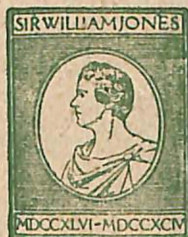


SRI AUROVINDA

[Proceedings of a Seminar organised by
The Asiatic Society, Calcutta]



THE ASIATIC SOCIETY
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FOREWORD

FIFTEENTH August, 1972 was the beginning of Silver Jubilee of Independence of India and the birth centenary of Aurobindo. Was it merely a coincidence? A coincidence which indicate much.

The Asiatic Society celebrated the centenary along with the nation. A seminar was held on 16 September 1972 which was inaugurated by Dr. P. B. Mukharji. Participating lecturers were Dr. A. C. Das, Dr. Priti Bhusan Chatterji and Shri Arun Chandra Guha. Shri R. C. Pal, Professor A. K. Mazumdar and Dr. K. K. Dasgupta were the commentators. Contents of this booklet of the *Seminar Series* are the inaugural speech, the lectures and the comments.

Aurobindo came with an inextinguishable flame within, which emitted in the scholar, burnt in the patriot and was aglow in the Yogi. The local scholar rolled into a national leader who bloomed himself into the Universal Being. It is unfortunate that we talk about it, hear about it but do not realise it.

It is inspiring to notice Aurobindo crawling down from her mother's lap to the arms of the mother-land to be enveloped by the Mother-Spirit of the Universe.

Some say he was a phenomenon and some say he was a legend; with mother we can say, 'In the history of the world, Aurobindo's contribution is not spiritual lessons, not even revelation of truth, he himself was, on this Earth, a manifest magnificent achievement of the Great Creator'. In life here and after-life Aurobindo had and has an inseparable aureole with him.

Publication of this *Seminar Series* has been delayed because of it having been held up in expectation of comments promised. The promise, however, has not materialised.

26 January 1976

D. K. MITRA
General Secretary

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

By

P. B. MUKHARJI

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

P. B. MUKHARJI

THIS Seminar on Sri Aurovinda's highlights the three dimensions of Sri Aurovinda's contribution to mankind.

The First Paper is by Professor Adhar Chandra Das on the conception of Aurovinda's Superman. He deals with Darwin, Samuel Alexandar and Nietzsche. His conclusion is that Sri Aurovinda's theory of supermanhood and enlightened humanism go together, as man would prove to be the pivot on which his supramental transformation of matter, life and mind would turn. The Second Paper is on "Some Aspects of Sri Aurovinda's Political Philosophy" by Dr. Priti Bhusan Chatterjee. This Paper particularly is an approach to Existentialism from the standpoint of Sri Aurovinda. Existentialists like Jaspers, Marcel, Hiedegger and Sartre are discussed in the paper and the difference with Sri Aurovinda noted. Dr. Chatterjee concludes by saying that it is difficult to generalise about Existentialism and comes to the conclusion that a better solution can be had from the standpoint of Sri Aurovinda. The main difference is that in Sri Aurovinda the essence of man is rooted in Spirit and the sooner he realises this, the more he is able to see and solve the so-called maladies of existence. The Third Paper is by Sri Arun Chandra Guha on Sri Aurovinda's contribution to India's Freedom Movement. He traces it through the Anusilan Samity and the Atmonnati Samity. The reference to the important pamphlet Bhabani Mandir by Aurovinda illustrates Aurovinda's idea of Maths all over the country and Sannyasis in spirit and conduct. It was more or less on the pattern of Bande Mataram of Bankim Chandra. To implement his idea four Papers were started, viz., *Bande Mataram*, *Sandhya*, *Nava-sakti* and *Jugantar*. Aurovinda's claim for Independence was based on "the inalienable right of every Nation to ha

independence". The learned speaker has beautifully developed Aurovinda's theory of passive resistances. At the same time he points out that Sri Aurovinda was not against armed revolution. Here perhaps was the basic difference between Aurovinda and Gandhi. It is perhaps the same difference as between Krishna of Hinduism and Buddha.

Aurovinda was basically and inherently a nonconformist. He refused to conform to any pattern. In so far as every nonconformist is a revolutionary he was par excellence a revolutionary. In the field of politics he was the most fiery patriot and the most ardent nationalist. Centuries of exploitation of India, Indian resources and Indian population made him the relentless champion of Indian Nationalism. The existentialism of today is not the existentialism of Sri Aurovinda. He believed in that existentialism which makes men for ever free, to react to every daily recurring and every new challenge of life with an abiding faith in the ultimate supremacy of man and God. The phenomenon he has all the phenomena in its caressing embrace. He was a confirmed believer in the purpose and destiny of the Universe and of men. His Existentialism therefore was not purposelessness. But he was no mere theoretician, no mere spectator, no mere abstract philosopher and no mere idealist. He had a blue print, if there can at all be a fixed technique to become the free and emancipated man. His Purna Yoga shows the way. In that respect also he was a nonconformist. From the Vedas, the Tantras and the Shaivas he took a good part of his inspiration but fashioned them into something which was entirely his own contribution.

He represented two streams of life, Tradition and Revolt from Tradition. His father wanted him to imbibe Western education and culture and sent him out to England at the early age of seven, where he was educated in a Public School and in the Cambridge University reading Classics, Latin and Greek but not Sanskrit. But his subsequent life was a complete repudiation of that system of training and education.

While in Baroda he married but he was indifferent to domestic life.

Yoga and the Yogic concept of life had a persistent appeal and fascination for Sri Aurovinda. The Greek concept of the perfect man with the upliftment of the soul, spirit, mind and body were his bid and no less. He met Swami Brahmananda at Gagonath Ashram who was well known as a great Yogi and a Mahatma. Later on, after Swami Brahmananda's death, his friendship grew with his disciple Keshabananda. He also came in close touch with a celebrated yogi, by name Sakharia Baba. The work of spiritual discipline has already taken its root in his life. He went on practising Yoga and got into its deeper meaning and mission. The one who exercised the greatest influence in the yogic life of Sri Aurovinda was the well-known Maharashtrian Yogi Vishnu Bhaskar Lale. To a certain extent, Lale can be described as the Guru of Sri Aurovinda.

In the midst of the din and noise of birthday centenary of Sri Aurovinda one needs to collect oneself and focus the attention on the essential teaching and lesson of this great life.

What is the great abiding message of Sri Aurovinda? He turned the tide of history to grant a deliverance more momentous than the sociological, economic, and political emancipation of a people, and more momentous than even the first emergence of man on the face of the earth. Remaking of man was his theme and no less. Before him Darwin and Herbert Spencer appear to be pitifully inadequate. Nietzsche's Superman is pale shadow before Sri Aurovinda's Life Divine and Cosmic Man. In him we see the whole pageant of life flower and come to fruition, in a manner grander than the harmony of Beethoven and more beautiful than the canvas of Rembrandt. One stands in silent reverence before this majestic peak which unfolds the ever-widening horizons, reflecting the entire panorama and the ultimate destiny of man.

The world today is both a culmination and a crisis of a great civilisation. Sri Aurovinda once said :

“At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis

in which is concealed the choice of its destiny, for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development whilst in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way."

The new lead which Sri Aurovinda gives to Indian philosophy primarily consists in his interpretation of integral experience, conscious, subconscious and superconscious. He also leads the way in giving the means of its growth and enrichment. His "Purna Yoga" contains the essentials of this synthesis.

Central and basic to Sri Aurovinda's philosophy is that matter is no denial of spirit but only an obscure and dense form of it, which is evolutionally tending to become a proper medium and expression of it. The central and direct issue of Sri Aurovinda's philosophy is whether the divine life is possible on this earth. Sri Aurovinda's answer is categorical and in the affirmative. Matter is a "fit and noble material" and entirely amenable to the spirit. A divine life on earth is, therefore, not only possible, it is the necessary and inevitable culmination of the course of evolution. This is the primary message of Sri Aurovinda, his life and work.

The conception of Aurovinda's structure of Government and society is unique. They depend in the long run on the conception formed on the nature of the man. Cosmology is, therefore, not an intellectual speculation nor a philosophical abstraction. It is the most practical task before the world today. The need today is to discover the bridge between spirit and matter. The familiar nostrums have not delivered their goods. In composition man remains individual. The besetting modern error has been to treat him as a mass product and deal with him as a mass. Modern politics, modern democracy, modern business, modern industry and modern science treat the individual as a mass product. They make him mechanical and not spontaneous. They make him automatic and not organic. Aurovinda therefore proclaims for integration. That integration comes by the awareness that man is not a

victim of an irrational destiny, but is himself a conscious participant in that destiny. He is not merely the mould, but also the moulder of the destiny of the universe.

According to Sri Aurovinda, in order to realise this destiny of man, one has to understand "Maya" which I should like to call the mythology of matter. The mythology of matter exercises its deadly grip when man denies his spirits and thereby fails to see the entire gamut from neumenon to phenomenon. The process is one, though the stages are different.

There is no antithesis between matter and spirit. The physical sciences of today have come to the verge of the awareness that all matter is some kind of energy. The scientist of modern age will tell you that our conception of matter and of its nature is changing. The physical sciences give the glimpse of a universe where nothing is inert but everything is radiant and vibrant with energy. The tiny atom of the physicists has become today a Colossus. Is the spirit of man, therefore, wrong in suggesting that the matter is conscious energy in hibernation? The great philosophies in India and the magnificent spiritual disciples of our great country insist on this one reality of consciousness as the pervading medium in which all matters exist. The mythology of matter grows when human consciousness and awareness are overcast by superstitions and Samskaras. To overcome the superstitions and Samskaras, a whole technique is provided in the magnificent sweep of his original contributions to Yoga and Philosophy. For him, therefore, it is not enough to ascend. After ascending beyond the veils of phenomena, one has to descend as the delivered and integrated men for conscious participation, both the player and the instrument rolled into one.

The mutability of matter proves that some other factor is responsible to create a dent or change in the matter and its forms. The secret is that all matter is the result of nuclear energy, again a subject of great excitement in modern sciences. When nuclear energy is emancipated, then that energy becomes all-powerful and fully creative; but the mythology of science,

working on matter within the bounds of quantitative time and quantitative space, has failed to see that this nuclear energy cannot be emancipated, except in accordance with the rules of the spirit or cosmic energy. Call it nuclear energy, call it nuclear fission, call it atomic energy, call it the Kundalini or by any other name you choose, the emphasis today has to be laid on the principle of obtaining that energy by obedience to the cosmic laws which still defy the materialistic methodology of modern physical science. Energy can be understood on its own terms, not by the laws of matter. The spirit has to be understood on its own domineering terms and not in terms of its derivatives. The Rubicon has to be crossed. It is then and then only that the centre and the circumstances are one. It is only then that the mythology of matter shades off into the cosmology of the universe.

