prepared to pray for the step-motherly consideration of England, Aurobindo laughed at the "bare faced hypocrisy of our enthusiasm for the Queen-Empress - an old lady so called by way of courtesy about whom few Indians can really know"<sup>56</sup>. So long as it was held that the colonies existed for the benefit of the mother country, no nation which colonized another was prepared to enrich the life of the latter or to return from where it unlawfully established itself. As a matter of fact all the seeming leniency Britain showed to India was the part of its political tactics. She was not prepared to give up India, the

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54. Indu Prakash, 26 June, 1893.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., 7 August, 1893..

finest gem on the British crown. This made a good number of nationalists like Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and C.R. Das lose their faith in the high sounding British liberalism. A follower of this school of thought, Aurobindo strongly came out against the British and the Congress leaders whom he held the henchmen of the English officials in India. But this does not mean that he did not cooperate with the Congress. Instead he joined it when it was dominated by Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal and missed no opportunity that helped him impart militancy to it. Indeed it was he who armed the Congress with the four-fold weapon of national agitation - Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott and National education. Aurobindo believed that India's hope lies not in English liberalism but in her own strong heart and giant limbs<sup>57</sup>. Here his political philosophy was influenced by the teachings of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Commenting on Bankim's patriotism, Aurobindo writes :

He saw that the force from above must be met by a mightier reacting force from below - the strength of repression by an insurgent national strength. He bade us leave the canine method of agitation for the leonine. The mother of his vision held trenchant steel in her twice seventy million hands and not the bowl of the mendicant... He perceived that the first element of the moral strength

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57. Bande Mataram, 30 August, 1906.

must be 'thyaga', complete self-sacrifice for the country and complete self-devotion to the work of liberation<sup>58</sup>.

Thus to suffer for the nation is the divine mission as "there can be no diviner seal than suffering for a cause" because nationalism is, after all, primarily an emotion of the heart and a spiritual attitude and only secondarily an intellectual conviction<sup>59</sup>. "Its very foundation is the worship of nationality as the one political duty and the readiness to consider all things well lost if only freedom is won"<sup>60</sup>. Aurobindo therefore suggests the desirable course of recognizing politics as religion; for that is the true patriotism which sees god as the mother in our country, god as 'Sakthi' in the masses of our country. He says that this religion of patriotism is the 'Pravrithi Marga' ie, the path of action. According to him politics is the work of Kshatriyas and not of the 'Sudras' who resort to the political mendicancy<sup>61</sup>. Proud of the glorious past of India, Aurobindo firmly held that the heroic land which gave birth to Rama, Krishna or Sivaji must not prostrate before a foreigner<sup>62</sup>. What is needed is the self-sacrifice and suffering which would arouse the nation's potentiality or 'Brahma Tej'. He even prays god to raise the nation from slavery to endless freedom:

58. Sri Aurobindo, Benkim - Tilak - Dayananda, p. 9.

59. Bande Mataram, 22 April, 1907.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., 5 November, 1907.

62. Ibid., 30 November, 1907.

Not for myself but for the land where thou  
Wert once a might warrior, lord and king,  
For India, for her sons, I pray, who now,  
Fallen, abject, cringing to a foreign hand,  
Forget thee<sup>63</sup> .

Nationalism is an 'avatara' (incarnation) and cannot be slain. Nationalism is a divinely appointed 'sakthi' of the eternal and must do its god-given work before it returns to the bosom of the universal energy whence it came<sup>64</sup> . So whoever suppresses a nation must be stubbornly dealt with as it is the duty of the nationalist to protect the mother land. After all this ideal of nationalism is untouched with malice towards anybody. In 'An open letter to my countrymen' he wrote:

Our ideal of Swaraj involves no hatred of any other nation nor of the administration which is now established by law in this country. We find a bureaucratic administration, we wish to make it democratic, we find an alien government, we wish to make it indigenious, we find a foreign control, we wish to render it Indian. We demand the realization of our corporate existence as a distinct race and nation because that is the only way in which the ultimate brotherhood of humanity can be

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63. Ibid, 31 March, 1908.

64. Ibid, 16 November, 1907.

achieved, not by blotting out individual peoples and effacing outward distinctions, but by removing internal obstacles to unity, the cause of hatred of those who mistakenly deny them<sup>65</sup>.

He drafted a programme of action also for Indian freedom fighters :

1. Persistence with strict regard to law in a peaceful policy of self-help and passive resistance;
2. The regulation of our attitude towards the government by the principle of 'No control, No co-operation';
3. A rapprochement with the moderate party wherever possible and the reconstitution of a united Congress;
4. The regulation of our boycott movement so as to make both the political and economic boycott effective;...<sup>66</sup>

There were three sides to Aurobindo's political ideas and activities. First, there was the action with which he started a secret revolutionary propaganda and organization with the object of preparing an armed insurrection. Secondly, there was a public propaganda which aimed at converting the whole nation to the ideal of independence. Thirdly, there was the organization of the people to carry on a public and united opposition and undermining the foreign rule through non-cooperation and passive resistance<sup>67</sup>. In

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65. Karmayogin, Calcutta, 31 July, 1909.

66. Pandit, Sri Aurobindo, 146.

67. Sri Aurobindo, On Himself, p. 154.

gaining independence Aurobindo never ardently believed in the path of non-violence or 'Ahimsa'. He was neither an impotent moralist nor a weak pacifist<sup>68</sup>. For, according to him, peace, being part of the highest ideal must be spiritual or at the very least psychological in its basis. Without a change in human nature the ideal of peace would not get any finality. If<sup>69</sup> is attempted on any other basis it will fail and even may leave things worse than before. Besides, to lay down arms in the midst of war means one's own destruction. Therefore, he even envisioned a plan of revolutionary activity which is seen reflected in his 'Bhavani Mandir', an Idea he evolved in consultation with his brother Barindra.

It can be said that Aurobindo's political career almost came to an end after he was acquitted in the Alipore Bomb case. During his cell life at Alipore Aurobindo underwent a great spiritual transformation. This he described in his Uttarapara speech eulogizing the 'Sanathana Dharma' as the basis of India's nationalism. He says that nationalism would be alive so long as 'Sanathana Dharma' was alive. He said:

This Hindu nation was born with Sanathana Dharma, with it it moves and with it it grows. When the Sanathana Dharma declines, then the nation declines, and if the Sanathana Dharma were capable

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68. Ibid, p. 155.

69. Ibid, p. 155.

of perishing, with the Sanathana Dharma it would  
perish. The Sanathana Dharma, that is nationalism.  
This is the message that I have to speak to you <sup>70</sup>

After his acquittal he went to Pondicherry in order to lead  
a life of spiritual abandon. With firm faith that India  
would one day certainly wrest her freedom he said: "You can  
take it from me, it is as certain as the rising of the sun  
tomorrow. The decree has already gone forth, it may not be  
long in coming" <sup>71</sup>. It is interesting that Indian indepen-  
dence was announced on 15th August, the birth day of Sri  
Aurobindo.

Aurobindo's vision of future is progressive and opti-  
mistic. He sees the possibility of a brighter future for  
the humanity and a unity of human race based on individual  
freedom and a common religion of mankind. To him progress  
is the order of the world. "Today the ideal of human unity  
is more or less vaguely making its way to the front of our  
consciousness" <sup>72</sup>. He held that man believes in the constant  
progression of humanity, and that this progression is the  
working out of a thought in life <sup>73</sup>. This thought or the

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70. Sri Aurobindo, Uttarapara Speech, p. 14.

71. Sri Aurobindo's Conversation with A.B. Purani quoted in  
Pandit, op.cit, p. 242.

72. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human  
Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 262.

73. Sri Aurobindo, Ideal and Progress, p. 40.

ideal sometimes "manifests itself on the surface and sometimes sinks below and works behind the mask of external forces and interests"<sup>74</sup>. When this thought withdraws from manifestation humanity feels apparent retrogression or tardy evolution and long hours of darkness. During the time "when the thought returns to the surface humanity has its periods of light and of rapid efflorescence, its dawns and splendid springtides; and according to the depth, vitality, truth and self-effective energy of the form of thought that emerges is the importance of the stride forward that it makes during these Hours of gods in our terrestrial manifestation"<sup>75</sup>. Even in the hours of thought unmanifesting on the surface, it works out behind one of its phases. The ideal or the thought is always dynamic. It has an aim which even the man serving the working of a thought within him is ignorant of in his surface self. "Charlemagne hewing a chaotic Europe into shape with his sword was preparing the reign of the feudal and catholic interpretation of human life with all that great though obscure period of humanity was meant for the thought and spiritual development of mankind"<sup>76</sup>. The progress of humanity has thus been a constant revolution with its alternative darkness and light. The emergence of an ideal in human thought is always the sign of an intention in nature. But this intention may not

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74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid, p. 41.

be accomplished in the near future and may even indicate an attempt pre-destined to temporary failure. Nature sometimes takes up an idea, half carries it out and then drops it unfinished. This, Aurobindo believes, is to resume the work in the future era in a better way. On every occasion nature acts as a laboratory to test how far mankind is ready to take up the ideal of a united humanity. According to Aurobindo "this ideal of human unity is likely to figure large-<sup>77</sup>ly among the determining forces of the future" . The developments the world hitherto gained also point to a future unity. The intellectual and material circumstances of the age have led to the "scientific discoveries which have made our earth so small that its vastest kingdoms seem<sup>78</sup> now no more than the provinces of a single country" .

However, Aurobindo held the view that a materially and scientifically favourable circumstance would not serve the ideal of unity until people could be ready for it. Sometimes a mechanized human intellect is likely to attempt the revolution through the mechanical means of social and political adjustments. But Aurobindo says that "it is not by social and political devices, or at any rate not by these, chiefly or only, that the unity of human race can be enduringly or fruitfully accomplished"<sup>79</sup> . Only by accepting

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77. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination, p. 262.1

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid., p. 263.

each other and by seeing oneself in everything mankind can realize this unity. The Upanishad says:

Where there is a duality, as it were, there one sees another, there one smells another; there one tastes another... But where everything has become one's own self, then whereby and whom one should see? Then whereby and whom one should smell? Then whereby and whom one should taste? .

According to the view of modern physics the world appears as a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole .<sup>81</sup> Aurobindo's concept of the unity is based more on his 'Yogic' experience than on the material aspects and the ideal of this unity he could easily and clearly read in every worldly incident. Therefore, he says that material object becomes something different from<sup>80</sup> what is seen externally. It is not a separate object on the background or in the environment of the rest of nature but an indivisible part and even in a subtle way an expression of the unity of all that we see .<sup>82</sup>

But this does not mean that Aurobindo was a dreaming spiritualist who neglected the importance of the vital

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80. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.5.15.

81. W. Heisenberg, Physics and Philosophy, New York, 1958, p. 107.

82. Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 402-403

particles from which the unity is to be welded. An object is both a part as well as an whole according to both physics and metaphysics. It is indefinable (anirvachaniya) or subject to 'probability'<sup>83</sup>. In short each and every part of a thing has its vital role in determining the texture of the whole. Not a single part can be avoided or its vitality destroyed if the union or harmony should be perfect and beautiful. Aurobindo's idea regarding human unity or the one world existence is based on this cardinal truth.

The thought about a universal order and harmony is not an altogether new one. The ideal or principle pertaining to the universal brotherhood has been time and again emphasized. The ideas of 'concord' and the 'holding together of all' have been stressed on by all religious teachings. Buddhism and Christianity are equally emphatic on this. The national philosophies, especially of India, cut across the barriers of parochialism and envision a cosmopolitan existence. Even self-abnegations and self-surrender India would advocate if that would serve a universal cause. While fighting for India's independence, Gandhiji held that freedom of India was not an end in itself, but a means towards a higher goal, a final objective. Only a free India, the Mahatma believed, can serve the humanity. He would be prepared to see India perish if "that would serve

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83.P. Nagaraja Rao (Ed), Radhakrishnan Reader - An Anthology, Bombay, 1969, p. 254.

the good of the world"<sup>84</sup>. As Coomaraswamy writes, "for the great idealists of younger India nationalism is not enough. Patriotism is parochial... there are finer parts great souls may play"<sup>85</sup>. India has always been tolerant and equally concerned with all others in the exploration of the thousand paths that have never yet been trodden, says Coomaraswamy. "It is life, and not mere Indian life that claims our loyalty"<sup>86</sup>. Therefore he exhorts India to throw in her lot with the world. "What we need for the creation of the common civilization is the recognition of the common problems and to co-operate in their solution"<sup>87</sup>. It has thus been in the vision of India to see the world in oneself and to see oneself as the part of the universal whole. "When the understanding enables one to see an immutable oneness in all beings, and an undivided whole in all the manifold shapes, know that to be the true light", says the Gita<sup>88</sup>.

The idea of universal oneness and the principle of order that keeps up this oneness have been visualised by the ethical philosophy of the West also. Kant was the greatest advocate of a perpetual peace. His essay on 'Eternal Peace' is a noble development of this theme. The

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84. V.P. Verma, Political Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, p. 254.

85. A.K. Coomaraswamy. The Dance of Siva, p. 180.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid, p. 181.

88. Sarvabhutheshu yenaikam bhavamavyayamikshathe avibhaktham vibhaktheshu thadjnanam viddhi sathvikam, Gita, XVIII. 20.

whole movement and meaning of history, according to Kant, is the ever greater restriction of pugnacity and violence, the continuous enlargement of the area of peace<sup>89</sup>. The history of human race viewed as a whole, may be regarded as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring about a political constitution, internally and externally perfect, as the only state in which all the capacities implanted by her in mankind can be fully developed<sup>90</sup>. Therefore Kant says, "we might suppose like the Hindu, that the earth is a place for the expiation of the old and forgotten sins". Visualising world peace and the resultant harmony of existence, Kant ridiculed the European race and its tendency of conquest and aggression. Kant says that the money that could have been used for the furtherance of values were being channelled to destructive ends. He had therefore complained that "our rulers have no money to spend on public education... because all their resources are already placed to the account of the next war"<sup>91</sup>. He believed that the nations would not advance on the path of civilization until all standing armies are abolished. He is against all privileges personal, national or racial and insists on equality. The revolutionary ideas of liberty and equality so fascinated Kant that he took his stand for the new world<sup>92</sup> characterized with democracy and liberty everywhere. Herder, Wilhem Von Humboldt and other German humanists and

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89. Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy, p. 283.

90. Kant, Eternal Peace and other Essays, Quoted in Will Durant, op. cit, p. 283.

91. Will Durant, op. cit, p. 284.

romanticists conceived of a reciprocal synthesis between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Herder "carried the optimistic ethical nature-philosophy on into a corresponding philosophy of history"<sup>93</sup>. But perhaps the greatest European who saw nationality a key to cosmopolitanism was Mazzini. He believed in the

Holy Alliance of the people as being the vastest formula of association possible in our epoch; in the liberty and equality of the peoples, without which no true association can exist - in nationality which is the conscience of the people and which, by assigning to them their part in the work of association, their function in humanity, constitute their mission upon earth, that is to say their individuality without which neither liberty<sup>94</sup> nor equality are possible...

The ideal of human unity has now become an imperative. It is the only panacea for the human kind which now seems to be on the verge of mass destruction. Toynbee says that "in the atomic age mankind has to choose between political unifications and mass suicide"<sup>95</sup>. He sees a number of hindrances in the way towards world unity. This is, he believes, primarily the trend in the West.

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92. Ibid, p. 286.