Make no mistake that Sri Aurovinda was the emancipator of mankind. Emancipation of India was only a chapter and the prelude to the deliverance of the modern world.

He described all this beautifully in his great epic, "The Savitri." It indicates the saga of mankind. Savitri, fighting Satyaban's death is, in Sri Aurovinda's hands, the material manifestation of the immortal Beauty and Love, plunging into the trials of territorial life and seeking to overcome them not only in herself, but also in the world she has embraced as her own. She is sworn to an utter end to earth's estrangement from God. But mind you, Savitri can only save Satyaban from death. You have to be a Savitri, the eternal matrix of this universe and you have to be a Satyaban dedicated to cosmic truth in order to have the eternal manifestation and deliverance.

I end by quoting from Savitri :

"Even in this moment of her soul's despair,
In its grim rendezvous with death and fear,
No cry broke from her lips, no call for aid ;
She told the secret of her woe to none.
Calm was her face and courage kept her mute.

SRI AUROVINDA'S THEORY OF SUPERMAN

A. C. DAS

AS WE all know, the concept of evolution is a gift of the nineteenth century. Charles Darwin, the British scientist, published his epoch-making book, *The Origin of Species*, in 1859, wherein he propounded his theory of evolution, which held the world upside-down for a time. The pre-evolution conception of the origin of the world was that of Creation, of which the story of the Genesis in the Old Testament is a type. There was, indeed, a time, we are told, when only God, the divine Spirit, existed in the plenitude of His being, and there was a Void to be filled. As it is put in the Book of Genesis,

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void ; and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light : and there was light.”¹

Creation thus started, according to the Old Testament.

“Thus the heavens and earth were finished, and all the host of them.

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.”²

Unlike the conception of creation, the theory of evolution showed that the existing species of animals that inhabit the world were not created at one time in the past, even by God, were there any, but that they came into existence by gradual development out of a simple form of animal life. It was altogether a new conception, worked out on scientific basis, which challenged all theories developed in the past regarding the origin of the species of animals. Before the advent of

1. *The Holy Bible*, British and Foreign Bible Society, London, p. 5.

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

Darwin all people in the Western world implicitly believed that all animals were Created by God at a particular point of time. But it was not that they were readily converted to Darwin's view. They were rather divided into two camps, one of which was wedded to the old view, while the other, which was scientifically oriented, was inclined to the newfangled conception.

Even some scientists and philosophers in the nineteenth century made a wide application of the conception of evolution in their attempts to work out a scientific theory of the world. We cannot afford to forget that Darwin's was a biological theory which was designed to explain the origin of the species. Thinkers like Herbert Spencer, however, utilized Darwin's theory in order to establish that of evolution of the world out of some undifferentiated simple stuff, which exceeded the former. Spencer, in short, developed a mechanical theory of the universe, and later Pringle Pattison, the idealist philosopher had the distinction of propounding the theory of teleological evolution. He showed in his own way that spirit could not emerge out of non-spirit, i.e., matter unless it was involved in the latter. So he characterized his position as Higher Naturalism, meaning that though matter was the starting-point of evolution, it was pregnant with qualities which were progressively delivered at the successive stages of the process of evolution, so far such qualities as life and mind.

Of all philosophers Samuel Alexander, the British philosopher, contributed most towards the clarification of the term "evolution". He suggests that evolutes emerge in succession along a straight line. He analyzed the difference as well as the relationship between the stages of evolution that have hitherto been actual, and developed the conception of deity. According to him, an evolute points to a preceding one or ones which constitute the general background of a succeeding one, though before the emergence of a definite quality we could not decipher in the preceding stage what

was coming next. In Alexander's view, space-time or S-T is the ultimate reality, out of which new and new qualities emerge in succession. All he means to assert is this, that the stage to evolve cannot be anticipated with the help of the nature and structure of what has come about already. It is ahead and is to evolve. The quality or stage yet to evolve Alexander calls deity, and this his conception seems to be based on an analysis of the relationship of the stages that have already been there. This word he employs to indicate that the stage or quality which now tends to evolve cannot be quite defined, or can only be defined and described in some vague, negative terms. However, Alexander is definite and precise in his view that the process of evolution has not ceased with the emergence of human beings. It is nevertheless not clear from this view whether evolution has any ultimate end to achieve.

Sri Aurovinda no doubt takes his cue from the scientists and philosophers mentioned above. He obviously accepts the conception of evolution when he says :

“The General idea of evolution was the filiation of each successive form or state of things to that which preceded it, its appearance by process of outbrining or deploying of some possibility prepared and even necessitated by previous states and tendencies.... By successive progression a world-system evolves out of the nebula, a habitable planet appears in an uninhabitable system, protoplasmic life emerges by some yet unknown process out of Matter, the more developed grows out of the less developed organism.”³

He, however, passes in review the development of the biological and philosophical theories of evolution, involving as they do such conceptions as accidental variation, natural selection, heredity, transference of acquired characteristics,

3. Sri Aurobindo, *Evolution*, Sri Aurovinda Ashrama, Pondicherry, 1950, p. 3.

etc. He also refers to Bergson's theory of Creative Evolution which negates gradual development, and points out that there are conceptions about evolution that are highly controversial. He particularly draws our attention to the theory of mechanical evolution, that life, mind and consciousness have developed out of Matter. As he points out, if Matter be the Matrix of all things, "life," "mind" and "consciousness" are synonymous with "matter".

Sri Aurovinda, however, supplements Pringle Pattison's theory when he says that "there are different forms of Force, each with its own characteristics and proper method of action, each reacting upon the other and enriching its forms by the contact."

Sri Aurovinda leads us back to the Vedic idea of the triple world in which we live, material, vital and mental, penetrating each other.

If this be the truth about our life, the process of evolution must be differently interpreted. Sri Aurovinda says, "The evolution of Life in Matter must have been produced and governed, not by a material principle, but by a Life-principle working in and upon the conditions of Matter and applying to it its own laws, impulses, necessities."⁴ The world is more complex than it is supposed to be, Sri Aurovinda asserts, and in addition to manifest causes there are causes that are unmanifest and are not open to our analysis: "Out of this unmanifest the manifest constantly emerges." Thus Sri Aurovinda leads us to an ancient truth which was known to the Vedic sages and seers, the idea of an inconscient ocean of being. But this is not all they knew. They also posited a superconscious which accounts for the emergence of a new consciousness which guides the operations of Evolution. As Sri Aurovinda puts it:

"Thus the whole view of Evolution begins to change. Instead of a mechanical, gradual, rigid evolution out of

4. *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

indeterminate Matter by Nature-Force we move towards the perception of a conscious, supple, flexible, intensely surprising and constantly dramatic evolution by a superconscient Knowledge which reveals things in Matter, Life and Mind out of the unfathomable Inconscient from which they rise.”⁵

Sri Aurovinda appreciates the idealist emphasis on spirit and free life in spirit in the body. But he develops a position which goes at a tangent to the basic conception of evolution. According to him, ‘The ultimates of life are spiritual and only in the full light of the liberated self and spirit can it achieve them.’⁶ By his spiritualist twist to the scientifico-philosophical theory of evolution, he, however, deviates from the lines set forth by the evolutionists who preceded him. In the first instance, unlike them, he posits one prime objective of the process of evolution, namely, the emergence out of men a species of beings he calls supermen, while his predecessors took evolution as a process without an ultimate end to achieve, though the idealists maintain that the gradual process of development serves to bring out the true nature of the ideal of human life. The next stage, which is supposed to be the final stage of evolution, like all other stages, can be correctly defined and described when it has become actual. But it can now be defined and described, or simply described, if at all, only in vague terms. Though Sri Aurovinda by the distinction and connection between the Inconscient and the Superconscient aligns his view of evolution to that of the idealists regarding it, it seems that, according to him, the Superconscient acting as a supreme principle brings out of “the ocean of Inconscient being” different qualities at different stages and would assuredly give rise to supermen at the next, which is the same thing, final stage of evolution. But if Sri Aurovinda means what he says, he on the whole subscribes to the view that in evolution Nature works out her plan

5. *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

6. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, Sri Aurovinda Ashrama, Pondicherry 1949, p. 211.

unconsciously, and supermen, like matter, life and mind, would arise in consequence of her unconscious operations. This seems to be part of his original view. But later he altogether changes his conception. Secondly, he derives his conception of supermen rather from the spiritualism of the Veda and Upanishads than from the basic conception of evolution. According to the Hindu scriptures, the ultimate nature and structure of the universe is throughout spiritual. Reality is, in short, the divine Being who holds in his being the world with its diverse levels of existence, such as matter, life and mind, and possibly upwards.

Nietzsche speaks of superman. But his conception of superman is based on the rejection of the Christ-idea and Christian ethics that, according to him, make men effeminate and weak. Nietzsche wants us to exceed the limitations that hamper us in expanding our physical powers. His superman would be only a Titan, and no God. As we know, empires were established in the past in some parts of the world, and there was Caesar or Napoleon. But humanity was not raised to the levels of such great warriors. That was, indeed, an individual ideal realized or to be realized by individuals separately.

Sri Aurovinda, however, says, "The gospel of true supermanhood gives us a generous ideal for the progressive human race and should not be turned into an arrogant claim for a class or individuals. It is a call to man to do what no species has yet done or aspired to do in terrestrial history, evolve itself consciously into the next superior type already half foreseen by the continual cyclic development of the world-idea in Nature's fruitful musings. And when we so envisage it, this conception ranks surely as one of the most potent seeds that can be cast by thought into the soil of our human growth."⁷ Mark the words "evolve itself consciously into the next superior type." By these words Sri Aurovinda

7. Sri Aurovinda, *The Superman*, Sri Aurovinda Ashrama, Pondicherry, 1960, pp. 1-3.

no doubt strikes a new note. Contrary to his previous position that evolution is the unconscious process of Nature-Force, he now maintains that this process from the stage of man towards a higher one is conscious, and that the transition from the former to the latter is conditioned by human efforts. He repeats the same idea when he says, "For Man is Nature's great term of transition in which she grows conscious of her aim ; in him she looks up from the animal with open eyes towards her divine ideal."⁸ We may be told that man is part of Nature and that her further progression necessitates conscious efforts on his part. It is obvious, then, that the process of evolution up to the stage of Man or Mind is unconscious, while it is conscious from man to the next higher stage. In this regard also Sri Aurovinda differs from the evolutionists who came before him. This reorientation of the concept of evolution is highly controversial, however. I may here touch on a small point, namely, whether man is wholesale a part of Nature. It is no doubt true that man in his physical aspect is subject to the laws of Nature and is, indeed, one among the terms of a casual nexus. But man is not merely a physical thing to which consciousness is just an accident. Sri Aurovinda himself would agree that man ethico-spiritual consciousness brings to light the freedom of his will. But there is a contrast between the two sides of human nature. Freedom of the moral will is manifest in the decision he makes as regards the course of action in the face of some alternatives, and that man in his deeper nature is free is shown by the fact that he ever endeavours to transcend himself. Now, if Nature is a sphere of causal necessity, while the realm of moral consciousness is one of freedom, man is obviously a contradiction. We nevertheless cannot enter into it. We shall simply consider whether it has any bearing upon the conception that the conscious evolution through man is the continuation of the same process as is determined by unconscious Nature-Force. Sri Aurovinda may, however, avoid such needless 'subtlety and

8. *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

may insist that Nature operates through man's consciousness as well as he belongs to her. In that case man's consciousness would promote Nature's process of evolution under the necessity of her laws. And the next higher stage, i.e., superman would come up as a must. But Sri Aurobinda negatives this view. He says, "If the Consciousness-Force of the Infinite has manifested Life after manifesting Matter and Mind after manifesting Life, it does not follow that it will proceed to manifest Supermind as the next terrestrial creation. For Mind and Supermind belong to quite different hemispheres, Mind to the lower status of the Ignorance, Supermind to the higher status of the Divine knowledge"⁹. He further says, "But if a superior creation is intended, then, certainly, it is not out of man that the new grade, type or pattern can develop ; for in that case there would be some race or kind or make of human beings that has already the material of the superman in it, just as the peculiar animal being that developed into humanity had the essential elements of human nature already potential or present in it ; there is no such race, kind or type, at most there are only spiritual mental beings who are seeking escape out of the terrestrial creation."¹⁰

Waiving the question regarding the nature of evolution, let us consider how Sri Aurobinda comes by the conception of superman.

Sri Aurobinda first cites some evidence for superman as the next higher stage. Human beings are ever imperfect. "But in this constant imperfection," he says, "there is always a craving and an aspiration towards perfection. Man, limited, yearns to be Infinite ; relative, is attracted in all things towards their absolute ; artificial in nature, drives towards a higher case, mastery and naturalness that must for ever be denied to her inconscient forces and half-conscient animals ; full of

9. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II. pp. 986-987.

10. *Op. cit.*, p, 991.

discords, he insists upon harmony ;... What he aspires to, is the sign of what he may be.”¹¹ All this reminds us of F. H. Bradley’s view that man ever endeavours to transcend himself and realize what exceeds him and the world. But as regards Sri Aurobinda’s view, one point must be made clear. It is : how could he ever conceive of superman in some positive terms when superman has not yet come into being ? As we see, Sri Aurobinda speaks about superman as both a seer and a philosopher. As we have already seen, he has the conception of a higher stage beyond by an analysis of the self-transcending of man. He ever seeks full knowledge, harmony and perfection. This shows that what he aspires to is immanent in him and can be brought into concrete being. Again, Sri Aurobinda says, “The action of intuitive intelligence is keen and luminous enough to penetrate and modify, but not large and whole enough to swallow up into itself and abolish the mass of Ignorance and Inconscience ... Still, even in our present state, a participation of a kind is there and our normal intelligence is sufficiently awake for the universal Conscious Force to work through it.”¹²

This mystical aspect of his view about man and the ultimate reality Sri Aurobinda brings out in a statement which reads thus :

“As the existence of the Divine is in its nature an infinite consciousness and the self-power of that consciousness, so the nature of its infinite consciousness is pure and infinite bliss ; self-possession and self-awareness are the essence of its self-delight. The cosmos also is a play of this divine self-delight and the delight of the play is entirely possessed by the universal ; but in the individual owing to the action of ignorance and division it is held back in the subliminal and the

11. Sri Aurobindo, *The Superman*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1960, p. 9.

12. *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 1101.

superconscient being; on our surface it lacks and has to be sought for, found and possessed by the development of the individual consciousness towards universality and transcendence"¹³.

It seems that in this quotation we have a deep analysis of the conception of the Supreme Being as *Sachchidānanda*—Existence—Knowledge—Bliss absolute. Here, however, we find a fuller conception of Reality. Sri Aurobinda, in fact, poses seven, or rather eight principles in order to explain our existence. They are :

Existence	Matter
Consciousness-Force	Life
Bliss	Psyche
Supermind	Mind. ¹⁴

The first group of principles cover the spiritual world and constitute the different aspects of the divine Being, while the second group make up the empirical world. Sri Aurobinda suggests that supermind represents the line between the two worlds. But he does not mean that the two worlds are apart. In his view, the empirical world is the manifestation of the Supreme Being. If the Infinite excludes the finite manifoldness, it is a false Infinite and is really finite as it is limited by what it excludes." This supermind then is the Truth or Real-Idea, inherent in all cosmic force and existence, which is necessary ; itself remaining infinite, to determine and combine and uphold relation and order and the great lines of manifestation."¹⁵

I may here deviate from my analysis to refer to Philo, an Alexandrian philosopher of the first century A.D. He was a contemporary of Jesus Christ, though he did not live in Palestine. Philo's philosophy has relevance to our discussion because of his doctrine of the Logos or divine wisdom, which

13. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 315.

14. *Op. cit.*, p. 316.

15. *Op. cit.*, p. 319.

has a resemblance to Sri Aurobinda's doctrine of supermind. According to Philo, in the beginning there was only the divine Being enveloped in his infinitude. Then out of him arose the Logos which he called the First-born. It was in fact divine wisdom or a vast plan in the mind of God that prefigured the creation of things and beings of the world. Though the Logos was the first to emerge, yet it was a principle confined within the spiritual world, only tending towards creation. Sri Aurobinda sometimes describes supermind as divine Wisdom or Truth-Consciousness. And I think we can best understand supermind in the light of Philo's doctrine of the Logos.

We must, however, restrain ourselves. We should not go away with the idea that there is no difference between Sri Aurobinda's conception of supermind and Philo's doctrine of the Logos. We have to recognize the fact that Logos is a creative principle which operates with the help of Ignorance, while supermind both descends through ignorance for the purpose of creation and descends with light to the lower regions for their supramental transformation.

We shall do well to consider here the gulf created between Mind as we know it and supermind which is Truth-Consciousness. Mind, indeed, in its ignorance, gropes towards Truth and conceives it by means of constructions. It is to be noted, however, that in some ways human mind transcends itself. Intuition is one of such ways. But intuition, Sri Aurobinda tells us, "is in its very nature a projection of the characteristic action of these higher grades into the mind of Ignorance."¹⁶ A flash of intuition on the part of mind, indeed, gleams forth across the gulf that Ignorance posits between the two worlds. Nevertheless, supermind descends into the lower world not only in Ignorance, but also with the

16. *Op. cit.*, p. 328.

light of Truth-Consciousness. In the latter case the descent of supermind is conditional.

"It is time", says Sri Aurobinda, "that the spiritual urge has been largely other-worldly or turned at its extreme towards a spiritual negation and self-annihilation of the mental individual ; but this is only one side of its tendency maintained and made dominant by the necessity of passing out of the kingdom of the fundamental Inconscience ; overcoming the obstacle of the body, casting away the obscure vital, getting rid of the ignorant mentality, the necessity to attain first and foremost, by a rejection of all these impediments to spiritual being, to a spiritual status."¹⁷ Sri Aurobinda means to say that the spiritualists of the past simply tried to escape or escaped out of the meshes of the empirical world and bodily life. In Nirvāṇa or in Samādhi the aspirant rose above ignorance to attain enlightenment or to realize Truth or Brahman, rejecting body and mind as imperfect. This is how Sri Aurobinda reads the spiritual experiences and achievements of seers and saints. He seeks to clarify his mission by contrast.

There is, Sri Aurobinda points out, another side of spiritual life in which the aspirant seeks to obtain mastery over Nature, and a spiritual perfection of his being, "a divinisation of the mind, the heart and the very body ; there has been the dream... of a new earth and heaven, a city of God, a divine descent of God not only within us but outside in a collective human life."¹⁸ The upshot of this statement is this, that in future the human race will be totally transformed into a new species of beings by the descent of supermind into them. But supermind with its effective force can descend and work only in the conditions of light or knowledge. But the conditions of light have to be created by human beings themselves. In the final form of transformation the soul passes into "completely

17. *The Life Divine*, Vol. II. part II, p. 1008

18. *Ibid.*, p. 1009.

80 315

effective self-knowledge." Supermind or Truth-Consciousness, in that case, finds Nature ready and descends into the lower grades of being to create supramental, spiritual beings. But supermind cannot effect transformation in the body and mind out of grace.

"But the supreme grace will act" Sri Aurobinda says, "only in the conditions of the Light and the Truth ; it will not act in conditions laid upon it by the Falsehood and the ignorance"¹⁹. Two conditions must be fulfilled for the purpose of effective transformation. These are, "opening from below" and descending from above. That is to say, there must be complete surrender of the physical, vital and the mental to the Divine. There should be no compromise with the Falsehood. On the contrary, there must be a total rejection of all that is limited and imperfect. Supermind does not directly act upon the ego and empirical consciousness. The task of eliminating the ego and all that ensues out of it falls on the aspirant. So long as he has the sense of the 'I' and of the body, he must endeavour to clear them away by surrendering to the Divine all the aspects of his being, physical, vital, and mental. This overall process of surrendering Sri Aurobinda calls integral Yoga. But this Yoga is not binding upon all men ; it is only binding upon those who have been seized by the sense of the Infinite that transcends us and the world. In other words, only those who have institution of the supreme Being would cleanse their inner as well as outer being by integral yoga. But there are sceptics and they must be convinced by reasoning about possible descent of supermind into the lower grades of being. Sri Aurobinda for his part devotes volumes to the delineating of his theme. And in his discourses he presses into service both mysticism and metaphysics for the purpose. It may seem that there is one difficulty in the way of integral yoga, namely, that a good

19. *The Mother*, p. 2.

many of the processes in body, life, and mind fall beyond the scope of consciousness. And as yoga proceeds through the medium of consciousness, these processes and principles cannot be brought under the yoga of surrender with the result that integral yoga remains incomplete. Sri Aurobinda, however, reassures us: "Surrender must be total and seize all the parts of the being. It is not enough that the psychic should respond and the higher mental accept or even the inner vital submit and the inner physical consciousness feel the influence."²⁰

As we have already seen, according to Sri Aurobindo, the supreme Being, or supermind does not descend out of grace into men and transform them into spiritual beings as he conceives them. The proper condition of the descent of the Divine must be fulfilled by men, some of them at least. They are not to rely on mind or intellect, which is an instrument of ignorance; they are to look deep into their nature and possess the inmost law of their being. And all the aspects of their being must be opened to the Divine. "Even the inconscient and subconscious have to become conscient in us, susceptible to the higher light, no longer obstructive to the fulfilling action of the Conscious-Force, but more and more a mould and lower basis of the spirit."²¹ The supramental change in body and mind does not occur at haphazard. It can happen only when these are cleansed and surrendered to the operation of Truth-Consciousness.