93. Albert Schweitzer, The Philosophy of Civilization, p. 166.

94. Catlin, The Story of Political Philosophers, New York, 1947, p. 708.

95. Sachithanandan (Ed.) A Toynbee Anthology, p. 80.

The western society has shown itself exceptionally recalcitrant to any movement towards political unification hitherto, and this western peculiarity is a handicap to present day mankind as a whole, since, in our time, the non-western majority of the human race is adopting western manners and customs, western ideas and ideals, and western likes and dislikes<sup>96</sup> .

However, Toynbee does believe that this is only the present trend and not a built-in-trait, and that it can be changed at any moment as circumstance decides. He says that "we do give up even the most cherished habits if and when it becomes clear that it would be disastrous to persist in them", and that the human beings seldom do choose death when it comes to the point". The only choice therefore is, that we shall submit to a minimum of a world order and unity,<sup>97</sup> observes Toynbee . Above all in an age of ideological transformation no nation or community can any longer remain psychologically cloistered and apart in the unity of the modern world<sup>98</sup> .

Aurobindo says that this unity is inevitable and the ideal emerges important in our consciousness. But he also says that "it is not by social or political devices" but by

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96. Ibid.

97. Ibid, p. 81.

98. Sri Aurobindo, Ideal and Progress, p. 37.

the change of the heart and soul of humanity and an insight pertaining to the spiritual unity that a human unity is feasible<sup>99</sup>. A mere mechanical unification of humanity under a world administration can only quell the richness and vitality of human life. Under such an order "both individual and regional life would be crushed, dwarfed, deprived of their necessary freedom like a plant without rain and wind and sunlight"<sup>100</sup>. Perhaps in the beginning of such a temporary and mechanical adjustment humanity may see the outburst of satisfied and joyous activity. But in the long run it would bring in only an increasing stagnancy. The unity of mankind is inherent in nature's eventual scheme and nothing can prevent it from coming into being. Such a unity, Aurobindo says, could be realized only "under other conditions and with safeguards which will keep the race intact in the roots of its vitality, richly diverse in its oneness"<sup>101</sup>.

Aurobindo says, nature is constantly tended to bring about a harmony between the two poles of life, "the individual whom the whole or aggregate nourishes and the whole<sup>102</sup> or aggregate which the individual helps to constitute". Therefore any attempt at forging a unity of mankind without giving due importance to the individual is meaningless.

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99. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 263.

100. Ibid, p. 265.

101. Ibid, p. 266.

102. Ibid, p. 267.

For, such an organization can only lead humanity to a death-trap where individual talents and aspirations are neglected. If human life is to reach its perfection "It must involve the elaboration of an as yet unaccomplished harmony between these two poles of our existence, the individual and the social aggregate"<sup>103</sup>. This is because only the perfection of the individual can constitute a perfect society, and individual perfection would be incomplete if it does not help towards a perfect state of social aggregate and in the end to a united humanity. The idea of the relation between the subtle and the gross ('Vyashti' and 'Samashti') has been familiar to Indian thought. Everything in the universe was seen as the part of the 'Virat-purusha' or the 'Cosmic Being'. The Gita says that it is the merging point of everything in the world. Amidst the battle of Kurukshetra Krishna tells Arjuna to "see this day the entire universe with movable and immovable objects united here in my body and anything else that he likes to see"<sup>104</sup>. Hence the search for the central essence of the individual which leads to a deeper principle which is spiritual.

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103. Ibid.

104. Gita XI. 7. Also see the Purusha Sukta Hymn of the Rigveda which speaks of the universe as the form of the 'Cosmic Being' or the 'Purusha'. Here the seer gets realization, across the darkness of delusion, of the 'Purusha', heroic with solar illumination and creates all forms out of his conscience and gives name to them. Purushasuktha-16.

Indian thought from time immemorial sought a correspondence between the individual and the world and tried to discover for every important feature of the one, an appropriate counterpart in the other. "It represented an effort to express the world in terms of the individual"<sup>105</sup>. This notion of parallelism between the individual and the world runs throughout the vedic literature<sup>106</sup>. The ideal of human unity becomes imperfect if the growth and perfection of the individual is incomplete. The development of the individual, his all-round growth, alone can determine the growth of the human aggregate or the cosmic life.'

Human unity, Aurobindo says, is inevitable and must come even if it may take much time and endeavour. Aurobindo refers to some complications which nature herself introduces and which prevent the individual from standing in a pure and direct relation with the totality of mankind<sup>107</sup>. They are the lesser aggregates which stand between individual and the united humanity. They are partly aids as well as barriers but are the necessary steps towards the attainment of the final human unity. They are reflections of the early limitations and the later development of the human heart conceiving the idea of the small units and carries it to that of the one capable of envisioning much broader and finally an all-comprehending unity<sup>108</sup>. "The family, the

105. M. Hiriyanna, Outlines of Indian Philosophy, p. 55.

106. Ibid.

107. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 267.

108. Ibid.

commune, the clan or tribe, the class, the city-state or congeries of tribes, the nation, the empire are so many stages in this progress and constant enlargement"<sup>109</sup>. All these small units often pose various problems between the lesser and more aggregate units, and among themselves as well, and act as hindrance to the concept of unity. Aurobindo backs up his thesis by citing several examples from history. He refers to the struggle towards the aggregation of tribes among the semitic nations, and to the failure of the clan-life to combine into an organized national existence in the Celtic race. "We see the failure of the city-states and small regional peoples to fuse themselves in the history of Greece, the signal success of a similar struggle of nature in the development of Roman Italy"<sup>110</sup>. The whole past of India, Aurobindo says, brings to picture the attempt "to overcome the centrifugal tendency of an extraordinary number and variety of disparate elements, the family, the commune, the class, the caste, the small regional state, or people, the large linguistic unit, the religious community, the nation within the nation"<sup>111</sup>. But at all these times the problem seemed insoluble, and these struggles have often brought in a foreign rule as it happened in ancient Greece or in medieval India. Even when a nation or human aggregate is sufficiently organized there appears another malady. The progress of all individuals in

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109. Ibid.

110. Ibid., p. 268.

111. Ibid.

the society does not proceed equally. "Some advance, others remain stationary-absolutely or relatively - others fall back. Consequently, the emergence of a dominant class is inevitable within the aggregate itself, just as in the constant clash between the aggregates the emergence of dominant nations is inevitable"<sup>112</sup>. The emergence of the class may either lead the society progressively, may develop most perfectly the type nature needs at the time for her progress or may lead to retrogression. Sometimes it may be the emergence of an influential aristocracy, literary or savant class, a powerful bourgeoisie or economic community or an artisan class. But it is not in the nature's will that a dominant class or nation should be permanent; the final aim of nature in human life is not the exploitation of many by the few or even of the few by the many. "There we see that such dominations bear always in the them the seed of their own destruction"<sup>113</sup>. It is revealed by history that the predominance of classes has been abolished or was on the point of subsidence into equality with the general mass. If at times there was the prevalence of aristocracy soon there would come up an intellectual class with a new philosophy, and the whole system would be changed into something new as we saw in France during the last phase of the 18th century. Thus the class predominance is not perpetual and that it should give way to the new

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112. Ibid, p. 269.

113. Ibid.

upcoming is in the will of nature. "Therefore", Aurobindo says, "the perfect counsel for a dominant minority is always to recognize in good time the right hour for its abdication and for the imparting of its ideals, qualities, culture, experience to the rest of the aggregate or to as much of it as is prepared for that progress"<sup>114</sup>. They should act as the torch bearers of unity within the smaller and larger aggregates.

Even when the unity within these small units is made through the social, administrative and cultural measures there still remains the question of the individual whose tendency is to exist in himself and the limits of the small units like family, class, clan or nation. The "Self-sufficiency on the one side... universality on the other are the essential elements of his perfection"<sup>115</sup>. The success of life depends on how to adjust between the two poles of existence perfectly so as to bring about a creative living. "To exceed himself was... goal for the individual, not by losing all his personal aims in the aim of an organised human society but by enlarging, heightening, aggrandising himself"<sup>116</sup>. For, through this he can come into contact with what is universal, to see the universe in himself and to give himself to it. After all the unity

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114. Ibid, p. 270.

115. Ibid, p. 271.

116. Rhoda P. Le Cocq, The Radical Thinkers - Heidegger and Sri Aurobindo, p. 103:

and equality brought to existence through the technicalities have no meaning; and "even in the greatest similarities of the world we find difference of inequalities and differences of unlikeness"<sup>117</sup>. Equality of the spirit is the sole reality and universality can be attained only through the realization of the oneness in the midst of the million differences and inequalities of the world<sup>118</sup>. Therefore all the limits erected by the human aggregates, should wither away<sup>119</sup>. Again, throughout the past save during some rare interludes the state organisations have almost suppressed the human sentiments and efforts that tried to cut across the national borders and ideologies. If Greece had poisoned Socrates to death, in medieval times the religious orthodoxy assassinated Giardano Bruno. Erasmus or More had met more or less the same fate in England. In the erstwhile Soviet Union it had been characteristic that anyone preaching the philosophy of freedom would be harassed. Also till the Germanic unification the Berlin wall was tearing asunder a national soul itself, and the national and individual freedom of a people were completely stifled. But against all this crushing might of the states and sovereignties the individual freedom and human rights struggled. As the 20th century draws to a close, it has become more obvious than

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117. Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, p. 178.

118. Ibid.

119. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle -The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p.271.

ever that no state and trans-state actors have become and will continue to become more and more important in the conduct of international relations<sup>120</sup>. Present day popular movements and aspirations, make it obvious that the principle of national sovereignty and its corollary of 'territorial integrity' will become more problematic and that they will be more effectively challenged from within and from without. Individual freedom cannot be suppressed for long, the lesser aggregate cannot check the interpenetration of the two entities - the individual and humanity. While humanity moves towards a unity there is always the strife between the two equally deep-rooted human tendencies, individualism and collectivism. "On one side is the engrossing authority, perfection and development of the state, on the other the distinctive freedom, perfection and development of the individual man... But even then the question will remain poised between man and humanity, between the self-liberating person and the engrossing collectivity"<sup>121</sup>. Freedom of individual that helps him to see and feel himself as the part of all-engrossing humanity is the primary and inevitable step towards a human unity.

Aurobindo says, man was always the part of the collective existence as told by the available facts of history

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120. Achin Vinayak, "Universal Human Rights - Conflict with National Sovereignty", Indian Express, Cochin, 2 July, 1993.

121. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, pp. 272 - 273.

and sociology. Man was of course subservient to the social or political organizations he belonged to. But this, Aurobindo says, was a necessary stage of man's historic and pre-historic evolution, of which the end is the freedom in unity<sup>122</sup>. He also calls our attention to the "ancient tradition of humanity which it is never safe to ignore or treat as a mere fiction that the social state was preceded by another free and unsocial". Some times the ideal regarding such human life may appear not only unsocial but anti-social as well in the modern age of scientific state ideas. But the tradition is rather that of a golden age in which man was freely social without society. "Not bound by laws or institutions, but living by natural instinct or free knowledge he held the right law of his living and needed neither to prey on his fellows nor to be restrained by the iron yoke of collectivity"<sup>123</sup>. The thought regarding such a state of nature and philosophic anarchism is nothing new to history and world of ideas. The ancient literatures of the East, the 'Mahabharata' and 'Digghanikaya' aver that for a long time after the creation of society, there prevailed a golden age of harmony and happiness, when people led happy and peaceful lives on account of their innate virtuous disposition, though there existed no government to see that the law of nature was respected and followed<sup>124</sup>. Popular

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123. Ibid., p. 274.

124. A.S. Altekar, State and Government in ancient India, New Delhi, 1984, p. 26.

imagination has dreamt of a golden age in the dim and distant past not only in the East but also in the west. Plato's Republic also may well be regarded as the idealization of such a golden age; the actual state could only be a faint copy of the ideal one delineated by him. Even Plato's concept of the philosopher-king itself is centered on the purity and excellence of a man, free and unattached and able to lead the society he lives in. If all men of the society are enlightened to such a height it would be a free society that can be equated with State of nature. As late as 18th century Rousseau held that this era of a golden age had disappeared many centuries ago. The most that man could do was to try to realize it to some extent in the imperfect society. His whole effort therefore was directed towards discovering the real man. He jeered at the modern philosophers who "know very well what a citizen of London or Paris is, but not what a man is"<sup>125</sup>. He gave proper importance to the individual who, as he envisioned, is the part of a 'moral and collective body', a 'Common me'<sup>126</sup>. Hence his injunction 'return to nature', an injunction to man, within the framework of civilized society, to make himself by cultivating those feelings and sentiments which promote equality and social justice<sup>127</sup>. Aurobindo says, the laws of nature are the primeval laws and hence divine, and that man's realization of these laws once

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125. G.H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory, p. 539.

126. C.L. Wayper, Political Thought, p. 151.

127. Thilly, op. cit., p. 407.

again would help the progress of humanity a long way.

"Our progress may be a devious round leading from the easy and spontaneous uniformity and harmony which reflects nature to the self-possessed unity which reflects the Divine"<sup>128</sup>

However in modern times the state idea after a long interval tries to fully reassert itself and dominate the thought and action of the world to a good extent. Even in England which down the ages skilfully worked out a harmony between the individual freedom and state sovereignty there comes a 'Germanic discipline' and an efficient 'organization'. The state idea is rushing towards possession with a great motor force and is prepared to crush under its wheels everything that conflicts with its force or asserts the right of human tendencies<sup>129</sup>. Yet the individual and humanity, the two poles stand side by side and it is the part of the nature's programme to bring down any barrier between these two entities. Therefore it is in the will of history that the state should become as supple and flexible as to allow the individual to be a part of the humanity at large.

According to Aurobindo the modern state idea itself is inadequate, for it is only a collective egoism on the altar of which the individual is to immolate himself. The state

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128. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 274.

129. Ibid, p. 276.

seeks to "satisfy certain collective aims and ambitions shaped and imposed on the great mass of individual by a smaller or larger number of ruling persons who are supposed in some way to represent the community". Often the emergence of the states, as revealed by history, is by the force of circumstances; and their aims and ideals are imposed at present more by the hypnotism of verbal persuasion than by overt and actual force. A group of ruling persons installing themselves in the saddle of power through gimmick and trick cannot represent the best mind of the nation or its noblest aims or its highest instincts<sup>130</sup>. Great issues often come to them for decision, but they do not deal with them greatly. High words and noble ideas are on their lips, but they become the claptrap of a party. This disease and falsehood of modern politics are now seen in all countries. As a matter of fact what is ensured by the modern state idea is in no way the largest good of all. Even if the government machinery is better constituted 'Still the state would not be what the state idea pretends that it is". Because the state is often run by the ordinary wisdom available in our society and by the collective wisdom that ignores the individual talent. It would have been much more different had it permitted the individual effort and wisdom to do what the state effort and wisdom failed to do. Aurōbindo believes that "it is this energy of individual which is the really effective agent of collec-<sup>131</sup> tive progress". But the state's surmounting power

130. Ibid, p. 278.

Ram Jethmalani, "Saving the Country - Wanted: a new party", Indian Express, Cochin, 1 September, 1995.