A field would thus be set up for the working of the supreme Light in order to establish on earth a gnostic Consciousness and to embody it in spiritual or gnostic beings. But what would gnostic beings be like? Sri Aurobindo vividly describes them. I shall do well to quote him:

"A supramental or gnostic race of beings would not be a

20. *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

21. *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, part II, p. 1107.

race made according to a single type, moulded in a single fixed pattern ; for the law of the supermind is unity fulfilled in diversity, and therefore there would be an infinite diversity in the manifestation of the gnostic consciousness although that consciousness would still be one in its basis, in its constitution, in its all-revealing and all-uniting order.

A supramental gnostic individual will be a spiritual person, but not a personality in the sense of a pattern of being marked out by a settled combination of fixed qualities, a determined character ; he cannot be that since he is a conscious expression of the universal and the transcendent.

“His life would be a movement in the steps of a spiritual liberty and largeness replacing the law of the mental idea and the law of vital and physical need and desire and the compulsion of a surrounding life ; his life and action would be bound by nothing else than the Divine Wisdom and Will acting on him and in him according to its Truth-Consciousness.”²²

In a supramental being or superman, in short, matter and life would be spiritualized and mind divinized, finite would become infinite and mortal immortal. We in our lives are in the constant fear of death. We, indeed, live in the midst of death, which has been considered a major evil in the world from the time of Job in the Old Testament to this day. The supramental descent into, and the transformation of, a human being or human beings would eliminate death and would establish on earth a new heaven in which the spiritual beings would enjoy eternal life in deathless bodies.

There is no denying that the ideal Sri Aurobinda adumbrates is very difficult to realize. He, indeed, thrusts upon men a great task if he even aspires to be instrumental in the working out of the divine plan, namely, supramentalization of his whole kind.

Sri Aurobinda streamlined his theory in his *magnum opus*

22. *Op. cit.*, p. 1155, 1182, 1194.

The Life Divine. It means that through a consummate yoga by man the Divine would descend into him and totally transform his being, including his physical basis.

Sri Aurobinda's position is clearly distinct from that of the Advaitist. According to the latter, Brahman is the sole reality and the world is not logically implicated in the being of Brahman. There is really no multiplicity. The world only appears there to be sublated in the highest state of spiritual experience, i.e., *nirvikalpa samādhi*. According to Sri Aurobinda, however, even the material world is real and exists to be transformed into the perfect medium of spirit. And through the supramentalization of all the aspects of their being human beings would be transformed into deathless all-perfect spiritual beings.

As we see, Sri Aurobinda's theory of supermanhood and that of enlightened humanism go together as man would prove to be the pivot on which supramental transformation of matter, life and mind would turn. Man, indeed, would determine his own destiny as well as the destiny of the world—a life in spirit, by fulfilling the condition of descent of the Divine into him, which is nothing less than a complete surrender to him. In this, undoubtedly, man, though steeped in ignorance, is given the role of a fellow-worker of the Divine in bringing about a new heaven on earth.

SRI AUROBINDA'S THEORY OF SUPERMAN

(*Comments on Dr. A. C. Das's Paper*)

BY

Dr. Ramchandra Pal

I MUST at the outset thank the authorities of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, for permitting me to comment on my revered teacher Dr. A.C. Das's illuminating paper on Sri Aurobinda's theory of Superman. He has rightly opened his discussion with the genesis and development of the concept of evolution obviously because in Sri Aurobinda's theory the evolution of Superman is as much important as its characterisation. For the fruitful germination of the concept of evolution Charles Darwin's is the most prominent name in the history of European thought. There are no doubt thinkers who hold the view that the idea of evolution was first brought into prominence in the philosophical studies by Hegel (1770-1831) and Comte (1798-1857), and subsequently applied by Lamarck, Darwin and others to the origin of species. There are also historians who would trace the idea of evolution among the pre-Socratic thinkers of Greece. But the fact remains that the concept of evolution, owes its prominence more to Charles Darwin than to anybody else, and Dr. Das's reference to his theory of evolution while tracing the genesis of this concept appears to be fully justified. Dr. Das has pointed out how the biological theory of the Origin of Species of Darwin was utilised by Spencer for giving an account of cosmic evolution, and how the idea of evolution came to be subsequently enriched by Pringle-Pattison when he introduced the idea of teleological evolution. Dr. Das has referred to S. Alexandar for another instance of how the idea of evolution became further enriched. To sum up, Dr. Das has sought to show how the idea of evolution has been itself evolving since the

publication of Darwin's book, "The Origin of Species" in 1859. Dr. Das has carefully noted two features in S. Alexander's theory of evolution. First, the process of evolution has not ceased with the emergence of human beings. Secondly, there is no clear formulation of the ultimate end of evolution in his Philosophy of evolution. It is interesting to see how Sri Aurobinda has enriched our thought on both these issues.

In paragraph 6 Dr. Das has quoted from Sri Aurobinda to indicate his idea of evolution as a gradual realisation of some possibility prepared and even necessitated by previous states and tendencies.

This is in substantial agreement to the current biological and philosophical theories of evolution. Dr. Das has rightly noted however one significant point of departure of Sri Aurobinda's theory from the basic western idea of evolution in that he subscribes to the Vedic idea of the triple world, material, vital and mental penetrating each other. This naturally does not allow him to accept an account of evolution in terms of a mechanical flow from matter. On the other hand, Sri Aurobinda believes that although out of the inconscient ocean of being out of the unmanifest material prius the manifest spirit constantly emerges, there is althrough behind it the role of a superconscience guiding the operation of evolution. Dr. Das notices here two special features in Sri Aurobinda's thought, first, his recognition of a supreme objective of the process of evolution, viz., the evolution of superman ; and secondly, his indebtedness more to the Vedas and Upanishads than to the prevailing western conception of evolution. I beg to observe, however, that Sri Aurobinda did not obviously obtain his theory of evolution in a finished form from the ancient scriptures of India, although he developed the germ of such thought in the Vedas.

In paragraph 12 Dr. Das refers to Nietzsche's conception of superman in terms of the emergence of Titans, the expansion of physical powers—an idea basically different

from Sri Aurobinda's idea of supermanhood as fulfilment of the spiritual potentiality in man. Dr. Das has elaborated this point by an apt quotation from Sri Aurobinda.

But how will the evolution of superman operate? Dr. Das thinks that Sri Aurobinda has struck here a new note that man may be said to evolve of himself consciously into the next superior type. Dr. Das has pointed out that in Sri Aurobinda's view the transition of man to a higher stage is conscious. But since consciousness may have many degrees, it would be a highly interesting study to note how this consciousness may gradually unfold itself in course of the anticipated evolution of superman. This is obviously beyond the purview of the present paper.

In paragraph 14 Dr. Das has offered his own estimate of man's capacity for freeing himself from the causal nexus of natural forces. Man is as it were the meeting ground of two tides, one, the mechanical process operating from inconscient nature and the other felt as an urge to go beyond the chains of physical necessity. Man is not apart from Nature and yet can transcend the natural forces. To my mind Dr. Das seeks to offer a rational of Sri Aurobinda's theory of conscious evolution at the higher stage and appears therefore to be driving towards the point that man, though *ab initio* continuous with unconscious Nature—force is yet—partly in actuality and partly in potentiality—distinct from it. It is as it were a relation of continuity-cum-distinctness.

Next, Dr. Das comes to discuss if the next higher stage, i.e., superman would come up as a 'must'. He interprets Sri Aurobinda as holding the view that there is no natural necessity that superman will emerge. Mind and supermind belong to quite different hemispheres, it is not a matter of necessity that the consciousness—Force of the Infinite will proceed to manifest supermind as the next terrestrial creation after manifesting Mind.

In paragraph 16 Dr. Das leaves aside the nature of evolu-

tion, and concentrates upon the conception of superman. If human aspiration is an index to his future,—if 'what he aspires to is the sign of what he may be'—supermanhood implies perfection, infinitude, absoluteness and harmony. Dr. Das asks : how could Sri Aurobinda even understand superman in some positive terms when supermanhood has not yet been actualised ? This is essentially a problem of inference—a problem which a logician cannot ignore. Dr. Das offers, however, a possible defence of Sri Aurobinda's view in that the formulation of a higher stage beyond manhood by an analysis of the self-transcending of man is possible for a seer, if not for a mere philosopher. Since we sense here an ultimate appeal to the mystical aspect of Sri Aurobinda's view about man in relation to the ultimate reality, we beg to refrain from offering our comments on it. If Sri Aurobinda as a philosopher has to face this critical inquiry, the seer's vision of that stage of evolution does not however suffer especially because it appears to be fully vindicated by the Upanishadic account of ultimate reality as divine self-delight. The ramblings of logic appear here to be silenced by a profound sense of mystery.

In paragraph 20 Dr. Das incidentally refers to Philo's conception of the Logos which in his opinion is helpful to understanding of Sri Aurobinda's doctrine of supermind. But we do not like to comment on his view because he himself recognises substantial difference between Sri Aurobinda's conception of supermind and Philo's doctrine of the Logos.