131. Ibid, p. 279.

suppresses and eliminates the individual effort altogether or leaves it dwarfed and cowed into helplessness with the result that the corrective to the defects, limitations and inefficiency of the state machine disappears. Though in modern times the state organizations have been much bent upon educating and intellectualising all their members with the aim of the moral development of the whole community, the defects are still left there. Along with crushing the individual freedom the state has never been on good terms with other such political entities. The State is a collective egoism much inferior to the best of which the community is capable. In history we often come across the unfriendly relations between such collective egoisms. Its ugliness has recently been forced upon the vision and conscience of mankind. Man's international existence is "still primitive", and self-protection and self-expansion by devouring others became the 'dharma' of the state. Though in recent times there has been much effort to iron out the monstrosity of the state still the world could come only upto the level of a 'sacred egoism'. There is neither any true and enlightened consciousness of human opinion to restrain the predatory state nor any effective international law<sup>132</sup>. What holds the modern state back from attacking other ones is only the fear of defeat and a disastrous economic organization. Not being backed by any enlightened ideal, the efforts to check the state's aggression have

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132. Ibid, p. 281.

always failed. "Experience after experience", Aurobindo says, "has shown that these checks are ineffective"<sup>133</sup>. The claim of the state to suppress its Individuals as well as to expand itself over other states "is premature and, if satisfied will surely end in a check to human progress, an organised stagnancy such as overtook the Greeco-Roman world after the establishment of the Roman Empire"<sup>134</sup>. The state should, therefore, never be made an end in itself.

True, the state can contribute its share in the evolution of human unity, and is a necessary element in human life and growth. It can provide all facilities for co-operative action of humanity and remove avoidable injustice, to secure for every individual a just and equal change of self-development and satisfaction to the extent of his powers and in the line of his nature. However Aurobindo believes,

even co-operative action is injurious if... it immolates the individual to a communal egoism and prevents so much free room and initiative as is necessary for the flowering of a more perfectly developed humanity<sup>135</sup>.

Therefore Aurobindo says, it is improbable that a healthy unity of mankind can be brought about by state machinery. The realization of the true development is possible only

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133. Ibid,

134. Ibid,

135. Ibid, pp. 283-284.

through an enlightened and spiritualised humanity united in its inner soul. A unity in outward life and body cannot answer to the problems of humanity.

Even if the state machinery may turn towards the world unity it can only construct a house of cards that would tumble down within no time. For it is not the nation that is acting there but a mechanical structure prone to conquer other ones with the result that other nationalisms are crushed. However imperialism could not endure as it would dash itself against the nationalisms. We have in history instances of state machineries ceasing to exist when it tries to keep ~~or~~ bridled for a long time the emotions and aspirations of the peoples. Italian Fascism and Germanic individualism are the best examples. In national socialism the 'spiritual foundation' was laid by 'blood and toil', and it played the same part in Germany as the myth of imperial Rome in Italy<sup>136</sup>. The so called national philosophy of Hitler was nothing different from the state ideology the Communists preached. Consequently the Germanic conquests over the other national minorities have so much in common with what Russia had done through the means of Red International before whose brute force, to quote Adolf Hitler,<sup>137</sup> "democracy would be annihilated forthwith". An attempt at empire-building can therefore provide nothing to constitute a human unity. Empires are Aurobindo says:

136. Sabine, *op. cit.*, p. 815

137. Adolf Hitler, Main Kampf, Bombay, 1987, p. 316.

only political and not real units; they have no life from within and owe their continuance to a force imposed on their constituent elements or else to a political convenience felt or acquiesced in by the constituents and favoured by the world outside<sup>138</sup>.

Aurobindo cites Austria as the long-standing example of such an empire. Austria he says, "was a political convenience favoured by the world outside, acquiesced in until recently by its constituent elements and maintained by the force of the central Germanic element incarnated in the Habsburg dynasty of late with the active aid of its Magyar partner"<sup>139</sup>. But there arose indeed a new convenience which Austria hitherto served. It was from the side of Prussia which aimed at founding a Prussian Germany. From that moment the existence of the Austrian Empire was in jeopardy. But Germany's attempt to build an empire for itself also proved disastrous. Aurobindo therefore holds that the empires are not real but political units. Artificially created, they have nothing original to keep their longevity<sup>140</sup>. As a matter of fact he prefers nationalism to imperialism as the foundation of a united humanity. The philosophy of nationalism always comprehended in itself the ideal of internationalism, and true nationalists often envisioned human unity. "The great national leaders and

138. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human unity - War and Self-Determination, p. 285.

139. Ibid.

140. Ibid., p. 286.

writers of Enlightenment, degraded to the stature of tribal patriots by the later generations, were nothing of the kind"<sup>141</sup>. Frederick the Great made a Frenchman the president of the Prussian Royal Academy and declared himself content to have lived in the age of Voltaire. Herder proclaimed, "human race is one whole; we work and suffer, sow and harvest, each for all"<sup>142</sup>. Hans Kohn, says, "Nationalism is only a passing form of integration... pointing forward on the road to deeper liberty and to higher forms of integration"<sup>143</sup>.

As already noticed, the nationalism as envisioned by Aurobindo is entirely different from the modern western nationalisms which are only the cults of intolerance<sup>144</sup>. Aurobindo's ideal of nationalism envisions an absolute autonomy from foreign control. An ardent advocate of Indian nationalism, Aurobindo said that "we claim the right of every nation to live its own life by its own energies according to its own nature and ideal"<sup>145</sup>. He rejected the

141. Frederick L. Schuman, International Politics, New York, 1953, p. 338.

142. Ibid.

143. Ibid.

144. Arnold J. Toynbee says: "Our modern western nationalism has an ecclesiastical tinge; for, while in one aspect it is a reversion of the idolatrous self-worship of the tribe which was the only religion known to man before the first of the 'higher religions' was discovered by an oppressed internal proletariat, this western neo-tribalism is a tribalism with a difference. The primitive religion has been deformed... And it is not surprising to find that we have been propitiating... blasphemously idolised tribal deities with the human sacrifices which they relish and exact".

145. Samar Basu, Social and Political Evolution of Man, Pondicherry, 1981, p. 31.

claim of one people over the other and viewed nationalism as the creed of acceptance among nations and their claims. Conquest, looting, infringement and such evils are no part of this ideal. Nations are the real and enduring units, they being the result of cultural and spiritual evolution. They alone can be used as the corner-stones upon which the superstructure of the human unity can be raised.

A free association and unity must undoubtedly be the ultimate goal of our development. But for the realization of such a change, Aurobindo says, "the world must be subject to constant changes and revolutions". All artificial creations involving injustice or which stand in the way of new tendencies and ways of human advancement must change themselves or be changed. He, however, believes, "time has not come when the true principle of order can replace those which are artificial and imperfect". "It is idle to hope for a federation of free nations until either the present inequalities between nation and nation are removed or else the whole world rises to a common culture based upon a higher moral and spiritual status than is now actual and possible"<sup>146</sup>. Aurobindo believes that still the imperial instinct is alive, dominant and stronger and there is likelihood of the strong empires overshadowing free nationalities and their developmental aspirations. Therefore he

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146. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 329.

suggests that the artificial and merely political empire may be replaced with a truer and more moral type which can recognize the principle of national autonomy and utilize the still vital instincts of nationalism to strengthen the imperial strength and unity<sup>147</sup>. As a preliminary step towards a federation of free nations, a system of federated empires and free nations drawn together in a close association is desirable. Through this and other steps, Aurobindo thinks some form of political unity for mankind may at a more or less distant date be realizable<sup>148</sup>.

In humanity's progress from nationalism to world unity, continental unity or the unity of the nations and peoples coming under a common culture or way of life forms an important step. Aurobindo, therefore, even pondered over the idea of a United States of Europe. The World wars, he says, brought up many suggestions among which the elimination of war by a strict international law administered by an international forum seemed important. But such solution proved chimerical, it being not immediately followed by further and far reaching developments. Nonetheless, a concert of Europe, Aurobindo says, though cannot prevent fresh struggles and collisions, may postpone them until there comes a unity based more on enlightenment than a mere mechanical

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147. Ibid.

148. Ibid.

adjustment born of mutual fear and precariousness<sup>149</sup>. Aurobindo suggests, some form of European federation, however loose, is therefore necessary provided the idea behind these suggestions of a new order is to be made effective, and once commenced, such a federation must be tightened and drawn closer towards the form of a united states of Europe. Such a concert of Europe, no doubt, would inevitably awaken in antagonism to it ideas of Asiatic unity and American unity. Such a division based on continental identities is a reactionary step of the gravest kind attended with the most serious consequences to human progress. Moreover, this idea has its chief objection in the fact that "the general sense of humanity is already seeking to travel beyond its continental distinctions and make them subordinate to a larger human idea"<sup>150</sup>. Europe is thus put in between two ideas-the pan-European sense and the necessity of transcending it. The war had clearly brought about the need of the idea of Europeanism more than nationalism. After Germanic aggression and subjugation it was realized that the nationalism of Germany or any other nation must merge into the continental mainstream, that "the egoism of the nation must consent to exist only as an organic part of the larger egoism". Aurobindo says, the Nietzschean concept

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149. Ibid, p.330.

150. Ibid, p. 331.

that "nationalism and war were anachronisms and the ideal of all enlightened minds must be not to be good patriots but good Europeans" seemed to get the imprimatur of European political fora. But as already mentioned, Europe would not constitute the whole humanity. The increasing importance of America, Japan and China; and the renewed stirrings of life in Asia were also factors Europe had to reckon. Aurobindo however says that there is the possibility of a European unit, consisting in it all nations that had accepted the principles of European Civilization, including America and Japan as they have proved, through forceful manner, that they too have come upto the European standard in civilizational heights and equality<sup>151</sup>. There is, of course, even the likelihood of Asiatic and American unity and consequently the inter-continental cold war and rivalry. Metternich Principle was only the reincarnation of the Napoleonic Continental System so far as its aim of an Austrian dominated Europe was concerned. The feeling behind the Asian security scheme envisioned by Michael Gorbachev, the last President of the Soviet Union, and the Monroe Doctrine was more or less the same - the continental unity and oneness to check an external aggressor. It may even evoke international friction. This becomes more clear when looked in the light of the post - 1989 international politics. With the setback and final collapse of the Soviet Union, USA emerged as the only super power with the result

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151. Ibid, p. 332.

that she began pressure tactics and to force her decisions on other nations. The balance of power has almost vanished. America's interference, using UNO, in the internal affairs of other nations has become almost habitual, and provides the best example of the continental unity and strength leading to unipolarism in power politics. But such a continental oneness is a necessary step in humanity's march towards its final unity. True, Aurobindo does not believe that these artificial and superficial political adjustments are everlasting. The movements of the immediate past, he says, have actually created for us the nation, the natural, homogeneous empire of nations kin in race and culture or united by geographical necessity and mutual attractions. But they were not yet welded into true psychological unities<sup>152</sup>. These past aggregations had brought some actual and tangible gains, "but each has brought with it its temporary or inherent disadvantages and inflicted some<sup>153</sup> wound on the complete human ideal".

Civilizational contact, Aurobindo believes, however can bridge the gulf of continental differences. For instance, there is the greatest possibility of the cultural contact between Asiatic and European peoples. Cultural differences within the continents are only due to minor and simple variations. The only radical difference that still exists

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152. Ibid, p. 336.

153. Ibid.

is between eastern and western minds. But the increasing contacts and association between the West and the East may lead to the evolution of a common world culture<sup>154</sup>. "Asia is undergoing the shock of Europeanism, and Europe is beginning to feel, however slightly, the reflex of Asiaticism. A common world culture is the most probable outcome"<sup>155</sup>. A closer intellectual, cultural and physical intercourse can override even a strong race-sense<sup>156</sup>. After all, it becomes inevitable in the near future itself. He believes that even a common language which seems now most a chimera, may become a reality. For "it is different indeed to suppose that languages with powerful literatures spoken by millions of cultured men will allow themselves to be put into a quiet secondary position, much less snuffed out by any old or new speech of man"<sup>157</sup>. Linguistic difference is not an insuperable obstacle to cultural and educational uniformity or to any regulating measure applied to all walks of life and "settled for the common good by the will and intelligence of the human race"<sup>158</sup>. For a cultural unity and oneness of humanity set by common language, common feeling and civilizational contact are very much desirable in the making of a world-state. Such world

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154. V.P. Verma, op.cit., p. 256.

155. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 480.

156. Ibid.

157. Ibid.

158. Ibid., p. 481.

culture, Aurobindo firmly believes, would usher not in the destruction of independent cultures of the various peoples but in the full and perfect evolution of each profiting by other and all serving by their separateness and their interaction the common aim and idea of human perfection <sup>159</sup> .

Aurobindo points out some political factors which were leading the world towards internationalism. The ideological basis of internationalism in modern world was formed by the latter half of the eighteenth century. The Revolution in France, he says, had triggered off some unprecedented changes which resulted in ideologies and sentiments which were universal. First of all it had strengthened the French national unity itself and finally a universal idea. The revolution swept away the relics of the ancient system of aristocracy and brought to a successful conclusion what the Bourbons aimed at but failed - a certain amount of administrative uniformity in France <sup>160</sup> . Again it could provide the humanitarian ideas of liberty and equality to the future generation. It could indeed give an ideological background and unity to the political movement later emerged. This was the first stage of the development of internationalism. The idea of internationalism again made its appearance during the nineteenth century <sup>161</sup> . According to Aurobindo "during

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159. Verma, op.cit, p. 256.

160. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination, 421-422.

161. V.P. Verma, op. cit, p. 256.

the nineteenth century we see the larger idea growing again in the minds of the thinkers, sometimes in a modified form, sometimes in its own pure idealism, till allying itself with the growing forces of socialism and anarchism it took a clear body and recognizable vital force"<sup>162</sup>. Intellectuals began to grow intolerant of narrow minded nationalism. Patriotism, corporate egoisms, arrogance, prejudice, hatred, oppression, division and strife among nations were contemptuously looked by the thinkers of the 19th century. The ideal of internationalism, Aurobindo says, sought to abolish all the barbarisms by putting men together on the basis of their common human sympathy, aims and highest interests of the future<sup>163</sup>. The ideal of internationalism of the nineteenth century was fully futurist in its view. It envisioned a purer good of the future when man, at last beginning to become truly an intelligent and ethical being, would shake away from him all the sources of prejudice, passion and evil<sup>164</sup>. 'Humanity', he says, was becoming an idea and feeling. The thoughts of the 20th century pertaining to a united humanity were closely associated with the cultural and religious oneness. It is no exaggeration to say that India herself had contributed a lot towards it, with Swami Vivekananda taking the vision of oneness to the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. He was there to bring

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162. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination, p. 525.

163. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination, p. 526.

164. Ibid.

out a common background for dialogue among all religions and cultures, and to fervently hope "the death knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword and with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal"<sup>165</sup>. On 27th September, 1893, thanking the noble souls "whose large hearts and love of truth" dreamt of the Parliament of Religions and brought it to realization; the Swami prophesied the emergence of a new world order out of the then chaos. In the Parliament of Religions which has proved to the world that "holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character", he could point out to the world the advent of a new order and to the banner of every religion upon which would soon be written 'Help not Fight', 'Assimilation and not destruction', 'harmony and peace and not dissension'<sup>166</sup>. Through his lectures he could teach the people all over the world that the spiritual unity of the nations through love would surely bring eternal beatitude and peace<sup>167</sup>. Thus by the end of the 19th century internationalism was almost becoming a creed; its philosophy was gradually gaining ground.

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165. Swami Vivekananda's address at the opening session of the Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 11 August, 1893.

166. Vivekananda's address at the concluding session of the parliament of Religions, Chicago, 28 August, 1893.

167. Hideo Hridayakumara Kimura, "Swami Vivekananda and World Peace". Parliament of Religions, R.C. Majumdar (Ed), Swami Vivekananda Centenary, Calcutta, 1965; pp. 256-260.

In its absolute form it, of course, remained a professed creed only of some intellectuals and visionaries. But the impact it left on the world vision was farreaching and revolutionary. The idea of the human unity entered the third phase with the end of world war I. Aurobindo states, "the year 1919 comes to us with one of the most pregnant and historic dates of the modern world"<sup>168</sup>. With the end of world war I, forces making the situation more favourable to a free world union emerged. The Russian Revolution had brought in the Asiatic region an unexpected change. The ideology of the political emancipation of the oppressed people had its verbal expression in the Bolshevik slogan of free nationality. The Tzarist oppression had its death and decay in the soil of its own birth. True, Aurobindo did not believe that the Russian Revolution could bring about an order of ever lasting unity or peace<sup>169</sup>. He viewed the new order in Russian as merely a temporary one which might fail at any time. In fact he said, whether the new order "will really succeed any better is for the future to decide", and believed that the mysticism of Russia, not the perverted one that existed on the eve of the revolution but a true type, would reassert itself after sometime<sup>170</sup>. He held that all the practical schemes of socialism invented in Europe

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168. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 637.

169. Ibid, p. 646.

170. Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, quoted in Kishore Gandhi, Fallacy of Karl Marx, Pondicherry, 1992, p. 66.

were merely utopian and would only fail<sup>171</sup>. A forced association, and a mechanical comradeship, he believed, would end in a fiasco. Aurobindo had no doubt about the impermanence of the Bolshevik type of socialism. Notwithstanding all these, he evaluates the revolution in Russia as a historical necessity that heralded a new order. It was a threshold of new vistas of historic progression. The destruction of Pan-Germanic imperialism, was another favourable factor<sup>172</sup>. Some attempts were made to organize central Europe on nationalistic lines. Even the pioneers of colonialism including Great Britain gave a qualified recognition at least in theory to the principle of free nationality in the reorganization of their empires<sup>173</sup>. In most parts of the British Empire people asserted their right of national self-determination and freedom. Asiatic countries were rising to question imperialism, and the philosophy of nationalism was getting a practical translation. The world was gradually believing that only an association of free nationalities could contribute to a real organized form of a world union. After World War I humanity was tended to think on the need of an international forum to check the aggressive and imperialist tendencies and to have an understanding among the nations though the new body, the League of Nations, could hardly answer to the problems of humanity

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171. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 391.

172. V.P. Verma, op. cit, p. 275.

173. Ibid.

and its thirst for unity. Mechanical adjustments for unity often fell like a house of cards. Mere mechanism cannot for long keep in oblivion or suppress the realities that stood the test of time. The failure of the League of Nations can be cited to illustrate this argument. The League of Nations which aroused much expectation proved to be a well-organised nothing when the nations including its own members began to violate its principles. It could not extend to humanity either in theory or in practice a true unity. The League and its associated agencies never became symbols of human brotherhood eliciting love and loyalty from large numbers of people in all lands and thereby developing the prestige and authority an incipient government requires. It just remained a method of co-operation among some sovereign governments. Their subjects and citizens remained patriots devoted to national interests. "In some states they were bewitched by visions of tribal conquests; in other, frightened into passivity; in still other befuddled and betrayed"<sup>174</sup>. Nowhere were they united in the effective service of common purpose. Diagnosing well the pathology of the League, F.L. Schuman concludes: "The League's white palace in Ariana Park, by the shores of Geneva's Lake Lemman, therefore became, in the end a sepulchre"<sup>175</sup>.

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174. Schuman, op. cit., p. 217

175. Ibid.

The League of Nations, Aurobindo writes, "was not happy in its conception, well-inspired in its formation, or destined to any considerable longevity or a supremely successful career"<sup>176</sup>. Indeed the League of Nations that was to have embodied a new, fair and peaceful world order hardly even existed, or existed only as a mockery and a byword. Aurobindo therefore wrote of the League as an ornamental, a quite helpless and otiose body, "a league on paper with little chance... of being anything more than a transparent cover or a passive support for the domination of the earth by a close oligarchy of powerful governments or it may be even, of two allied and imperialist nations"<sup>177</sup>. The League of Nations meant only the control of the earth by the few great powers, "a control that would be checked only by the necessity of conciliating the sympathy and support of the more numerous smaller or less powerful nations"<sup>178</sup>. It was not a league of nations but of governments, each having its own inherent differences ranging from radical to psychic. The League of Nations was established by a victorious force which claimed to be the force of right and justice. However its decrees and acts were based on "not ascertainable impersonal principle" but were "mainly the decrees... of three or four mighty nations" behind whom there was no surety of a general and reliable equity<sup>179</sup>. The activities of many of these nations

176. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 556.

177. Ibid, p. 642.

178. Ibid, p. 536.

179. Ibid, p. 631.

aroused grave dissatisfaction and hostile criticism. France, under the pretext of realizing the war indemnity was exploiting the economic resources of Ruhr Valley. Britain, a prominent member of the League and the advocate of the philosophy of non-aggression herself was the leading aggressor who unlawfully established herself over the Asiatic and African peoples. In actual practice it was a league to bind and depress humanity. An equal system of international rights and obligations, just liberties and wholesome necessary restrictions which alone could be the sound basis of international law and order were the missing points of the League <sup>180</sup>

Thus the mechanical adjustment the world applied in its seeking after the unity proved always a failure. Whether it was the League of Nations or the United Nations Organisation the theory applied was a balance of power rather than a harmony of powers involving order and beauty. The problem is that even after centuries of experience the world still gets on with the stereotyped blunders. After world War II it was found that the roots of the war had lain in the 1919 Peace which destroyed Germany. But the measures the world leaders sought to avoid a third World War were not sufficient to serve their aim. They only put Germany to further harassment. If the minor wound inflicted on Germany led to World War II a complete destruction of that revengeful state would lead to another catastrophe was something that

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180. Ibid, p. 633.

eluded the vision which worked behind the 1945 Peace. The world leaders began to address themselves to this question only when the soul of Germany expressed signs of revival pointing to its national and geographical unity. Even now the United States of America, reluctant to quit West Germany, closed its eyes towards this emerging reality. However the Germanic reunification was in the will of history. The dissolution of the Soviet Union was preceded by the reawakening of nationalism and national minorities. Shortly the Baltic nations became independent. The Communist force which hitherto struggled to suppress nationalism lost its ground, once again proving that administrative and mechanical unity is ephemeral and that nationalism cannot be stifled for long<sup>181</sup>. True, it was a necessity of circumstance rather than a noble vision that made USSR withdraw from Germany and pull aside the red tape that blocked the Germanic reunification. The fact that Germany was given what was long due for her when the Soviet President Gorbachev initiated the step might have averted an immediate outburst of German revenge. But that would not completely anoint the wounded German soul. At least in the opaque corners of her mind Germany is brooding sweetly over the Reich and Swastika; and Nazism is once again tending to make headway. While Germany aims at leading Europe racism rises day by day inside Germany, posing a threat to the

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181. George J. Church, "Final Dissolution of an Empire" Time, (International Edition), New York, 9 December, 1991.

foreigners in Berlin. The news is afloat that Neo-Nazis are attacking foreigners daily and they do not distinguish between Indians, Arabs or Africans. Even those who have married Germans and have long settled in Germany are also seeing visions of dangerous times ahead<sup>182</sup>. To the unemployed Germans the foreigners are parasites, sucking away the state money which could be used for the welfare of the local people. In short the foreigners are looked the way the Jews were during the Nazi regime. This Neo-Nazim, no doubt, rings ominous. Though the administrative measures to drive it underground prevail there is always the likelihood of its reappearing with reinforced vigour. If those in the saddle of power are unable to find an ideal and humanitarian solution the result would be disastrous; even the possibility of a fourth Reich cannot be ignored.

Again, a united Germany itself implies something more, something agonising to the future Europe, as the other nations of Europe conceive it. The European powers, of course, expressed their jubilation over the German reunification. The 'Economist' of London wrote a telling editorial, applauding the reunification as a 'famous victory for the West' and urging the West to have a "clear commitment" to unification<sup>183</sup>. But this was only a myth this London

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182. Jayashree Sengupta, "Reunification and After" Indian Express, Cochin, 13 October, 1993  
Daniel Benjamin, "Hate", Time (International Edition), New York, 23 November, 1992.

183. Economist (Editorial), London, 27 January, 1990.

paper, in its wisdom, might have wanted to propagate, but it was simply not true. The British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher had her reservations and so in a different sense, had the French Foreign Office. Paris was more alarmed since, unlike London, it has known what it means to be under Nazi Jackboot<sup>184</sup>. Again, a united Germany was an anathema to the formidable U.S.A. United Germany would be so highly competitive with the U.S, especially in the economic field that the prospect could not find much welcome in Washington D.C. After all united Germany, roused to its old battle cry - Germany above all - could be taken by England and others as a destabilising factor in Europe. No wonder the 'Economist' dealt with this delicately when it said that "a slim but undeniable possibility lingers of a return to what can be called the sudden-swerve tendency in German history, the alternation between periods of peculiarly high endeavor and sharp descents into peculiarly bad behaviour"<sup>185</sup>. France was the most afraid. Of course she did rejoice over the demolition of the Berlin wall. In fact, euphoria ran so high that the French television gave a brick-by-brick running commentary on the wall. But France was perhaps also the quickest to realize that the first stone from the wall had fallen in its own garden. Even the French intellectuals who welcomed German unity, too fell prey to fears later. Explaining Germanophobia, Jacques

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184.M.V. Kamath, "If the Two Germanys Unite", Organizer, Bombay, 8 February, 1990.

185. Economist, op. cit.

Julliard, France's renowned historian and editorialist began by analysing his own mind: "It's true a part of my reflexes have been conditioned by 1940, my unconscious by 1914, and my reptilian brains by 1871"<sup>186</sup>. It is not merely a fear of Germany or another war, it is more like an unconscious apprehension. After the bitter experience of the crushing defeat at the hands of Bismark, the Nazi occupation and the World War, France has come to suspect Germany and the Germans. The French Germanophobia is compounded today by a fear of German Vendetta, a revengeful reunification and all that the social chemistry of restirred patriotism can imply. Again, the dream of a Europe gravitating around France proves a shattered one. All the successive French leaders have done everything within their means to use German political 'neutralisation' to make France the European leader and Paris the European capital. But with the reunification of Germany the French president, Francis Mitterrand knew that his dream of European leadership was now stuck in the whirlpool of history. Soon Mitterrand resorted to woo the other powers like Rumania, Czechoslovakia and the Polish leaders, and to a European Monetary Unification. Behind it all was the tacit belief that Germanic reunification would not only worry France, but everyone else in Europe. France would perhaps like to read to whole Europe what François Mauriac said in 1983:

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186. Vijay Sing, "who's afraid of the German Eagle?" (Letters from Paris), Indian Express, Cochin, 8 April, 1990.

so long as there were two Germanys, it was a place for lovely strolls. When one unified Germany was born. it was time for us to stop laughing. Today there are two, so we can sleep again, shutting at least one eye. When the two pieces rejoin, we will once again have to become this hare which sleeps with its eyes open"<sup>187</sup>

Whatever it is, a united Germany can possibly be the first tentative step towards a United States of Europe which would be a giant power that can rival the U.S. in power and splendour. The idea that not Germany but the U.S. is the formidable challenge to Europe has already been mooted by a few intellectuals including even of France. Hence their urge for a United States of Europe. Shortly after the World War the French author-Politician Andre Malraux drew a picture of what an Atlantic civilization might become were it not uniquely a business world but a balanced comity of nations. He even wondered whether General De Gaulle was not the Philopoemen of Europe, the last Greek strategist to attempt to unite the Achaen cities to protect Hellenic liberty against Rome.

But the movement to bring about a harmony among the European nations through the modern methods symbolized by the Mastrich treaty and the European Currency Unit which

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187. Ibid.

seemingly solidify the European community, despite the early enthusiasm and warmth the European nations have shown, is about to meet an abrupt end with Germany upholding the German Mark as the symbol of her national pride or Britain tending to show a lukewarm attitude or Denmark's special exemptions from the Maastricht Treaty<sup>188</sup>. This economic technic and mechanism would bring only a temporary adjustment. All such adjustments have, in the past, could only kiss the ground. But Europe with all her past experience is still hunting hallucination with the result that a true European unity is still out of her reach. A common market rather than a common humanity is still the ideal of a Europe which stands on the threshold of the 21st century.. After all, this idea of a Common Europe is born out of mutual fear, suspicion and selfishness, and not mutual acceptance and an ideal of co-operation and harmony. An action with out a true ideal can lead humanity nowhere.

For making a human unity feasible measures other than merely economic and military are to be sought. To bail the world out of its present riddle Aurobindo has solutions to offer. The ideal solution, he says, is to make available a new psychological factor - a spiritual religion of humanity which alone will provide a solid foundation for world union

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188. Jayashree Senguptha, "Monetary Union", Indian Express, Cochin, 11 January, 1993.

or a free grouping of mankind, "the free grouping of nations according to their natural affinities, sentiments, sense of economic and other convenience to be the final basis of a stable world union"<sup>189</sup>. Unity would be the largest principle of life, but freedom should be its foundation<sup>190</sup>. Aurobindo suggests a world union based on the principle of multiple variation and liberty, and enshrining the concept of free and rational unity. According to him, force as the arbiter of international difference and a free world cannot exist<sup>191</sup>. Therefore, he says, the elimination of war and the recognition of equal rights of all people are the necessary steps. Such "interdependence, admitted for a moment, even though imperfectly... will have to be permanently accepted if there is to be any unification of the race"<sup>192</sup>. He also points to the need of recognizing and concretising the right of self-determination of all peoples. For it is the natural and divine right of each which nobody can rightfully deny. It really means,

within every living human creature, man, woman and child and equally within every distinct human collectivity growing or grown, half developed or adult there is a self, a being, which has the right to grow in its own way, to find itself, to

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189. Verma, op.cit, p. 258

190. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 517.

191. Ibid, p. 118.

192. Ibid, p. 519.

make its life a full and satisfied instrument and  
image of its being<sup>193</sup>

This, Aurobindo says, is the first principle which must contain and overtop all others. Also there can be the ordering of economic life of people by mutual and common agreement rather than by authoritarian dictation and imposition. He believes, "it is likely that once the element of struggle were removed from the political field, the stress of the same struggle in the economic field would greatly decrease"<sup>194</sup>. The advantage of self-sufficiency and predominance, would lose much of their stringency. Instead of it, Aurobindo believed, a freer 'give and take' would become more easily visible. Aurobindo cites some instances through which this economic co-operation is feasible. He says, it is obvious that an independent Finland would profit much more by encouraging the passage of Russian commerce through Finnish ports or an Italian Trieste by encouraging the passage of commerce of the present Austrian province than by setting up barrier between itself and its natural feeders.

An Ireland politically and administratively independent, able to develop its agricultural and technical education and intensification of productivity would find a greater advantage in sharing

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193. Ibid, p. 601.

194. Ibid, p. 519.

the movement of the commerce of Great Britain than in isolating itself even as Great Britain would profit more by an agreement with such an Ireland than by keeping her a poor and starving helot on her estate<sup>195</sup>.