In paragraph 25 Dr. Das has raised a pertinent question as to whether the supermind's descent may be just a matter of grace. On page 15 he points out that Nature must prepare herself to receive the supermind before it can descend. For effective transformation of Nature 'there must not only be 'descending from above' but 'opening from below.' But if the conditions for descent of the supermind, when fulfilled, necessitate the evolution of the higher stage, does it not

restrict the freedom of the supermind or mean the unfettered law of natural necessity? Obviously, if freedom does not mean arbitrariness, denial of the latter does not necessarily mean the negation of the former.

We like to observe here that the twofold conditions for the evolution of supermind fully tally with the following spirit of the *Srimad Bhāgavad Gītā* (vide 10/10-11).

Divine Compassion is not unwarranted; since it is for those who are constantly united with the Lord. In the language of Sri Aurobinda 'descending from above' is for those who have already striven from below.

Dr. Das has discussed the question as to whether all superminds would be of the same type. Since Sri Aurobinda recognises diversity in this regard, the ultimate end of evolution would appear to be a community of superminds.

Dr. Das has incidentally touched upon the points of difference between the general position of Sri Aurobinda and that of the Advaitins. The points of difference marked out by him are brief but cogent. It will, however, be a more interesting study to compare Sri Aurobinda's position with Ramanuja's. I suggest that Ramanuja's conception of the ideal human virtues after the pattern of their absolute archetypes in God—of the duties of man as the realisation of the of the divine perfections—may be interpreted as the conception of the community of divine associates of the Lord, and that it indicates how the next higher stage for man might emerge from Ramanuja's point of view. This is, however, a matter not strictly within the purview of Dr. Das's paper.

AN APPROACH TO EXISTENTIALISM FROM THE STANDPOINT OF SRI AUROBINDA

By

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I

EXISTENTIALISM is one of the leading philosophical movements in the West in modern times. It is a philosophy of protest against rationalism, idealism, supernaturalism and other-worldliness. It represents a reaction of the philosophy of Man against the excesses of the traditional philosophy of ideas and the philosophy of things. It is the dominant theme of contemporary literature and philosophy in many cases; but it is presented in so many diverse forms that it is extremely difficult to offer any general definition of Existentialism.

Our object here is to study Existentialism from the standpoint of Sri Aurobinda in so far as the latter is also a philosophy of Man and imbibes a spirit of dynamic activism. But Existentialism, we submit, is an incomplete philosophy and it requires a corrective. We venture to show how the different problems posed by Existentialism can receive a better treatment at the hands of Sri Aurobinda.

II

Existentialism is no well developed, well knit system. It has been presented in different patterns and from different perspectives. Still the different forms have some common features, and we shall confine our discussion to them.

Existentialism, as the name itself indicates, emphasises the priority of *existence* over *essence*. Essence is *what* a thing is, and existence *that* it is. It is alleged that ever since the days of Plato philosophers have been emphasising the essence of

things as distinguished from their existence. The existentialists aim at reversing this order of emphasis—they argue that an individual first *is* and then he is what he is. But existence does not simply indicate a static state—it is primarily an *act*; it means an actual transition from possibility to actuality. This transition, however, has got to be effected by an individual and does not happen automatically. Existentialism is thus an attempt at ‘philosophizing from the standpoint of an *actor*, instead of from that of a *spectator*’.

Existence, in the sense of transition, can be possible, only if the individual possesses *liberty* or *freedom*. One must have the freedom to choose what one wishes to be. Again, man’s existence implies existence in a *situation*; but since man is a free being, he is not determined by the situation. This in its turn confers *responsibility* on man. He is a free as well as a responsible being. The freedom of man also presupposes the absence of any pre-existing ‘norm’ determining or guiding his course of action. What man does and will do cannot be dictated from outside—it cannot be laid down by God, society, state or any other authority. Man finds himself in the midst of paradoxes and irrationalities. Thus he finds himself constantly *engaged* without having engaged himself. He finds himself *alone* and he experiences an *anguish*. The burden of freedom in the midst of a perplexing world-situation with which man is confronted makes him feel an anguish.

As a philosophical way of thinking existentialism may be traced back to ancient Greek Philosophy; but it receives its present-day impetus from Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish Philosopher, and Friedrich Nietzsche, the German thinker. Existentialism is a developing philosophy, and it has various ramifications. Modern Existentialists are, however, broadly divided into two groups—Right and Left. The Rightists are more or less softer in their outlook and adopt a theistic world-view, while the Leftists are uncompromising in their attitude and adopt an atheistic philosophy. Karl Jaspers and Gabriel

Marcel are the noted Rightists, and Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre are looked upon as the typical Leftists among the Existentialists. It should be noted, however, that all commentators (and even perhaps the philosophers themselves) may not agree to this labelling.

III

Let us now turn to Sri Aurobinda. He is no professional philosopher spinning theories. He is deeply concerned with the problem of man, and is eager to show mankind a way out of the morass in which it finds itself landed. Thus his interest lies in man's existential problems.

Sri Aurobinda visualises the entire universe as spiritual. The Spirit, as the support and principle of all existence, has three aspects: transcendent, cosmic and individual. The present cosmic manifestation is the result of a double movement: involution and evolution. Involution is the process by which the Universal Consciousness-Force voluntarily limits itself and 'veils' itself by stages till it moves down to the level of dense inconscience, *i.e.*, matter. The opposite process of involution is evolution by which the universal Consciousness-Force gradually unveils itself and moves forward from the level of matter. Upto the present stage of evolution matter, life and mind have emerged, and there is no reason why it should not move to the emergence of the Supermind.¹ The Supermind and the triune aspects of Reality (*Sat-chit-ānanda*) which are not yet in our front, but which are the secret principles to be realized. So man is not the last word of

1. According to Sri Aurobinda evolution is to pass through the following stages: matter (*jaḍa*), life (*prāṇa*), psyche (*caitanya-puruṣa*), mind (*manas*), Supermind (*vijñāna*), Bliss (*Ānanda*), Consciousness-Force (*cit-śakti*). Evolution can move progressively through these stages, because it was preceded by the Involution of the Supreme Consciousness-Force in the reverse order.

evolution, but he has to transcend himself, and to help the emergence or the advent of the supermind, the potentialities for which lie dormant in him. Man's highest aspiration is for perfection—he longs for freedom and mastery, for pure Truth and unmixed Bliss ; he can have his aspirations fulfilled only if he helps his self-development. Thus a great responsibility devolves on man. He must cooperate with Nature in bringing forth that for which he bears a promise within his own *svabhāva*, within the law of his own being. To quote Sri Aurobinda, "Man has seen that there can be a higher status of consciousness than his own ; the evolutionary oestrus is there in his parts of life and mind, the aspiration to exceed himself is delivered and articulate within him. In him, then, the substitution of a conscious for a subconscious evolution has become conceivable and practicable, and it may well be concluded that the aspiration, the urge, the persistent endeavour immanent is a sure sign of Nature's will for a higher way of fulfilment, the emergence of a greater status."²

The Superman of Sri Aurobinda's vision is not a mere dream. The cosmic evolution has a nisus towards the emergence of the Superman. By the practice of yoga the individual mind may also rise to the level of the Supermind. As a result of yoga the individual self will be united with the Divine self, the terrestrial will be united with the transcendental. This is called Integral Yoga. This yoga involves not only an ascent to the Divine, but also a descent of Godhead into the embodied nature. By the practice of Integral Yoga Sri Aurobinda aims not only at rising to the supra-mental level, but also making it a permanent station of Divine Consciousness. Of course to have this the individual must make a complete surrender to the Divine and win the Grace of the Supreme Being. The Superman is not an embodiment of physical force, but a perfect expression of the Spiritual force. He is Divine Gnosis

2. *The Life Divine*, p. 1005.

or Wisdom incarnate. He will be on the supra-moral level—he will not cease to be moral, but will transcend morality through his higher development. Further, the Superman is not an isolated individual, but is related to the entire humanity. He reaches his fulfilment or completion in relation to, and in association with, others. He is fired with a sense for responsibility for the entire cosmic welfare.

IV

Both Sri Aurobinda and the Existentialists are indifferent to the building up of a systematic theoretical philosophy. They are interested in philosophizing out of their interest in man, and so their philosophizing begins from man rather than nature. In fact, Sri Aurobinda turned to philosophic meditation after his heroic revolutionary struggle for the freedom of his motherland. He at first wanted to remove the sorrows and sufferings of his countrymen which they experienced under a foreign rule. Then he was led to the consideration of the redemption of entire mankind. Thus the Existentialist and Sri Aurobinda would both agree to what Fichte said to Jacobi: "We philosophise out of our need for redemption." Both try to 'see reality with fresh vision'.

But Existentialists begin their philosophizing by rejecting the traditional philosophies—they are opposed to idealism as well as naturalism, rationalism as well as the empirical scientific procedure. They simply speak of diverse possibilities of human existence, and as there is no guide-line their philosophy in most cases ends in some kind of 'idiosyncrasy and fantasy'. And herein Sri Aurobinda differs in his approach. He does not simply criticise the traditional philosophical systems, for he realises that mere opposition is of no avail. He discovers truth in the different systems and tries to reconcile them. He does not proceed simply by dichotomizing, but by reconciling. His is an *integral approach*. This integral view comprehends

Being in its multi-dimensional fulness. From this standpoint he rejects neither the One nor the many, neither the Being nor the Becoming, but looks upon them as parts of a single pattern. Again, as a philosopher of man, he does not look upon man as a natural thing, but as a free existent, responsible for realising his own end. Philosophizing does not arise simply from man's involvement in the present situation, but from his awareness of individual selfhood.

Further, the philosophical discussions of the Existentialists generally centre round the analysis of human existence within its own limits, and so their philosophy becomes mostly descriptive. Of course thinkers like Heidegger and Marcel advise us to get behind the particular modes of being of man and the world and to dig beneath the merely sensuous : but on the whole the existential philosophy is limited to the description of the sensible, objective modes of being ; but philosophy, in order to be fruitful, should involve a comprehensive evaluation of life and its problems in the light of some supratemporal, fundamental truths. In other words, the philosopher should gradually disengage himself from his involvement and rise higher. And this is what Sri Aurobinda does. He himself rises higher and shows his fellowmen how through the pathway of Integral Yoga they also can rise high and can have vision of truths of universal import. Thus Sri Aurobinda's philosophy is superior to the Existential Philosophy inasmuch as in it a description of human existence is transcended and supplemented by an attempt to draw out the *full implications* of that experimental situation.