Thus for the removal of war and the recognition of the right of self-determination of the peoples the arrangement of the economic life of the world in its new order by mutual and common agreement can be added as the third condition of a free union. Fourthly, he envisions the need of adhering to and propagating a religion of humanity as the basic psychological foundation of a world union. Though Aurobindo had favoured a confederate form of world union later he modified his earlier opinion. In the postscript chapter added to his book The Ideal of Human Unity he supports a world-state based on the federal principle of organization<sup>196</sup>. According to him "a true world-state, either of a unitary but still elastic kind... or a union of free peoples could open the prospect of a sound and lasting world-order"<sup>197</sup>. The most desirable form of a world-state, Aurobindo says, would be a federation of free nationalities in which there is no subjection or forced inequality or subordination of one to another, and though some might

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195. Ibid.

196. Verma op. cit, p. 258.

197. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 565.

preserve a great natural influence, all would have an equal status. "A world - union of this kind would have the greatest chances of long survival or permanent existence"<sup>198</sup>. Such a system, Aurobindo believes, can undoubtedly avoid all the impending catastrophes on mankind. An optimist, Aurobindo has the firm conviction about the dawn of such an order of peace, harmony and co-existence. He sees in such an order a divine purpose and design. Therefore he says:

The ideal of human unity would be no longer an unfulfilled idea but an accomplished fact and its preservation given into the charge of the united human people. Its future destiny would lie on the knees of the gods and if the gods have a use for the continued existence of the race, may be left to lie there safe<sup>199</sup>.

Mere superficial device cannot pave the way towards the unity of human race. True, the progress of physical science and human intellect lead to some change. But they were totally insufficient in curbing the conflict of peoples, civilizations and nations. What is therefore needed is some other device that can effect the change psychic of humanity. Human egoism, Aurobindo says, is the root cause of all discords and differences. Hence the need of replacing the class and national egoism with love and brotherhood. What

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198. Ibid.

199. Ibid.

is called for is a "Religion of Humanity" which is more powerful deeper than the nationalist's creed of the religion of patriotism<sup>200</sup>. Aurobindo's 'Religion of Humanity' is rather intellectual than dogmatic. It may be "either an intellectual and sentimental idea, a living dogma with intellectual, psychological and practical effects, or else a spiritual aspiration and rule of living, and partly the sign,<sup>201</sup> partly the cause of a change of soul in humanity"<sup>202</sup>. This intellectual religion of humanity, Aurobindo says, already to a certain extent exists. It has made its presence felt partly as a conscious creed in the minds of a few, partly as a potent shadow in the consciousness of the race. "It is the shadow of a spirit that is yet unborn, but is preparing for its birth"<sup>202</sup>. The 'Religion of Humanity', says Aurobindo, is one among those unborn spirits which are still unable to take a definite body, but are already 'mind-born' and exist as "influences of which the human mind is aware and to which it now responds in a desultory and confused fashion"<sup>203</sup>. Even in Europe, the cradle of materialist civilization, Aurobindo says, this religion had its early tidings. It was the mind-born child of the rationalist thinkers of the eighteenth century who tried to mould it as a substitute for the formal spiritualism of the ecclesiastical Christianity. It was so rational, humanitarian and

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200. Ibid, p. 541.

201. Ibid.

202. Ibid.

203. Ibid.

philanthropic as to herald an age of humanism, an age of the religion of man rather than decorative gods and demons. It has triggered off so many radical changes in the modern world that "democracy, socialism, pacificism are to a greater extent its by-products or at least owe much of their vigour to its inner presence"<sup>204</sup>. This religion aims at adoring man as the one above all. It aims at the glorification of manhood, man being the most perfect one, the symbol of divinity, the terrestrial god. The Vedic sage calls man 'amruthasyaputra' or the son of immortal bliss<sup>203</sup>. So the religion of humanity has it that man must be worshiped as god is. It aims at discovering and acknowledging the inherent divine potency and intrinsic superiority of man. In the words of Aurobindo:

Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinction of race, creed, colour, nationality, status, political or social advancement. The body of man is to be respected, made immune from the violence of outrage, fortified by science against disease and preventable death. The life of man is to be held sacred, preserved, strengthened, ennobled, uplifted. The heart of man is to be held sacred also, given scope, protected from violations, from suppression, from mechanisation, from belittling influences. The mind of man is to

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204. ibid, p. 542.

205. Swami Vivekananda, "Paper on Hinduism" (Read at the Parliament of Religions), Chicago, 19 September, 1893.

be released from all bonds, allowed freedom and range and opportunity, given all its means of self-training and self-development and organised in the play of its powers for the service of humanity. And all this too is not to be held as an abstract or pious sentiment but given full and practical recognition in the persons of men and nations and mankind. This speaking largely is the idea and spirit of the intellectual religion of

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humanity .

Aurobindo's vision resembles that of another philosopher-mystic of India born of the same soil of Bengal - Rabindra Nath Tagore who makes the following prayer to god.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert

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206. Sri Aurobindo, "Religion of Humanity", The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination, pp 542-543.

sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by  
thee into ever-widening thought and action.  
Into that heaven of freedom my father  
207  
Let my country awake

This is the reflection of a nation's aspiration to elevate man into godhood and the whole earth to the kingdom of heaven, or to bring about a divine transformation. Or it is the reflection of the soul of Aurobindo's Savitri answering to the 'radiant God' who tempts her with solitary bliss that her life was born"

To raise the world to God in deathless  
Light, to bring God to the world  
on earth we come, to change the earthly  
207  
life into life divine .

The attainment of the religion of humanity has its first step in overcoming its own principal enemy, egoism - that of the individual, class and nation. For, this alone can lead towards love, mutual recognition of human brotherhood; a living sense of human oneness, and practice of human oneness in thought, feeling and life. "This was the ideal which was expressed first some thousands of years ago in the ancient vedic hymn and must always remain the highest

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207. Rabindra Nath Tagore, Gitanjali XXXV.  
207. Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, XI. 1, p. 692.

injunction of the spirit within us to human life upon  
earth"<sup>208</sup>. In short the religion of humanity envisions a  
stage where egoism of all kinds vanish and man finds him-  
self identified with the rest of the world and nature. If  
such a state is reached, even outward unification may not  
be indispensable or, if indispensable it will come about  
naturally. Aurobindo says that "the aim of the religion of  
humanity was formulated in the eighteenth century by a sort  
of primal intuition; that aim was and it is still to re-  
create human society in the image of three kindred ideas,  
liberty, equality and fraternity". But none of these, he  
says, has really been won. For they were not given a sub-  
lime philosophical interpretation and acceptance of the  
soul. All the arrangements of the past just laboured to  
establish a political, social and legal liberty, equality  
and mutual help in an equal association. They never got a  
selfless and spiritual practical translation. According to  
Aurobindo the "Union of liberty and equality can only be  
achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it cannot be  
founded on anything else. But brotherhood exists only in  
the soul and by the soul; it can exist by nothing else"<sup>209</sup>.  
When the soul strives for brotherhood, it would bring in an  
equal freedom of self-development on a common life, a unity  
of mind and feeling founded upon the recognition of the  
inner spirituality. Freedom, equality and unity are the

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208. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human  
Unity - War and Self - Determination, p. 545.

209. Ibid, pp. 546-547.

eternal attributes of the spirit. It is the practical recognition of this truth which is meant by the religion of humanity which abolishes all divisions and delusion so as to create a single nation of mankind<sup>210</sup>. More over if all human beings are the reflections of one ultimate reality-God, the delusion that divides man from man has no ultimate value.

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210. Ibid, p. 547.

## CHAPTER - V

### SOME POINTS OF AGREEMENT FROM SPENGLER AND TOYNBEE

Aurobindo's ideas on history have got a world wide recognition, their validity being already verified by the trends history has shown hitherto. His views often come in agreement with those expressed by the other philosophers of history. His insight into the ideas of philosophy of history, along with placing Indian historiography equal to the western one, also imparts new visions and ideas on history. It should be noted that European historians and philosophers of history, except a few, gave India and her ideas only a place of tertiary importance. This characteristically contemptuous look at India from the West is seen well reflected in the opinion of Oswald Spengler who says that "India... formed no image of a world in progress" and that "we men of western culture are with our historical sense... world history is 'our' world picture and not all mankind's"<sup>1</sup>. This has been answered duly and adequately by the Indian school of modern historiographers who were also influenced by the militant nationalist ideology of pre-independent India. Of these modern Indian philosophers, Aurobindo stands as a pioneer. A comparative study of the ideas of Sri Aurobindo with those of the western philosophers of history like Spengler and Toynbee, would bring out the importance and heights Aurobindo enjoys in the field of philosophy and thought regarding history.

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1. Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, Charles Francis Atkinson (trans), Arther Helps (abridged & Ed) New York, 1932 p. 12.

Unlike the modern materialist critics of history Oswald Spengler seems to have been influenced by the idealism and historical sense of Germany which give more importance to culture. To Spengler history of the world is the sum total of the cultures which flowered and withered down the ages. These cultures, according to him, go through different stages like the spring, summer, autumn and winter, ending in the final decay. Each culture which is to him the 'form' expressed of the 'being' has "its own new possibilities of self-expression which arise, ripen, decay and never return"<sup>2</sup>. He says that there is not one sculpture, one painting, one mathematics, one physics, but many, each in its deepest essence different from the other<sup>3</sup>. Spengler assigns a role to each culture in a morphological manner. "A culture", he says, "is born in a moment when a great soul awakens out of the proto-spirituality of the ever childish humanity, and detaches itself, a form from the formless, a bounded and mortal thing from the boundless and enduring"<sup>4</sup>. Spengler thus believes that there is a great potential factor remaining invisible of which culture is the kinetic and visible expression, and thereby gives us an idea that there is an enduring boundless and formless 'being' which can generate cultures one after another, and an optimism that the end of one culture is not the end of all cultures and that the possibility of an 'organic'

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2. Ibid, p.17

3. Ibid.

expression of the 'being' in the form of cultures is not sealed once for all. Culture is to Spengler the expression of the everlasting entity - the 'being'. So from the being there is the 'becoming' as well as the 'become'. Infinite is the 'being' and finite the 'become'. Spengler says that there must be suitable surroundings for the expression of the 'being' into a culture. "It blooms on the soil of an exactly definable landscape to which plant-wise it remains bound"<sup>5</sup>. It is interesting to note that geographical settings have, in a far reaching manner, influenced the culture. "Every culture stands in a deeply symbolical, almost in a mystical, relation to the extended, the space in which and through which it strives to actualise itself"<sup>6</sup>. This culture, Spengler says, recedes from the outer surface when it has fulfilled its missions in the world of matter. It dies when "this soul has actualised the full sum of its possibilities in the shape of peoples, languages, dramas, arts, states, sciences and reverts into the proto-soul", and leaves behind in man "an inner passionate struggle to maintain the Idea against the powers of chaos without and the unconscious muttering deep down within"<sup>7</sup>. After seeing that it has passed through its childhood, youth, man-hood and old age or that "the aim once attained - the idea, the entire content of inner possibilities, fulfilled and made externally actual", the culture recedes to the womb, the

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4. Ibid, p. 73  
5. Ibid, p. 73  
6. Ibid, p. 74  
7. Ibid, p. 73

<sup>8</sup>  
being . The culture "suddenly hardens, it mortifies, its  
blood congeals, its force breaks down and it becomes civi-  
lization"<sup>9</sup> .

In his study of the rise and decline of cultures Spengler rejected the linear theory of progress. If the culture comes out of the 'being' with infinite potential and recedes to its original source which again causes another culture to sprout forth, it can only be cyclical in work. Here Spengler's view takes after those of Lamprecht and Aurobindo. Rejecting the linear theory, Spengler ascribes each and every incident of history to the work of destiny. These cultures, sublimated life-essences, grow with the same superb aimlessness as the flowers of the field; its life is decided by destiny<sup>10</sup> . Spengler therefore sees "world history as a picture of endless formations and transformations, of the marvellous waxing and waning of organic forms". He refutes the view of the professional historians who see history as a "sort of tapeworm industriously adding on to itself one epoch after another,"<sup>11</sup> and sees no logicality in the customary sense of historians that tends to divide the straight line of history into ancient-medieval-modern<sup>12</sup> . He says that unfortunately

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8. Ibid, p. 74

9. Ibid. Civilization, according to Spengler, is the end of a culture when the ideal recedes, leaving behind mere superficialities.

10. Ibid, p. 17.

11. Ibid, p. 18.

12. Ibid

historians have followed in their research the methodology adopted in science, especially physics and thus they imagine themselves to be carrying on historical research when they are "really following out objective connexions of cause and effect"<sup>13</sup>. Judged by the standards of physicists and mathematicians, the historian becomes 'careless' as soon as he has assembled and ordered his material and passes on to interpretation. This necessity of cause and effect Spengler calls the 'logic of space' and has it that there is another 'organic' necessity of life, that of ~~density~~<sup>destiny</sup> which he calls the 'logic of time' which is a fact of deepest inward certainty, a fact which suffuses the whole of mythological, religious and artistic thought and constitutes the essence and kernel of all history<sup>14</sup>. This 'logic of time' or destiny is unapproachable through cognition and remains something transcendental. However Spengler says, this fact of the "logic of time" still awaits its theoretical formulation. He says that "we observe that swift and deep changes assert themselves in the history of great cultures without assignable causes, influences or purposes of any kind"<sup>15</sup>. Historical happenings are not due to any assignable cause.

The Gothic and pyramid styles come into full being as suddenly as do the Chinese imperialism of Shih-Huang-Ti and the Roman of Augustus, as Hellenism

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13. Ibid, p. 6.

14. Ibid, p. 6.

15. Ibid, p. 232

and Buddhism and Islam... Every being active or contemplative, strides on to its fulfilment by epochs... The origin of the earth, of life, of force-moving animals are such epochs, and, therefore, mysterious that we can do no more than accept<sup>16</sup> .

According to Spengler "that which we know of man divides clearly into two great ages of his being". The first is, according to available knowledge, limited on the one side by that "profound fugue of planetary destiny which we call the beginning of the Ice Age" about which, basing on the existing picture of world history we can only say that "a cosmic change took place", and on the other by the "beginnings of the high cultures on Nile, Euphrates, with which the whole meaning of human existence became suddenly different"<sup>17</sup> . He sees the work of destiny or the 'logic of time' in all the cultures, both primitive and high. In all the primitive existence the 'it' or the cosmic is at work with such immediacy of force that all microcosmic utterances, whether in myth, custom, technic or ornament obey only the pressures of the destiny. "For us", Spengler says, "there are no ascertainable rules for duration, tempo and course of the development of these utterances"<sup>18</sup> . While commenting on the high cultures, he says, it was an incident, the sense of which cannot now be scrutinized that the

16. Ibid, pp. 232 - 233.

17. Ibid, p. 233.

18. Ibid.

type of high culture appeared suddenly in the field of human history<sup>19</sup>. Indeed it was some sudden event of destiny that brought forth a new and different form into phenomenal existence. Again, he says that the origin of a new culture is also unpredictable. We cannot "prophecy whether and when a new culture shall be" born though from the moment when a "new being is conceived in the womb", or a "seed sinks into the earth", we know the inner form of this new life-course<sup>20</sup>. But Sri Aurobindo is of the firm opinion that without cause there cannot be any effect or incident. After all the theory of causation has been the very essence of Indian thought<sup>21</sup>. Non-existence can never be the cause of what exists. In the words of Vivekananda:

That the law of causation is omnipotent and knows no time or place when it did not exist, is a doctrine as old as the Aryan race, sung by its ancient poet seers, formulated by her philosophers, and made the corner stone upon which the Hindu man even of today builds his whole scheme of life<sup>22</sup>.