V

The Existentialists are primarily concerned with the problem of existence. But what exactly is 'existence'? The term is taken in the existential literature in its root meaning of 'existence' or 'standing out'. Man has the characteristic of

standing out from other beings, because man is not only aware that he *is*, but is also aware who he is or what he may become. So man as an existent being has the characteristic of emerging from a situation and also of transcending, it. So man's existence is emergent, ecstatic, transcendent, but nevertheless elusive. Man does not have any *fixed* nature. He begins with 'nothingness' and becomes what he makes of himself by his own choice. As Sartre puts it, "We mean that first of all man exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. If man, as the existentialist sees him, is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself."³

Again, for the existentialist, every individual existent has a uniqueness of his own. An individual, in so far as he refers to himself by the pronoun 'I', refers to his own existence as a unique being, claiming a unique position and perspective. As a unique being, an individual existent is primarily self-related—he has his own existence characterised by his free choice. Authenticity implies own-ness; and existence is authentic to the extent that the existent has taken possession of himself and, shall we say, has moulded himself in his *own* image."⁴ There is, however, some difference of opinion among the existentialists as regards the nature of authentic existence. According to Sartre and other atheistic existentialists the authenticity is determined by an individual's own choice, while according to the theistic existentialists it is determined by the demands of God.⁵

But in Sri Aurobinda's Philosophy the notion of existence is better explained. The existentialists speak of the following

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3. Jean Paul Sartre, 'Existentialism is a Humanism' in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (Ed. by Kaufmann), p. 290.
 4. J. Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, p. 161.
 5. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 104.

aspects of human existence ; standing out from others, emergence and transcendence. But Sri Aurobinda shows that man is on the ascending scale of evolution—he has a pre-human past and post-human future ; he is half-animal and half-god. Man is thus not completely separate from the rest of creation, but is vitally linked up with it. This means that man's destiny is intertwined with the destiny of the universe. Again, the concepts of 'emergence' and 'transcendence' become more or less meaningless in the existential context ; for both emergence and transcendence require an explanation. Why should man emerge at all from the lower levels, and why again should he try to transcend his present state ? What is the *nisus* of evolution ? Such questions are not answered in existential philosophy. But Sri Aurobinda can well answer these questions in the light of his theory of involution. The Supreme Reality (which is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) descended by voluntary self-limitation to the level of dense inconscient matter, so that matter is nothing but veiled life and life is nothing but veiled consciousness. Hence as the lower level unveils itself, it emerges into the next higher level. Thus we may account for the evolution of animal life from matter, and human mind from mere animal life. This also explains why man feels an urge for self-transcendence. It is not enough to say that man seeks to transcend himself, for whither does he go by transcending himself : Does he transcend himself into nothingness ? At least the atheistic existentialists would be answering this in the affirmative and would be thus landed in absurdity. Their explanation of authenticity is also highly unsatisfactory. Authenticity of individual existence is not simply determined by the freedom of an individual's choice. The authenticity of existence is determined by some kind of authentic experience. Authentic experience is no doubt dependent on some higher type of knowledge, as for example, on some kind of yogic experience.

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VI

Man's existence is in the world and in relation to others. As Sartre says, "Without the world there is no self-hood, no person ; without self-hood, without the person, there is no world."⁵ In other words, to exist is always to be in confrontation with something which is other than the self. But the existentialists are not sure of the exact role of the world in the human situation. To them the world has an ambiguity.- Thus for Albert Camus the relation between man and the world involves an irrational absurd juxtaposition. Under the influence of the mechanists Camus advises us *not* to read any meaning, any kind of teleology, in evolution.

The existential thinkers have a general apathy or dissatisfaction in relation to this world. Man has a feeling of just being there in the world. In fact, Heidegger uses the expression *Dasein* (Being-there) to indicate man in the world. Man seems to be an unwelcome guest to this world. Similarly, Sartre says that an individual has a feeling of being superfluous (*de trop*) in this world ; so he experiences a kind of nausea in this world.⁶ Of course, thinkers like Marcel strike more or less an optimistic note. Marcel holds that body is a kind of mysterious avenue through which man participates in Being-hood in general.

The problem of man's relation to the human community is more or less the same as that between man and the world. Just as man is dissatisfied with the world, so he is with the society of his fellow-men. Every man basically lives in his own private world, and hence there is a clash of such private worlds. Social life involves hatred, inasmuch as social life means 'robbing of other man's subjective integrity' and Sartre thinks that even love cannot overcome this 'basic hate'. Marcel and Jaspers, however, think that every self is open to

6. See Sartre's novel, *Nausea*, pp. 172-73 (Roquentin's utterances).

another much in the same way as the whole of existence is open to the transcendent.

But this pessimistic outlook as expressed in the writings of some of the Existentialists is completely overcome in the philosophy of Sri Aurobinda. He holds that every human individual is marked by relatedness, uniqueness and transcendence. Man is related to the world and to his fellowmen in a harmonious way. The world is an expression of the Absolute and every individual is also a unique focalisation of the Absolute. The entire universe is permeated by the same spiritual consciousness; this consciousness gradually unveils itself at every step of the evolutionary process. Thus man is not a sudden unrelated emergent thrown into the world, as the Existentialists think. Man and his world are made up of the same stuff, so to speak. Further the indwelling presence of the same Absolute consciousness creates in Nature as well as man the same urge for self-development. The terrestrial and the individual evolution co-operate with each other. So individuality of man is not ego-centric, but cosmo-centric. With the discovery of his ultimate ground of existence, man experiences his authentic individuality. He then realises that he is in kinship with the entire universe.

The existentialists are mostly very much depressed at the sorrows and sufferings of mankind, and they develop a feeling of anguish, a kind of nausea, a sense of alienation in this world. They simply raise the problem of evil and suffering and cannot throw any further light. But Sri Aurobinda in the light of his philosophy of progressive evolution assures us that suffering is not an essential or inalienable feature of life and the world, but constitute just a passing phase. The beginning and end of creation cannot be *Nihil*, but creation is the expression of the *Sacchidānanda* who creates for the sake of delight, sport or *līlā*. The first phenomena of this Delight of Existence are, says Sri Aurobinda, "dual and impure, move between the

the poles of pleasure and pain".⁷ We suffer because we are not fully developed, because at the present stage we are cut off by our primal ignorance from the universal Consciousness-Force. As we shall grow in our spiritual stature, we shall realise that "falsehood and evil have no fundamentality, no power of infinity or eternal being, no self-existence even by latency in the Self-existent, no authenticity of an original inherence."⁸ There is therefore no ground for despondency or anguish. Physical and moral evil together with their consequential sufferings appear with the emergence of Life and Mind ; but these will be overcome when man attains spiritual maturity at the higher stage.

Many existentialists are overburdened with the idea that egosim and hatred dominate the interpersonal relationship between a man and a man. As against them, Sri Aurobinda tells us that egosim and hatred can disappear once an individual can develop an integral outlook. An integrated individual is always conscious of his rootedness in the Superconscient Absolute and is thus free from all sorts of egotism, hatred and ignorance. When an individual develops this outlook and is in unison with the Superconscient, he cannot but love humanity—love then becomes his way of self-expansion.

VII

We are aware how very difficult it is to generalise about Existentialism. We have chosen at random some of the views which are usually associated with Existentialism, and have tried to show how a better solution can be had from the standpoint of Sri Aurobinda. In fact, the trouble with Existentialism is that it raises many problems and asks many questions, but hardly cares to solve them. On the other hand, Sri

7. *The Life Divine*, p. 117.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 715.

Aurobinda in the light of his yogic vision can show us the way. If we follow the lead of Sri Aurobinda, we shall realise that human existence can never be cut off from its essential structure. In his essence man is rooted in the Spirit, and the sooner he realises this, the more he is able to solve the maladies of his existence.

EXISTENTIALISM AND THE STANDPOINT OF SRI AUROBINDA

(Comments on Dr. P. B. Chatterji Paper)

By A. K. Mazumdar

I HAVE gone through Dr. P. B. Chatterji's paper entitled "An approach to Existentialism from the standpoint of Sri Aurobinda" with pleasure and profit. The author has explored new grounds and has presented a refreshingly new analysis of existentialism from the standpoint of Aurobinda's philosophy. Taken independently, the exposition of the philosophy of Aurobinda and that of existentialism are all right. I confess, however, that I do not see any justification of this novel approach to existentialism. For, as we know, existentialism is a decision-making philosophy which is opposed to all kinds of system-building, whereas Sri Aurobinda is a system-builder, *par-excellence*. While Sri Aurobinda is a firm believer in teleological philosophy of evolution and history, the existentialist would dismiss the problem of teleology vs. mechanism as irrelevant to philosophical thinking. While the problem of evil and suffering is an insoluble problem according to the existentialists, for Sri Aurobinda evil and falsehood 'have their roots in the black soil of the unconscious'. Reality or *Sacchidānanda* is, however, evil-free, according to Sri Aurobinda. The starting point of existential philosophy is, of course, existence—human existence, to be precise—, but in Sri Aurobinda's philosophy the starting point is not man as such but integral reality in which spirit and matter are integrated. In the face of these diametrically opposed approaches to philosophy, I fail to see how existentialism and Aurobindoism can be compared significantly.

The author makes certain sweeping remarks and comes to a hasty conclusion that Sri Aurobinda's philosophy is superior to existential philosophy on the following grounds : (a) While existentialism simply speaks of diverse possibilities of human existence without providing any guide-line for the seeker of truth, Sri Aurobinda's integral approach to the problems of philosophy is more satisfactory inasmuch as his criticisms are constructive and he succeeds in reconciling the apparent opposition between unity and multiplicity. (b) Existential philosophy is mostly descriptive and takes a limited view of human existence ; in Sri Aurobinda's philosophy, a description of human existence is transcended and supplemented by an attempt to draw out the full implications of human existence. (How can description be transcended ?). (c) Existential philosophy urges that man is not definable because, to begin with, he is nothing. Sri Aurobinda goes a step farther inasmuch as he assigns the appropriate place to man in the scheme of evolution as a whole. While existentialism fails to explain satisfactorily the emergence and transcendence of man, Sri Aurobinda has offered us a better explanation by drawing our attention to the *nisus* of evolution.