A staunch advocate of the Hindu tradition and 'Sanathana Dharma', Sri Aurobindo laid much significance on the theory

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19. ibid, p. 234.

20. Ibid.

21. M.Hiriyanna, Outlines of Indian Philosophy, p. 144; Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine, p. 43.

22. Swamy Vivekananda, "Historical Evolution of India"; Swamy Vivekananda's Rousing call to Hindu Nation, Eknath Ranade (Ed), Kanyakumari, 1982, p. 19.

of causation. Even when he took up the cyclical theory expounded by Karl Lamprecht he saw in it the absence of the cause or the necessity that led to the transformation from one age to another<sup>23</sup>. Therefore Aurobindo was to add this element to Lamprecht's theory and perfect it. Of course, like Spengler he believed in the force of destiny or the invisible will of nature, but he had faith in humankind's ability to change the irresistible course of history through a soul-force and dynamic action or 'Karma'<sup>24</sup>. This hope Aurobindo clearly expresses in his views pertaining to a future world order of a united humanity and a common 'religion of humanity'. But to Spengler it is destiny alone that determines everything. Destiny is thus behind every happening or is it not that destiny is the cause behind every phenomenon? After all he speaks of this destiny as something related to the 'being' and the phenomena as 'become' or the outcome of the 'being'. Spengler does not write about the theory of causation though its influence is clear in his writings - that 'being' is the cause and 'become' the result or that everything is caused by the destiny.

Spengler expresses his objection to the western methods and trend of historical writing. He could not favour the system of writing history with Europe as centre, or looking

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23 .Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination, p. 2.

24. Sri Aurobindo, The Problem of Rebirth, Pondicherry, 1969, pp. 154 - 155.

at the panorama of history through a European spectacle. "The most appropriate designation", Spengler says, "for this current western scheme of history, in which the great cultures are made to follow orbits round us as the presumed centre of all world happenings, is the 'Ptolemaic system' of history"<sup>25</sup>. He prefers the 'Copernican discovery' in historical sphere which admits "no sort of privileged position to the classical or western culture as against the cultures of India, Babylon, China, Egypt, Mexico - separate worlds of dynamic being which in point of mass count for just as much in general picture of history as the classical"<sup>26</sup>. Spengler thus initiates the new scheme of drawing a world picture which is all-comprehending, giving representation to all the world nations and cultures though at times his findings went on to the orthodox and pessimistic extent of opining that world history is "our world picture", that India and Greece formed no "image of a world in progress", and that the western culture has ended up in its civilization.

While dealing with cultures Spengler gives special significance to race, people and nation. Race and people, according to Spengler, are the most indestructible ingredients of nationalism. True, he believes in the influence geography, vegetation, climate and the like factors may

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25. Spengler, op.cit, p. 13

26. Ibid, p. 14.

bring upon the race. They may bring about some slight change in the racial qualities. But the final conclusion to which he comes is that "Race, like Time and Destiny, is a divisive element in every question of life... In the last resort every individual man and every individual moment of his existence have their own race"<sup>27</sup>. The racial types and their qualities are so sharp and markedly different from one another that even a common language cannot erase them. Even the pronunciation of a particular language by different persons would vivify their racial difference. Spengler says, "we recognize a person known to us, without seeing him, by his pronunciation, and not only that, but we can recognize a member of an alien race even if he speaks perfectly correct German"<sup>28</sup>. He again holds that always only a person born of a certain race can understand the exact connotation of the words coined by the same race; and that is why, he says, "to West European the sacred Chinese texts must always be, in fullest sense a sealed book" and that no one not bred in the culture of the Hindus "can comprehend" the fullest meanings of the words in Sanskrit, 'Atman' and 'Brahman'<sup>29</sup>. Of course the Spenglerian view that a man born of the same culture and race alone can

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27. Ibid, p. 257. The race concept of Spengler is not derived of the physical features like those of the Neanderthal or Aurignation. It is something different. He, therefore, asks: "Is there such a thing as an Aryan or Semitic skull? Can we distinguish Celtic and Frankish skulls or even Boer and Kaffir?".

28. Ibid, p. 259.

29. Ibid, pp. 262 - 263.

understand the connotations of each and every word coined by it cannot be accepted in face value. For, intellectual and spiritual perfection is the final aim of all cultures and not the exclusive possession of a particular one. A good example for this is provided in modern times by Sir John Woodroffe who had given more valuable interpretations to the 'tantra' philosophy than any Hindu had. Spirituality is a common ideal and great men think alike. Great people, wherever they are, and whichever race they are born in, hold the same deepest values. Christianity got the finest interpretations and treatment from the non-Christians, especially the Hindus, they being a race more spiritual minded than any other people. Indian thinkers were capable of giving a more sublime and meaningful interpretation even to German philosophy than any German gave, the interpretations Sri Aurobindo himself had given to Nietzsche's 'Will-to-power'<sup>30</sup> being a finest example. But save such rare examples Spenglerian view that "Race, in the end, is stronger than languages" and everything else seems correct and derived of what is seen commonplace<sup>31</sup>.

People, according to Spengler, are the products of the cultures which are themselves "entities, primary or original, that arise out of the deepest foundations of

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30. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination, pp. 24 - 25.

31. Spengler, op. cit, p. 261.

spirituality"<sup>32</sup>. 'People' is, therefore, to Spengler, "a unit of the soul". Peoples are created by the cultures and the greatest events of history. A good and high culture alone can, therefore, create a 'people' rich in values of life. The 'people' of the Spenglerian sense is a group having a psychic unity based on a common heritage, and it calls for "neither unity of speech nor physical descent" to preserve its coherence. The 'people' is not a population, but an inwardly lived experience of the "We". Spengler says that "there are energetic and tame, ephemeral and indestructible, forms of people". Even change of name, speech, and land would not affect the soul of such 'people' group; and "so long as their soul lasts, they can gather to themselves and transform human material of any and every provenance"<sup>33</sup>. The people is not a heterogeneous mass wedded to different ideas. They are in themselves coherent, psychically and ideologically. "The name Roman in Hannibal's day meant a people, in Trajan's time a population",<sup>34</sup> says Spengler. It is sensible to identify the 'people' as the 'race' itself of the Spenglerian sense when he says that "race in this connexion must not be interpreted in the present day Darwinian sense of the word" but in the sense that in a race "there is nothing material but something cosmic and directional, the felt harmony of a Destiny, the single cadence of the march of historical being"<sup>35</sup>. The

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32. Ibid, p. 266.

33. Ibid, p. 265.

34. Ibid

35. Ibid.

Germans, the Frenchmen and the Jews, Spengler says, are different 'peoples' or 'races'. He believes that there can always be a coordination of this wholly metaphysical beat that can bring about co-existence among the races or the peoples.

It is an incoordination of this (wholly metaphysical) beat that produces race-hatred, which is just as strong between German and Jews, and it is the resonance on this beat that marks true love - so akin to hate - between man and wife <sup>36</sup> .

People are neither linguistic nor political nor zoological but "spiritual units". Such Peoples "in the style of their culture we will call Nations" behind which there is 'an idea'. According to Spengler the "only historical peoples, peoples whose existence is 'World history', are the nations" <sup>37</sup> . Nations are to him, spiritual entities whose inner spirit cannot be altered by the diversities of language, dress, climate or other material circumstances.

Also he opines that nationalism should be handed down from generation to generation through organized effort. Mere book learning would not suffice it. Instead he speaks of 'breeding' by which he meant the instilling of tradition, without which a nation loses 'form'. As examples of 'breeding' he cites the training of medieval page, cloister

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36. Ibid.

37. Ibid, p. 267.

education, the training of the Prussian Officers Corps, English Public Schools and university training for Indian Civil Service and the training for the Roman Catholic Priesthood. Spengler says that it was on account of Bismark's failure to train a political elite competent to deal with foreign affairs that Germany failed in later times to play artfully upon the diplomatic chess board of international politics so as to defend herself from disasters. Bismark, Spengler says, could only achieve "but could not form a tradition"<sup>38</sup>. If this tradition, he says, does not come off, then "instead of a homogeneous ruling stratum we have a congeries of heads that are helpless when confronted by the unforeseen"<sup>39</sup>. Spengler thus strongly argues for the preservation of the national and racial tradition by cultivating a true 'breed'<sup>40</sup>. He also believes in the need of preserving the national soul which must be sublimated with a spiritual appeal. This is seen reflected in his prophecies regarding the future of Russia in whom he sees the saviour of the soul. Spengler says, on three occasions Russia has been victimised with the western influence thrust upon her by Peter the Great, by Tzar Alexander at the time of Holy Alliance, and by Lenin. Lenin, he says, could not understand the soul of Russia. Therefore "Marxism, based on a typically Britishman's hatred of the rich, coupled with the Jewish memories of the Old Testament

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38. Ibid, p. 386.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid, p. 387.

course on manual labour, was adopted by Russia under an ardent misunderstanding". This, Spengler believed, would not get the acceptance of the Russian national soul which is scruples combined with the sublimity of the Russian countryside piety symbolized by Dostoyevski. Spengler prophesied that Russia would one day abandon the ideas of Tolstoy who was only a revolutionary who meant Marx when he spoke of Christ. "Dostoyevski is the peasant" representing the Russian soul that lies in its countryside and village life while "Tolstoy was the man of western society"<sup>41</sup>. Dostoyevski had a heart that throbbed for the peasants, and a clear notion regarding a true Christianity. "His life of Christ, had he written it - as he always intended to do - would have been a genuine gospel like the gospel of primitive Christianity, which stand completely outside classical and Jewish literary forms"<sup>42</sup>. He would have turned Christianity into the religion of the poor and perhaps read the ideals of Christ into the teachings of Marx - an ideal combination of the humanitarian and economic visions that would have been a desirable panacea for a humanity wearied of sulphurhot revolutionary slogans and a religious orthodoxy which has turned almost comic. Under Dostoyevski's influence, Spengler believed, Russia would produce a third issue of Christianity, priestless and founded on the gospel of St. John. He therefore says, "to Dostoyevski's Christianity will the next thousand years belong"<sup>43</sup>. Spengler

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41. Ibid. p. 273.

42. Ibid., p. 274.

43. Ibid.

believed that Russia would evolve a philosophy of life suited to its national soul. Whichever is the ideology a nation selects it should be the one which the soul of the nation accepts. Otherwise it will result in a longdrawn struggle in the end of which the soul of the nation emerges strong, throwing aside the ideology thrust upon it. Nothing should be allowed to supplant the nation-soul. Here Spenglerian views find themselves in conformity with the ideas of Sri Aurobindo.

The Spenglerian approbation for the ideals of Dostoyevski reveals that he was against all superficialities and artificial life styles. As already pointed out, culture is to Spengler the expression of the 'being' whereas civilization is the death-point of culture. The period of culture Spengler calls 'history' and civilization 'non-history'. History or the period of culture marks "the actualization of something that is essentially spiritual, the translation of an idea into a living historical form"<sup>44</sup>. This translation of the idea into historical form is very much apparent in all walks of human life. "It applies equally to the struggle of big style-tendencies in art of philosophy, of political ideals and of economic forms"<sup>45</sup>. But the 'post-history' which Spengler may rightly deem the age of civilization, is devoid of all this<sup>46</sup>. What

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44. Ibid, p. 244.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

remains during the 'post-history' period is only a shell, a dilettantish approach to what had once been venerable and true ideals of society. A mockery the kind of which is depicted in Erasmus, an age in which the author of In Praise of Folly saw the Pope at Rome leading a triumphal procession as if he were Pompey or Caesar (Whereas the true ideal is that of St. Peter who subdued the world by faith not with arms or soldiers or military engines) come into being. All that remains is, Spengler says, the struggle for more power, for animal advantage.

Whereas previously power, even when to all appearance destitute of any inspiration, was always the serving of the idea somehow or the other, in the late civilization even the most convincing illusion of an idea is only the mask for purely zoological striving<sup>47</sup>

This is the difference Sri Aurobindo draws between the cultured and the conventionally civilized or the cultured man and the Philistine who is the "modern civilized barbarian"<sup>48</sup>. So culture alone is to Spengler 'history' and the period of its decadence or civilization 'non-history'; culture is the bright point of history whereas civilization is the gloomy one.

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47. Spengler, op.cit, p. 244.

48. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle - The Ideal of Human Unity - War and Self-Determination, p. 79.

If 'history' and 'non-history' represent culture and civilization respectively the modern world is, to Spengler, undoubtedly of civilization, cultural decadence, 'non-history'. To him the 'Decline of the West' comprises nothing less than the problem of civilization<sup>49</sup>. According to him the transition from culture to civilization was accomplished for the western world in the nineteenth century itself. For the world has already forgotten its old sublimities, its old villages which were the citadels of cultural growth. It has now converged into four or five cities forgetting the "old wide landscape of the culture". In place of a world, "there is a city, a point, in which the whole life of broad regions is collecting while the rest dries up". Spengler finds in place of a 'type-true' people born of and grown on the soil "a new sort of nomad, cohering unstably in fluid masses, the parasitical city dweller, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful, deeply contemptuous of the countryman and especially that highest form of countryman, the country gentleman"<sup>50</sup>. This is, to him, a "very great stride towards the inorganic, towards the end". In the world cities, high soundingly called cosmopolitan, Spengler sees not a 'folk', but a 'mob'. In them he sees an "uncomprehending hostility to all the traditions representative of the culture", the keen and cold intelligence that confounds

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49. Ibid, p. 24.

50. Ibid, p. 25.

the wisdom of the peasant and the new-fashioned naturalism that in relation to matter of sex society goes back far to quite primitive instincts and conditions. All these things, Spengler says, "betoken the definite closing down of the culture and opening of a quite new phase of human existence - anti-provincial, late, futureless, but quite inevitable"<sup>51</sup> .

Also Spengler sees the appearance of irreligion during civilization. "Each culture... has its own mode of spiritual extinction, which is that which follows of necessity from its life as a whole"<sup>52</sup> According to him modern socialism marks the end of a noble and true religion; Christianity so called (and qualified even as 'true Christianity') is always on the lips of an English socialist to whom it seems to be something in the nature of a 'dogma-less-morale'<sup>53</sup> . Socialism is, to Spengler, "the Faustian world-feeling become irreligious". To him it is the extinction of living inner religiousness that becomes phenomenal in the historical world picture at the turn from culture to civilization<sup>54</sup> . He says that even in the last stages of the western science the greatly sloping route of decline is clearly visible<sup>55</sup> . The present generation faces a spiritual crisis that will involve all Europe and America. The

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51. Ibid, p. 26.  
52. Ibid, p. 183.  
53. Ibid, p. 185.  
54. Ibid.  
55. Ibid, p. 225.

present day science, according to Spengler, is not a living one. "Scientific results are merely items of an intellectual tradition", and in the nineteenth century the scientific tradition seemed to have come to an end with all the "savants of the caliber of Gauss and Humboldt and Helmholtz" already gone.

In physics as in Chemistry, in biology as in mathematics, the great masters are dead, and we are now experiencing the 'decrecendo' of brilliant gleaners who arrange, collect and finish off<sup>56</sup> like the Alexandrian scholars of the Roman age .

Spengler says, there is one more task for the 'historical Faustian Spirit' before the curtain to fall on the western civilization. It is the retreatment of the theoretical physics, chemistry, mathematics, etc., as a sum of symbols "which will be definitive conquest of the mechanical world aspect by an intuitive, once more religious world-outlook, a last master effort of physiognomic to break down even systematic and to absorb it, as expression and symbol, into its own domain"<sup>57</sup> . After all, western science, Spengler believed, has a mission of its own and after fulfilling it, "weary after its striving" it "returns to its spiritual home". The declining trend is very much revealed in another offshoot of western science - industrialism. Spengler knew that if in future "the very elite of intellect that is now

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56. Ibid, p. 221.  
57. Ibid, p. 222.

concerned with machine becomes overpowered with a growing sense of its satanism... then nothing can hinder the end of the great drama that has been a play of intellects with hands as mere auxiliaries"<sup>58</sup> . Even in Europe's present politics Spengler sees no promising trend. To him western democracy is only a farce. Today there is nothing as politics of people. "There is only personal history and consequently only personal politics. The struggle of, not principles but of men, not ideals but race-qualities, for executive power is the alpha and omega". Spengler therefore envisions a 'born statesman' who is above all a valuer - valuer of men, situations and things" to avoid the struggle between democratic and dictatorial trends. He says that the present democracy is more bound to economic aspects than ideals. "Politics sacrifices men for an idea, they fall for an idea; but economy merely wastes them away"<sup>59</sup> . In the economic life hunger awakens the ugly, vulgar and wholly unmetaphysical sort of fearfulness for one's life under which "the higher form world of a culture miserably collapses and the naked struggle for existence of the human beasts begins"<sup>60</sup> . This economic politics is an end in itself, for when the mere life-preserving begins to outline itself nakedly and insistently there comes the civilization. The dictatorial trend visible in modern democracy has

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58. Ibid, xii.

59. Ibid, p. 400.

60. Ibid.

its influence also in international politics. Consequently "even world-peace, in every case where it has existed, has been nothing but the slavery of an entire humanity under the regime imposed by a few strong nature's determined rule"<sup>61</sup>. According to him world-peace is always a one sided resolve. "Man is a beast of prey, I shall say it again and again". He held that the coloured races are not pacifists, and even protested against the Japanese alliance which angered the Nazis, and ridiculed the idea of a thousand-year Reich<sup>62</sup>. He was against the present mode of establishing world-peace which is merely an armed peace imposed by one power or a combination of nations. The philosophy of freedom, Spengler believed, should determine the world-peace. He, like Sri Aurobindo, believed in the superiority of the race-qualities and nationalism which are the expressions of the spirit and the guiding factors of history. Hence the advice to preserve nationalism for the continuity of history and its sole content - culture. Spengler, like Aurobindo, firmly believes that ideal should be the guiding principle of men, nations and cultures, for it is divine and therefore eternal. Action without ideal would help man reach nowhere.

To Arnold Toynbee also the study of history is the study of civilizations and cultures. The growth of civili-

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61. Ibid, p. 382.

62. Ibid, p. X.

zations is, to him, an eternal phenomenon having apparenta-  
tion and affiliation with old civilization, and hence his  
theories pertaining to the 'contacts between civilizations  
in time and space'. The greatest march of civilization or  
the primary victory of civilization, he says, was achieved  
when there happened the "mutation of sub-man into man"<sup>63</sup>.  
This accomplishment was a greater step in growth than any  
progress man has yet achieved under the aegis of civiliza-  
tion<sup>64</sup>. The origin of civilization, according to Toynbee,  
consisted in the transition from a static condition to the  
dynamic. A new civilization, he says, is "generated through  
the transition of a society from a static condition to a  
dynamic activity, just as it is in the mutation which<sup>65</sup>  
produces a civilization out of a primitive society".  
After all this alternating rhythm of static and dynamic, of  
movement and pause and movement is something fundamental in  
the nature of universe which no human hand can alter or  
check. This balanced movement between retrogression and  
forward march in history as well as every other aspect of  
universe has been theorized even in the early phase of the  
development of human thought. This is what the ancient  
Chinese meant through the 'Yin' and 'Yang' - 'Yin' the  
static and 'Yang' the dynamic<sup>66</sup>. Thus the process of civi-  
lizational stagnation and later dynamism comes in a cyclic

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63. Toynbee, A study of History, (Abridged by D.C. Somervell), London, 1962, p. 49.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid, p. 51

66. J.Needham, Science and Civilization in China, Vol. - IV, p.7.

way like the spring which is the child of its dead parent-the winter. Toynbee's idea regarding the 'fundamental nature of the universe' has got some similarity with Sri Aurobindo's thought pertaining to the will of the nature which is to him a laboratory wherein nature puts man to successive experiments, giving him defeat after defeat with a view to make him experienced and successful in his future attempts. To Toynbee neither race nor environment is a determining factor; only the fundamental nature of the universe is counted for.

Neither race nor environment... has offered, or apparently can offer, any clue as to why this great transition in human history occurred not only in particular places, but at particular dates<sup>67</sup>.

However there is a cause that helps civilizations sprout. This, Toynbee says, is in encounter between two super-human personalities - an idea symbolised in the encounters given in some of the greatest dramas or literatures like the 'Book of Genesis', the 'Faust' of Goethe, etc.<sup>68</sup>. The personal ordeals of Faust represent, in the intuitive language of fiction, the infinitely multiple ordeal of mankind. The expulsion of Adm<sup>α</sup> and Eve from the garden, which follows the encounter between 'Yahweh and

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67. Toynbee, A study of History, p. 59.

68. Ibid, pp. 62-63.

Serpent' is nothing less than symbolic of the fall of man. Faust is perfect in knowledge while Adam and Eve are perfect in innocence and ease. When the concept of perfection is complete there comes a change in the state by an impulse or motive which comes from outside<sup>69</sup>. Toynbee says, this "impulse or motive which makes a perfect 'yin' state pass over into new 'Yang' activity comes from an intrusion of the Devil into the universe of God"<sup>70</sup>. Thus the theme of 'Faust' gives us an idea regarding the inner urge of a human being to get himself free from the ditch and destruction he has fallen into. If in 'Faust' it is man who fights against the odds he is faced with, in the 'Genesis' this role is of the God. Toynbee says, "in the language of mythology, when one of God's creatures is tempted by the devil God himself is thereby given the opportunity to re-create the world"<sup>71</sup>. It is no matter whether the devil's intervention succeeds or fails. It throws before the hero a challenge to which he successfully responds or is expected to respond. The fall of Adam and Eve in response to the serpent's temptation to eat the forbidden fruit symbolises the acceptance of a challenge to venture upon a new path.

The expulsion from the garden into an unfriendly world in which the woman must bring forth children in sorrow and the man must eat bread in the sweat of his face, is the ordeal which the acceptance of the serpent's challenge has entailed<sup>72</sup>.

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69. Ibid, p. 63.

70. Ibid, p. 65.

71. Ibid, p. 65.

72. Ibid, p. 66.

Such themes symbolising this aspect is found not only in western literature but in those of the East as well. We have, for instance, the story of Kalidasa's 'Kumarasambhava' wherein the 'Devas' or the celestial ones are thrown out of paradise by the demon Taraka, and the former later successfully regain their lost paradise. Of course the poets of both the 'Faust' and 'Kumarasambhava' envision something highest - ie., man has a lost paradise of ideals and dynamism which he is expected to regain. Nonetheless these literatures give a picture of challenges and responses. The society, Toynbee says, is confronted in the course of its life by a succession of problems and the presentation of each problem is a challenge to undergo an ordeal<sup>73</sup>. As further illustration Toynbee says that the genesis of civilization was response to the challenges of nature also like the fauna and flora<sup>74</sup>. The necessities made man determined to invent. Civilization was thus the product of human endeavour in facing the hazards of the world.

The challenge is always in the nature. But that may not always be the case of response. Some society may respond, but some may not, due to the demise of creativity. In that case the assaulted party may be subjugated or even annihilated, it being powerless of any effective resistance and this Toynbee says, had been the fate of many primitive societies. "They had gone as the dodo went on the arrival of modern western man on Mauritius"<sup>75</sup>. This, he opines, is

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73. Ibid, p. 62.

74. Ibid, p. 66.

75. Ibid, p. 773.

due to the lack of creativity<sup>76</sup>. But those who enriched their civilizational values by reinforcing them with creativity always stood the challenges. While surveying the alternative types of reaction by an assaulted civilization we often come across the 'reply to force by force'. Toynbee cites as examples the Hindu and Orthodox Christian victims of an aggressive Iranic Muslim militarism. Here the former retorted by turning militant themselves. "This was the Sikh's and Maratha's retort to the Mughals, and the Greek and Serb nationalists' retort to the Osmalis"<sup>77</sup>. History provides us with so many examples in which a militarily inferior party has retorted its assailant by mastering even the latter's military technic<sup>78</sup>. The response came often not only through physical means, but ideological as well which would become commonplace in politics, religion and commerce<sup>79</sup>. Some times it came in the form of a civilization's or majority's response to a dominant minority. Such reactions, Toynbee says, had found violent expression, at various times and places, from medieval Peasant wars to the Jacobianism of the French Revolution<sup>80</sup>. During the middle of the twentieth Century of the Christian era such reactions came to have more powerful expressions along two channels than ever before. "Where the grievances were mainly economic, the channel was communism; where they were

76. Ibid, pp. 308 - 9.

77. Ibid, p. 773.

78. Toynbee, Civilization on Trial, London, 1957, pp.166-167

79. Toynbee, A study of History,, p. 774.

80. Ibid, p. 874.

political or racial, the channel was a nationalistic revolt against colonialism<sup>81</sup>. The elements of challenge and response always ruled the relation between the European and Asiatic civilizations. More or less the same view Toynbee had like Spengler on the dynamic aspects of nationalism and religion which respond to all challenges. Toynbee's view of Russian history and his prediction on its future is a best example. In reference to this context he quoted the famous line of Horace: 'you may throw nature out with a pitchfork, but she will keep coming back'<sup>82</sup>. According to him no human hand can stifle the will of the nature. The nature's will Toynbee saw in the history of Russia. The post-1917 regime in Russia claimed to have made a breach with Russia's past. The Russian Revolution, Toynbee holds like Spengler, was an attack of the West over Russia. This 'tour de force' the west has achieved twice over Russian history: "first by Peter the Great, and then by the Bolsheviks"<sup>83</sup>. The West also believed that Russia was becoming a slave to the occidental ideas when it saw the Russian Revolution in triumph. "Yet the reflection", Toynbee wrote decades back, "suggests that it is not easy to repudiate one's heritage"<sup>84</sup>. For the imposition of communism, Toynbee knew, would not do away with the soul of Russia which was closely related to the Byzantine Christianity rather than

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81. Ibid.

82. Arnold J. Toynbee Civilization on Trial, p. 164.

83. Ibid, p. 166.

84. Ibid, p. 164.

the western one. He held that the "Russian members of this Byzantine family have always put up a strong resistance against threats of being overwhelmed by our western world and that they are keeping up that resistance today"<sup>85</sup>. Of course on the other side Russia has been mastering the western technology. But this itself she did when constrained to do so as a means to save herself from being conquered and forcibly assimilated by the West. Toynbee knew, one day Russia would throw off the western ideas, ie communism thrust upon her. The West, he predicted would only fail in its attempt of westernising Russia. He said:

We may guess that Russia's ultimate decision will be deeply influenced by the sense of orthodoxy and sense of destiny which she had also inherited from her Byzantine past. Under the Hammer and Sickle, as under the Cross, Russia is still 'Holy Russia' and Moscow still 'The Third Rome'<sup>86</sup>.

Toynbee's prediction which was based on the light from the past has come true like that of the French oracler Nostradamus who prophesied that Marxism would begin to decline in 1989<sup>87</sup>.

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85. Ibid, p. 166.

86. Ibid, p. 183.

87. Nostradamus, the **S**ixteenth century French oracle had it that Marxism (which he called the religion of the second Anti-Christ) would collapse in the year that would witness the death of him who would be born in the first year of the twentieth century. The Japanese King Hiro-hitho was born in 1901 and died in 1989.

Sri Aurobindo also holds more or less the same opinion. The principle of struggle, Aurobindo opines, has assumed large historical aspects of an agelong clash and pressure of conflict between Asia and Europe. "Both materially and spiritually Europe has thrown repeatedly upon Asia, Asia<sup>88</sup> too upon Europe, to conquer, assimilate and dominate" . Out of this mutual challenges both had gained by responding with the principles of defense and assimilation. To make a civilization or culture stand an attack from other groups, the element of self-determination within a civilization is to be strengthened<sup>89</sup> . For it is to the failure of self-determination, Toynbee says, the breakdown of civilizations appear to be due. What is needed is a divine spark of creative power which, Toynbee believes, is still alive in the present western people; and he says, "if we have the grace to kindle it into flame, then the stars in their courses cannot defeat our efforts to attain the goal of human endeavour"<sup>90</sup> . Sri Aurobindo also advocates in favour of keeping alive the integrity of civilization. While pleading for the cause of India, the main seat of oriental culture, he exhorted the Indians to be dominated by the ambition of maintaining the integrity of oriental civilization in its own native home, India before being dominated by the natural ambition of carrying the banner of such a civilization all over the world<sup>91</sup> . This advocate of

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88. Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, p. 3.

89. Toynbee, A Study of History, pp. 278-9.

90. Ibid., p. 254.

91. Sri Aurobindo, "The Main Feeder of Patriotism", Bande Matharm, 19 June, 1907.

India's 'Sanathana Dharma' had much concern for the future of occidental culture. Indeed he is among the pioneers who raised voice against commercialising the European civilization; he made his exhortations to the sons of western civilization to awaken the spirituality in them as the only way to a true social perfection<sup>92</sup>. He was optimistic on novel ideas sweeping across the world<sup>93</sup>. A new Europe, he fervently hoped, would emerge.

Toynbee also envisions a united humanity. Throughout the past experiences of man in civilizational growth and disintegration there was "an awakening to a sense of unity"<sup>94</sup>. Though the outer realities of the painfully perturbing dissolution of familiar forms may often make it to the weaker spirits that ultimately everything ends in chaos, to the 'steadier and more spiritual vision' it is revealed that the "flickering film of the phenomenal world is an illusion which cannot obscure the eternal unity that lies behind it"<sup>95</sup>. This spiritual truth, Toynbee says, can easily be apprehended by an analogy from some outward and visible signs. An augury in the external world which intimates us of a unity that is spiritual and ultimate is the unification of society into a universal state.<sup>96</sup> Like Sri Aurobindo, Toynbee is of opinion that the inner reality

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92. Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle-The Ideal of Human Unity-War and Self-Determination, p. 171.

93. Ibid., p.18.

94. Toynbee, A study of History, p. 495.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

which is spiritual will have its outward expression in all walks of human life. The unity, political as well as religious, was always in the visions of the men of past. This sense of unity or the inner urge for a 'World Order', Toynbee believes, was seen reflected in the aspiration of the Hellenic people, and in Alexander the Great's vision of 'Homonia' or concord and his dictum that "God is the common father of all men". Toynbee says:

Alexander realized that brotherhood of man presupposes the fatherhood of God - a truth which involves the converse proposition that, if the divine father of the human family is left out of the reckoning, there is no possibility of forging any alternative bond of purely human texture which will avail by itself to hold mankind together<sup>97</sup>.

This sense of unity, Toynbee says, was reflected in the thought of the Chinese also; it was reflected equally in their political theory which adored the king as the 'Son of Heaven' and in the Taoist metaphysics. According to Huai Nan Tzu, a Chinese philosopher of the second century B.C. he "who conforms to the course of the Tao, following the nature and processes of Heaven and Earth, finds it easy to manage the whole world"<sup>98</sup>. The Chinese philosophy envisions a life which is 'one with Tao' or living in harmony with the nature and succeeding in everything man undertakes<sup>99</sup>.