I may be permitted to point out with the utmost humility that to say that one philosophy is superior to another is somewhat pointless in the present context simply because the two philosophies under reference widely differ from each other in their subject-matter and approach. To accuse the existentialists of failure to do what they never professed to do is somewhat unfair. The existentialists never attempted to offer any ready-made solutions of the problems of life. Rather they have drawn our pointed attention to the futility of the so-called "solutions" given by the metaphysicians. It is necessary to bear in mind that Sri Aurobinda never attempted to spin a cobweb of metaphysics ; all that has been presented in the works of Sri Aurobinda is the outcome of the author's yogic

vision. Furthermore, one has to bear in mind that the term "existence" has different significance and connotation for the existentialists and for Sri Aurobinda. While the existentialist lays great emphasis on man's freedom and anguish, Sri Aurobinda looks upon man as a multi-dimensional being. In our actualities we are loyal to our past and present and through our possibilities we project ourselves to the infinite future. The future is not a mere reproduction of the past and the present, it is an 'emergent' although it maintains its continuity with the present and the past. This is the integral truth which man very often misses on account of his blind loyalty to the actualities rather than his awakening to the possibilities. It may be said, therefore, without any fear of contradiction, that while according to existentialism, man is judged by what he is at present, according to Sri Aurobinda man is judged by what he is going to be in future. Herein lies the significance of the markedly opposite attitudes of the existentialist and Sri Aurobinda. This is a truth too precious to be thrown away.

I should like to draw the attention of the author to another observation of his which can hardly be substantiated by facts. In Section IV (p. 35) the author observes: "Sri Aurobinda turned to philosophic meditation after his heroic revolutionary struggle for the freedom of his motherland." It is difficult for me to agree to this. According to his own admission, Sri Aurobinda had mystic or spiritual experience sometime in 1893 when he first returned to India from England. In one of his letters, Sri Aurobinda said that he began his yoga in 1904 without a Guru; in 1908 he received considerable spiritual help from a Maharatta Yogi and discovered the foundations of his *sādhanā*. Therefore, "philosophic meditation" about which the author speaks was not a later event in Sri Aurobinda's life. According to his own statement, the revolu-

tionary work that was undertaken by Sri Aurobinda was also the outcome of spiritual *sādhana*. The observation of Sri Aurobinda to the effect that “nationalism is not a political programme but a religion given to us by God” is significant in this context.

SRI AUROBINDA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Arun Chandra Guha

IN A sense, Aurobinda is an unusual phenomenon in the political life of India. He was basically a man of religion, a philosopher, a mystic and a poet. By education he was a classical scholar. His father Dr. K.D. Ghosh, a completely anglicised Indian, wished his children to be *pucca* Englishmen without even the knowledge of their mother tongue. Early education of Aurobinda was in a missionary school, where English was the medium of education. When he left for England at the age of 7, he could not speak Bengali—his mother tongue. After 14 years' stay in England from his seventh year, he returned to India with nothing but a strong dislike for England and a potential rebel. By an irony of fate Aurobinda turned out to be just the contrary of what his father wanted him to be. He suddenly burst upon the Indian political firmament like a brilliant meteor and suddenly disappeared.

Though he was a poet, a mystic and a man of religion but circumstances and perhaps his mental make up forced him to take the path of revolution. Generally speaking, the Indian National Congress was at that time the mouth-piece of the Indian nation. It was then almost a loyalist body; its method was to make petitions to the Government; its aim was self-government within the British empire. Passing a loyalty resolution was its common feature for many years. It was an organisation of the upper middle class having no contact with the masses. The Congress did not reflect the under-current of political ambition of the nation. Behind the protestation

of loyalty to the British crown and adherence to decent and legal methods of submitting petitions to the Government, there were the grumbings or murmurs of revolt. Even Surendranath organised *Ryot Sabhās* and urged the peasants to combine against the oppression of the zamindars whose interests were zealously protected by the Government. Surendranath toured the whole of India preaching the gospel of unity of the Indian nation and also popularising Mazzini and Garibaldi. Other leaders also frequently made references to Washington, Mazzini, Garibaldi and others. While making such references, these leaders surely evinced an admiration for their methods which were just the opposite of constitutional methods then followed by the Congress. So there were, in fact, two opposing currents in the political life of India.

In that political background, Aurobindo returned to India which then had a muzzled voice and chained hands and feet. In 1906-07, the trio Bal-Pal-Lal were considered the most popular exponents of Indian aspirations. Aurobinda's name was also linked with them. But it should be noted that of these four, only Tilak and Aurobinda had the courage and the temerity of thinking in terms of India's independence, even of working for an armed insurrection. Pal perhaps had his moral scruple about violent methods ; Lal for some time toyed with young revolutionaries but later left them like hot potatoes. In that background, Aurobinda started working for an armed insurrection and talking of freedom.

Aurobinda returned to India in February 1893 when he was only 21. After keeping silent for about 6 months, he contributed some articles in the *Indu Prakash*, a bi-lingual paper of Bombay edited by Deshpande, his Cambridge friend.¹ The main theme of the series, "New Lamps for the Old", was the denunciation of the Congress as it was then. His main objection against the Congress was "It did not represent the

1. Micro-filmed copies of the articles in *Indu Prakash*.

mass of the population.” He said, “The National Congress was not really national, and had not, in any way, attempted to become national...It is not a popular body and had not, in any way, attempted to become a popular body...this class, I call the middle class, which Congress represents.” Aurobindo further argued, “The proletariat is the real key of the situation. Torpid he is and immobile ; he is nothing of an actual force, but he is a very great potential force, and whoever succeeds in understanding and eliciting his strength, becomes, by the very fact, master of the future.” Perhaps, he used the term ‘proletariat’ in its original French meaning rather than in the Marxian sense. In these articles, he used also the term ‘mass’ and in his later writings in the *Bandemātaram*, he uniformly used the word ‘masses’ or ‘millions’ and never ‘proletariat’.

He ridiculed the importance given by the Congress leaders to ‘legal and decent’ methods and said, “...is it true at all of France ? Rather we know that the first step of that fortunate country towards progress was not through any decent and orderly expansion, but through a purification by blood and fire. It was the vast and ignorant proletariat that emerged from a prolonged and almost coeval apathy and blotted out in five terrible years the accumulated oppression of thirteen centuries.” Aurobinda condemned the Congress : “its aims are mistaken, the spirit in which it proceeds, towards their accomplishment, is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and the methods, it has chosen, are not the right methods, and the leaders, in whom it trusts, are not the right sort of men to be leaders.” These articles attracted notice of many quarters, the Government, the Moderate leaders and more significantly of Tilak. Such strong denunciation of their methods, objects and their competence for leadership by a young man of 22, must have appeared to those veteran leaders of the Congress, as an insolent audacity of a young man.

Tilak had already started a secret organisation in Maharashtra and had also attracted the masses into his movement by starting the Shivaji and Ganpati *Utsavs*. Aurobinda liked Tilak's method of having a weapon with two blades—secret organisation of youngmen, and the mass enthusiasm around those two national festivals. Secret organisations in Maharashtra as also in Bengal had by then become an accepted political weapon. About 1896, Aurobindo actively joined a secret society in Maharashtra. In 1897 occurred the assassination of Rand, the Plague Commissioner in Maharashtra. Suspected to be connected with the murder, the Natu Brothers were detained under Regulation XXV of 1827. Tilak was convicted for sedition; the jurors were divided in their verdict of 6 Europeans against and 3 Indians for his innocence. In the next Congress in 1897, these two acts of the Government were bitterly criticised; the detention of the Natu Brothers were described as an example of *lettre de cachet* methods of the Government.

In 1901, Aurobinda came across a Bengali youngman called Jatindranath Bandyopadhyaya, an ardent revolutionary. He travelled upto Baroda seeking military training; as a Bengalee, he could not get any opportunity for that in British army. Aurobinda helped him to enter the Baroda army under the pseudonym Jatinder Upadhyaya. Finding in him a suitable instrument, in 1902, Aurobindo sent him with letters of introduction to P. Mitra and Sarala Devi to organise a secret revolutionary society. This may be called the first positive step taken by Aurobindo in the political field.

Here I may refer to the message Aurobinda gave on the 15th August 1947²—15th August was his birthday as also of the free Indian nation. He said, he had started with some dreams: i) "a revolutionary movement which would create a free and united India", (ii) "the resurgence and liberation of the people

2. The Fifteenth August, 1947.

of Asia" and (iii) "a world-union forming the outer basis of a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind." These are the broad outlines of his political philosophy. These also indicate that he was not a chauvinist or isolationist patriot; his main idea was the establishment of a "fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind." According to his plan of action—"Formation of secret societies was the first step including training for guerillas." For this, he wanted a three-tier plan—i) "a secret revolutionary propaganda and organisation of which the central object was the preparation of an armed insurrection"...(ii) "a public propaganda in order to convert the whole nation to the ideal of independence," and (iii) "an organisation of the people to carry on a public and united opposition and undermining of the foreign rule through an increasing non-co-operation and passive resistance."³

He strongly repudiated the suggestion that "Sri Aurobinda's political standpoint was entirely pacifist or that he denounced terrorism, insurrection etc., as entirely forbidden by the spirit or letter of Hindu religion."⁴ Aurobinda has no hesitation to accept violent methods; but at the same time he thought in the circumstances prevailing in India, "Passive or Defensive Resistance" would be a more suitable instrument. His primary aim was the freedom of India—which, he thought, was essential for the resurgence of Asia and ultimately for a fair world community.

On his arrival in Calcutta, Jatin Banerjee came in contact with the organisations already working there, including *Anushilan Samiti* and *Atmonnati Samiti*. Aurobindo was not the founder of any of these *samitis*. He himself stated, "Barin does not give the true state of things. I was neither the founder nor the leader. It was P. Mitra and Miss Sarala Ghosal who started it (*Anushilan*) at the inspiration of Baron

3. Sri Aurobinda on himself.

4. Bhawani Mandir.

Okakura. They had already started and when I visited Bengal, I came to know about it. I simply kept myself informed of their work. *My idea was an armed revolution in the whole of India.*"³ Even before settling down at Calcutta, he became one of the Vice-Presidents of *Anushilan Samiti*.

In course of his occasional stay in Calcutta, Aurobinda came in contact with important public leaders, including Bepin Chandra Pal, C.R. Das, Subodh Mullick and others. He attended the Barisal Conference (1906). It had a significant impact on his mind which decided this course of action. Lathi charges on the unarmed volunteers and ultimately the forcible suppression of the Conference and the intense but orderly, enthusiasm of the people impressed him. After the Conference, Aurobinda, in company with Bepin Pal, toured some of the districts of East Bengal. This was his first experience of rural Bengal. He took note of the mass enthusiasm which the anti-Partition and Swadeshi movement had roused. He thought a congenial atmosphere for work had been created. He returned to Baroda only to leave it for good to join politics in Bengal.