97. Ibid, pp. 495 - 496.

98. J. Needham, Science and Civilization in China, Vol - II, p. 51.

99. Fritjof Capra, The Tao of Physics, p. 95.

Unity was the cardinal element of Indian thought. India's concept of godhood, the idea of unity in diversity and the monism are the high roads to realize the unity. Even in polity India theorised on the universal kingship or the ideal of a 'Viswasyahuvanesasyaraja'. Thus throughout the past a unity has been striven for in all attempts of humanity including religious and temporal. Toynbee says, we observe that this concept of unity of all things through good, as well as the alternative concept of a unity of all things through law, is conceived by human minds "through an analogy from the constitution which a universal state is apt to assume as it gradually crystallizes into its final shape"<sup>100</sup>. In this case the human ruler who is originally king of kings eliminates the client princes and transforms himself into a 'Monarch' in the strict sense of the term. Simultaneous transformation takes place in religion also. According to Toynbee in place of a pantheon in which a high god exercises suzerainty over a community of gods "we see emerging a single God whose uniqueness is His essence"<sup>101</sup>. He says, there appears a great revolution in the relation between the divinity and his worshipers. When the divinities attain universality they tend to divest themselves of the bonds which so far had bound each of them to some particular local community or a church. They enter into a wide field of action by appealing on the one hand to the souls

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100. Toynbee, A Study of History, pp. 499 - 500.

101. Ibid, p. 500.

of the individual and on the other to mankind as a whole<sup>102</sup>. Being individual and universal, religion acts as a great bond that links individual to the idea of human unity. Tolerance, Toynbee says, is an essential promoter of the sense of unity. The practice of the virtue of toleration brings a spiritual enormity and moral adjustment, the desirable steps towards a universal religion and human unity. The right motive for toleration is the recognition that all religions are quests in search of a common spiritual goal<sup>103</sup>. He condemns the intolerant religious persecution and the tendency of one sect to style itself as 'right' and stamping the other one as 'wrong', for, by doing so the 'right' religion "puts itself on the wrong and denies its own credentials"<sup>104</sup>. More over all religions preach the principle of love. The philosophy of Christianity, Toynbee says, can be summed up from the gospel of Mathew:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind... Thou shalt Love thy neighbour as thyself<sup>105</sup>.

Toynbee believes, these terms of Christianity could be translated into terms of all other higher religions<sup>106</sup>. He thinks that the world is in need of a spiritual dynamic

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102. Ibid.

103. Ibid., p. 300.

104. Ibid.

105. Matt. XXII. 37-39.

106. Tonybee, A Study of History, p. 638.

which can be generated by Christianity, and that only the belief in religious transfiguration of man and the saving grace of divine being can protect civilization. This of course differs from the views of Sri Aurobindo who envisions not a particular religious sect but a religion of humanity which is human and therefore universal and acceptable to humanity. However Toynbee believes in the need of many humanitarian elements for the preservation of civilization and sense of unity. Of the many ingredients necessarily required to forge a human unity are personal liberty and social justice<sup>107</sup>. "Personal liberty is an indispensable condition for any human achievement, good or evil while social justice is the sovereign rule of the game of human intercourse"<sup>108</sup>. But it has always been a problem that uncurbed personal liberty drives the weakest to the wall and social justice cannot be enforced upto the hilt without the suppression of liberty without which human nature cannot be creative. "All known social constitutions", Toynbee says, "had been pitched somewhere between these two theoretical extremes". Unfortunately the western minds could not find a solution to this riddle. They used just a smokescreen, 'Democracy' to conceal this real conflict between liberty and equality. But to Toynbee a mere democracy may not necessarily do any good. He therefore envisi-

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107. Ibid, p. 898.

108. Ibid, p. 899.

ons 'fraternity' as the real mediatory ideal. For, the  
"Brotherhood of Man stemmed from the Fatherhood of God"<sup>109</sup> .  
Like Sri Aurobindo, Toynbee believes that this divine  
fraternity can help mankind know itself as the emanation of  
the divine and act as the divine bond that holds humanity  
together. Everything, the Gita says, is the expression of  
the divine; and to see this divinity in oneself and in  
others, and to see oneself as the other is the real wisdom.

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109. Ibid.p

## CONCLUSION

The idea of history has gained more in importance at present than it did in the past. Though it has been focussed on by many thinkers it did not get the acceptance of the majority of academics as it now does. A good number of visionaries tried to give a framework to the thought regarding the idea of history. The 'being' of history has been conceived and felt by them despite history being defined as a chain of incidents, happening one after the other. The ancient chroniclers like Herodotus or Tacitus tried to have a scientific approach to the study of history, analysing the truth behind it. This attempt proved more fruitful than before when it got the superb touch of Heraclitus or an Anaxagoras who theorised on the idea of the permanance of substance through interaction and harmony. Hegel Explaining his dialectics, revealed the mutual interaction of the seemingly opposite ideas leading to the spirit of creation as the main undercurrent determining the course of historical development. This is the secret working behind the very universe, and all the universal phenomena, he believed, are the expressions of the idea subjected to the dialectics. It was in the chinese thought - in the interaction between 'Yin' and 'Yang' - that the very existence of the world is determined by the mutually opposing forces which in their ultimate union lead to creativity. But

these thinkers and their thoughts were far in advance of their time or were something so much intuitive as to elude the common man's perception. And unfortunately they remained beyond the cognizance of even the academic world. Even the Spenglerian thought which came of late used to be disparaged as the offspring of pessimism though time and again he stresses the permanence of the being of history which surfaces and withdraws in a continuously cyclical way. And it was with Toynbee that the philosophy of history began to be more popular. However it still remains difficult for the world to float in the world of ideas. The philosophy of history is still of interest to a few and the fewer would try to make out it, it having gone far beyond the ordinary cognition. To this category the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo belongs.

Sri Aurobindo's ideas on history differ, to a good extent, from those put forth by other philosophers of history like Spengler and Toynbee. With the strong conviction that man is the centre of cultural development and that his aspiration for progress has been through centuries the determining factor of historical evolution, Aurobindo analyses the psychic development of man to understand the feeling of history. Man is, to Aurobindo the maker of history which is the reflection of human psyche. He therefore tries to find out a psychic cause for all historical developments, both progressive and

retrogressive. The cause of the German defeat in World War is, according to Aurobindo, in German leaders' inability to understand the Nietzschean theory of will-to-power which Bismark in his impatience and arrogance misinterpreted as the material power to subjugate other nations. The German collapse actually resulted from the German leaders' hasty and misunderstood application of the national psyche, a sublime one which could otherwise have been channeled to more creative and humanitarian activities. The national mind is the sum total of its individual minds and the development of the individual minds leads to a matured national mind which in turn influences the history of humanity.

Again like other philosophers of history Aurobindo is emphatic on the need of preserving nationalism and culture which he deems the two undercurrents of history. Culture is, to Aurobindo, undying and would remain eternal irrespective of its geographical settings. His nationalism, unlike the Spenglerian one requiring breeding, calls for no technical approach or artificial feeding for its perpetuation. It is something spiritual and inward and can be eternal with its potential preserved and developed by the disciplines of life which is called 'Tapasya'. By disciplining the aesthetic and ethical principles of life the culture can be further sublimated into the state of being 'Sanatana' or eternal and universal.

The eternity of culture is thus the expression of the eternity of spirit or the being which is a metaphysical or spiritual entity manifesting itself time and again as called for. Every incident of history is thus predetermined and the causes themselves happen as are due. True the theory of causation gains significance in historical contexts, but that too is just a medium in the hands of destiny so that what is already in store must have terrestrial expression. Causes are just the factors that bring about an incident and it is for the happening of an incident the cause surfaces. Here incident gains more importance than the cause. What is already in store must happen whether by one cause or the other. Thus before a more penetrating intuitive analysis even the theory of causation is relegated to secondary importance, the cause being just a means for the divine end. The views of Sri Aurobindo have in them the touch of spiritual determinism as one sees in the views of Hegel and Spengler.

Culture, Aurobindo says, is all-comprehending encompassing within it all facets of human life - political, social, economic, spiritual and the like. And if only, as said already, all these aspects of human life mature to perfection the culture can attain its full fruition. The culture of a nation is one with its nationalism and both work together determining the course of universal history. Nationalism, Aurobindo believes, is a religion much to be

deified and preserved. After all, it would stand all the calamities as has been proved by the history of the Jewish or Irish people or French and German nationalisms which have been clinging fast to their related religions and cultures. Aurobindo's thought is rooted in nationalism conceived as a religion. Nation, he believes, has a potential which should be reinforced and energised to the full so as to make it the solid bedrock on which the future prospects of world culture and universal outlook would rest. For the nationalism and its culture can supplement the human unity and the culture adumbrating from it. Hence Sri Aurobindo's exhortation to preserve the nations as the basic units of human unity.

Indian culture, Aurobindo believes, will not die provided those who are entrusted to preserve it would follow the aesthetic and the ethical principles of life. 'Dharma' alone determines the destiny of a culture, it being the determining factor of 'Rita' or order of universal movement which is cyclical or forward moving. Wherever this 'Dharma' is relegated to the rear the cultural flow is stalemated. Therefore Aurobindo upholds the preservation of 'Dharma' as a way out of the historical riddles of the present world. He often outsteps the generally conceived notion that a historian or a philosopher of history has no right to guideline the future actions of humanity. Indeed he seems to believe, it is the duty of historian to study into the

errors of history and advise the future generation against repeating the old mistakes as a way to avoid in future the catastrophies they brought in times gone.

The cyclical theory of history he conceived and developed was in with his reflections on history and its philosophy which he applied to correct many ills of man's past and lead humanity on a progressive path. He had the firm faith that humanity would always tread its ways to the ultimate truth which was its starting point too. Hence the relevance of his cyclical theory characterised with the symbolic, typl and conventional ages followed by the age of reason which is on its way to realise the ultimate truth. Though for the convenience of developing his own theory Aurobindo took the frame left by Lamprecht, he modified and developed it undoing all its illogicalities and adding to it necessary elements like causation and giving it a metaphysical tinge. He thus far excels Karl Lamprecht in that he cast a more logical and spiritual die than the one the theory of historical cycles was put in by the latter, though he admits the need of faring the track already laid by this philosopher historian of Germany.

Each stage of historical development was determined by the psychic development of man which in turn determined the culture of humanity. Each nation has got its own culture and culture has got various stages of psychic development

leading man to the primordial truth. Aurobindo had the strong conviction that man is indivisible with the truth and that the difference between men is only <sup>in</sup> appearance.<sub>^</sub>

In the final analysis humanity is one and hence the possibility of evolving a human unity through a common religion of humanity that cuts across all social divisions and communal segregations. Aurobindo thus envisions a religion of humanity which encompasses within itself all the people, and a world unity based on that, accommodating all the lesser aggregates like communities, nations and continents. Accepting the diversities man is to forge the unity, because he is the divine of which all his co-beings are the reflections. And this is the only law of development though the present man, ignoring the realities tries to build castles in the air and solve riddles with artificial or superficial methods, though all these, as proved by history, proved failures. Hence the relevance of Aurobindo's call to accept realities and make them the cornerstones of man's future development.

A good number of occidental philosophers have cast their idealogical die for the future progress of man and the guidelines they prepared for this were the offsprings of their visions about history. Most of them believed in the spiritual under-current of history, stressing its cultural and religious aspects. Religion and culture contributed

greatly to history, they ardently believed. Whether it was Hegel, Nietzsche, Toynbee, Spengler or Green, the case was more or less the same. However all of them seem to have been subjected to what can be called an occidental limitation in their dealing with the spiritual or soul culture of history in that they could not swim into the vast and vibrant overseas where the thinkers of the east embarked on to. Spirituality was to them, except for a few, something that only skirted their thought rather than the one they sought, scientifically explained, experienced and realised. Compared to the Indian knowledge their perception pertaining to this seems to be peripheral. It is in this sense that the Indian masters occupy the vanguard of spiritual knowledge. It is here that Sri Aurobindo's relevance come to the fore. He could realise history as the reflection of individual progress or the handiwork of spirituality. History was to him the working of the world engineered by vision, soul and spirit and he could give theoretical explanations and come up with logical conclusions about each and every development of humanity in the past. Aurobindo's knowledge of history sprang from his own experience rather than a peripheral analysis of data. His perception is not affected by fatalism which often sources from pessimistic view. It is dynamic, energising and optimistic. It is the philosophy of dawn and a divine future.

However, this philosopher of dawn is not free of

criticisms. His view may appear insignificant, irrelevant and utopian in the material world, they being highly spiritual and difficult to be cognised by the ordinary mortals. The plane Aurobindo treads is superbly idealistic, a world he alone or only a few of his intellectual calibre can be familiar with. And he often cautions ordinary men not to tread these lines, lest it should, in their case, prove a failure, it being, according to him, a "premature adventure". Here one is bound to be doubtful as to whom his philosophy is meant for if the majority of the masses is not reckoned with. Certainly it appears that his philosophy may not fit in the terrestrial world. It is highly unlikely to be popular and may not fit in with the thoughts of the ordinary people who, hardly caring the ideals, slapdash into errors due to their dilettantic reading of things and incidents. Aurobindo's philosophy is meant exclusively for a few who are highly idealistic and intellectually developed whom he calls the rare aristocrats on earth. He does not deal with the silly aspects nor address himself to the undeveloped psyche and its mere material problems, and stands atop in world of thought along with Hegel or Nietzsche. His philosophy is, no doubt, not popular, he having not cared to cater to the interests and emotions of the common masses.

He would always fare the path he chose and would not care for framing a popular philosophy. His stand is firm

and unflinching. Aurobindo's answer to each and every problem is unambiguous and assertive. He always insists on ideals and their true translation into practical work which alone, according to him, leads to an ideal world with its human life turning divine. All the failures of the human experiments in the past were because of their not being inspired by visions or that the men behind such experiments could not adequately bridge in the gulf between vision and work. All activities, if not guided by good idealism and lofty aims, would only fail as has been proved by history. Buddha gave his ideals to the world and the Buddhist Order could carry them out to the letter, but as time elapsed they became mere ideals with the Buddhist followers sidetracking from them. Christ had shown a way. He taught his followers the path of renunciation. But as Swami Vivekananda opined, the West had abandoned it and fared the path of accumulation of material wealth resulting in the imperialist exploitation and the consequent international confrontations. Distorted application of ideals has led the world a good way towards disharmony and discontent followed by destruction and devastation. But the world does not still seem to be satisfied, and is hunting mirage in its quest for peace which, it still believes, is feasible through might. It is still not learned enough to meet peace through peace.

It is here that the views of Sri Aurobindo comes to have relevance. They accord man a divine status and

acceptance rather than mere tolerance. The theory that accepting each other is accepting oneself, an idea which gained ground in India since the beginning of her history, has got primary importance in the visions of Sri Aurobindo. Imbibing the noblest aspects irrespective of their national or East-West difference, India developed a fully matured culture. Aurobindo was typical of this culture and he found in the harmony of the occidental and oriental ideals the threshold towards the desirable development of civilization and human unity. Mutual acceptance, individual purity and broadening of mental horizon would bring in a world of peace, harmony and unity. Hence the call of Sri Aurobindo to bring down to the world of mortals a life divine which is the only panacea for all the present ills.

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