In 1905-06 an important pamphlet—*Bhawani Mandir*—was secretly printed and distributed in thousands; Aurobinda was its Author. *Bhawani Mandir* contemplated the establishment of some *maths* or temples all over the country where dedicated workers—*sannyasis* in spirit and conduct—would work with the idea of rousing popular enthusiasm for independence. In this document Aurobinda gave a broad outline of the work. "They (workers) will strive to effect in various ways : (i) Lectures and demonstrations suited to an uneducated intelligence, (ii) Classes and nightly schools, (iii) religious teachings, (iv) Nursing the sick, (v) Conducting work of charity, (vi) Whatever other good work their hands may find to do and the order approves."⁴ The idea elaborated in this pamphlet was to establish an *Order of Sannyasis*—a band of devoted workers.,

In that pamphlet, for the middle class, he prescribed "various works of public utility in the big towns and elsewhere." For the wealthy classes, he prescribed "to turn the minds of rich men to work of public beneficence and charity to those in their neighbourhood." Here one may see an idea similar to Gandhi's ideas of change of heart and of Trusteeship.

He stated "India needs *Shakti* alone", and urged that what, we must strive to acquire before all others, is strength—strength physical, strength mental, strength moral, but above all strength spiritual which is the one inexhaustible and imperishable source of all the others." According to this document *Bhawani Mandir*, the nation is "the *Shakti* of its millions", and our mother Country, "is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty *Shakti*, composed of the *Shaktis* of all the millions of units that make up the nation."⁵ All along, Aurobinda identified the nation with the "millions"—the masses; and on the other hand, he deified the country as the Mother Supreme. The millions of people are the repository of the *Shakti* of the mother. Service to the nation was a part of man's religion. Youngmen of his time took up the work of national liberation as a part of their religion. Bankim's famous *Bandematarm* song strengthened his idea of identification of the Motherland with the Mother Supreme.

This paper, *Bhawani Mandir*, naturally attracted the attention of the Government. According to I. B. Report "*Bhawani Mandir* was nothing but a gigantic scheme for establishing a central religious society, outwardly, religious, but in spirit, energy and work political... The argument shows that extraordinary adroitness with which its author has misinterpreted the Vedantist ideas for his own purpose."⁶ The I. B. Officer, Denham later on commented— "The

5. Sri Aurobinda and the New Thought in Politics—Haridas and Uma Mukherjee.

6. Life of Sri Aurobinda—A. B. Purani.

whole revolutionary movement in India was carefully thought out by the author of the pamphlet—*Bhawani Mandir*—and that the attainment of *Shakti*, which was so carefully hidden under a religious veil in *Bhawani Mandir* was shown by the *Jugantar* articles in its nakedness.” He also reported—“The pamphlet *Bhawani Mandir* is but a clear forerunner of the far stronger meat which was served in the *Jugantar*.”

Aurobinda came to Bengal in July, 1906. *Bandemataram* started on August 6, by Bepin Chandra Pal with a sum of Rs. 500/- donated by Haridas Haldar; and almost immediately, Aurobinda joined the paper at the request of Pal. He also joined the National College as its Principal. But soon political difference developed between Pal and other colleagues—particularly “with regard to secret revolutionary activities... to which Pal was opposed.”⁷ So, Bepin Chandra Pal left editorship and Aurobinda conducted the paper till his arrest on 2nd May, 1908. Policy of the paper was “(i) To support violence against violence, and it was shown that it was indispensable to do so. (ii) If injustice was not opposed, the enthusiasm, perseverance and unity, so necessary to win independence, would weaken considerably. (iii) To return blow for blow, to stand against attack, awaken manhood in the nation. This is very important for an oppressed nation. (iv) Treachery and perfidy to the nation, if they are not punished, do not stop. v) A nation that wants to be free must be ready to face tyranny and persecution. *Oppression is God's method of preparing a nation.*”⁸ Aurobinda said “We are iron on His anvil and the blows are showering upon us, not to destroy but to recreate. Without suffering, there can be no growth.”⁸ This is the main idea of his politics. From this ideal, he advised Bhupen Datta, prosecuted as the editor of *Jugantar*, not to put up any defence. The ideal of courting suffering and self-immolation was intended to rouse the dormant conscience of the nation.

7. *The Liberator*—Sri Aurobinda—(by) Sisir Kumar Mitra.

This ideal found expression in the martyrdom of Khudiram, Prafulla Chaki, Kanai Dutta, Satyen Bose, Charu Bose and Biren Datta Gupta in 1908-10. This ideal all through guided the workers of *Jugantar Party*—founded under his direct inspiration.

The *Bandemataram* put before the nation the programme of Boycott, Swadeshi, National Education and Passive Resistance with the ideal of forming a parallel Government. The paper *Jugantar* was started in March, 1906 with the sanction of Aurobinda. The paper was to preach open revolt and total defiance of British rule even encouraging guerilla warfare. In the beginning Aurobinda wrote some editorials for *Jugantar*, this was intended to provide a guide line and direction to the actual conductors of the paper.

Before Aurobinda came to Calcutta, he had made up his mind about his political objectives and that was to prepare country for an armed insurrection,—a step preparatory for the revolution. At Calcutta, he had previous contacts with P. Mitra and his *Anushilan Samiti* as also with *Atmonnati Samiti*. Both these organisations were engaged in physical culture, *lathi* play etc. But when it became apparent that these associations would not seriously take up the work of organising armed bands of youngmen, Barin took up the work of building up a new organisations. The first step had already been taken by the starting of the paper *Jugantar*. During the Congress Session of 1906, there was a conference of workers of different districts in Subodh Mullick's house. Aurobinda addressed the workers as to the programme of work and the method of organisation. Thus was established a direct contact with the district workers. Barin toured the districts and started collection of arms and manufacture of bombs in Manicktala garden, their ancestral property. Aurobinda was, often invited to visit the garden, but not so frequently. Some other youngmen established contacts with the Indian soldiers in Fort William. This was

in line with Aurobinda's expectation of the possibility of a mutiny. In pursuance of this, the Jat Regiment in the Fort William was contacted ; some of them were later on court-martialled.

To implement his objective of having "a public propaganda intended to convert the whole nation to the ideal of independence", four papers were started : *Bandemataram*, *Sandhya*, *Navashakti* and *Jugantar* which were persistently preaching the cult of Indian independence and of armed revolution. These papers had an informal common editorial board with Aurobinda as its head. These papers were preaching the same gospel of national independence—only with the difference of using either an outspoken or a subtle language. *Jugantar* and *Sandhya* were using very blunt language ; while *Bandemataram* and *Navashakti* using more subtle language. At one time Aurobinda took up the direct editorship of *Navashakti*. Bramhabandhab Upadhyaya of *Sandhya* was also closely associated with the *Bandemataram* and similarly Aurobinda was also taking interest in *Sandhya*. These papers had a definite contribution to rouse the conscience of the dormant people. The broad policy of these four papers was provided by Aurobinda—"Our ideal is that of Swaraj or absolute autonomy free from foreign control. We claim the right of every nation to live its own life, by its own energies and according to its own culture and ideals."

In *Bandemataram*, he was preaching his policies in a very subtle manner ; never could the Government launch a case against the editorials of *Bandemataram*. The editor of the *Statesman* complained that these editorials were "too diabolically clever, crammed full of sedition between the lines, but legally unattackable because of the skill of the language."³ The prosecution launched against *Bandemataram* in 1907, was not for any editorial but for something appearing in the correspondents' columns.

Aurobinda's claim for independence was always based on "the inalienable right of every nation to have independence" ; it was not based on any racial hatred or charges of tyranny or mis-government.⁷ But the frequent acts of tyranny and mis-government were forcefully discussed in the columns of *Bandemataram*, so that they might rouse the inert spirit of the people. Almost day after day, he was pouring forth, through its columns, molten lava in the form of printed words. From April 10 to April 30 1907, he contributed a series of articles under the caption *The New Thought*. In the very first article, he said, "The New Thought holds and declares as a fundamental axiom of political philosophy that the countenance of foreign predominance or overlordship in any shape or form—political, industrial, intellectual, social or religious—is fatal to the continuance and growth of self-conscious life among a people subject to such overlordship."⁵ Along with this propaganda, he gave a definite shape to the revolutionary movement which was taking root in Bengal then. Aurobinda never aspired to be a public leader. Aurobinda used to keep himself behind public gaze. Even in secret revolutionary politics, he avoided making himself prominent ; he said, "My action in giving the movement in Bengal, its militant turn or forming the revolutionary movement is very little known."³ in the Surat Congress, he was forced to come forward before the vast audience. His role was mostly that of an inspirer—that of guide—and not of an active leader.

Aurobinda laid great emphasis on "Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education". This was one of the main themes of *Bandemataram*. He knew that pure Swadeshi or autarchy was neither possible nor desirable ; so he emphasised only the boycott of British goods. But boycott along with Swadeshi was the political weapon for hitting the commercial interest of Britain, As for national education, his idea was—if we failed "to fill the minds of our boys from childhood with the idea of the country...we may as well give up our desire to

create a nation". That was why, he agreed to be the Principal of the National College. Satish Mukherjee—the pioneer of national education movement—was associated with that college.

Though Aurobinda tried to form a party to organise the nation for an armed insurrection, he was not so much in favour of a rigid party. He wrote "It is only in a servile nation, unaccustomed to the habits of freeman, that party becomes a master and not an instrument." He went on to say, "party is a curse because it becomes faction." So his emphasis was always on a revolutionary movement. This idea of his was followed by the *Jugantar Party* of Bengal which never developed into a rigid party but always moved along with the current of national movement. His emphasis on a national movement rather than the formation of a rigid party is an important contribution of Aurobinda to our political strategy.

He wrote another series of articles under the caption "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance." The ideas propounded in this series, are in my view, a very significant contribution to the freedom struggle. Main theme of these articles was—"the nation has to strive for self-development and self-reliance." There are three courses for the nation to follow—(i) "to organise passive resistance, which generally Parnell followed in Ireland"; (ii) "to organise aggressive resistance in the shape of an untiring and implacable campaign of assassination and a confused welter of riots, strikes and agrarian rising all over the country," and (iii) "armed revolt. Though Aurobinda had no objection to armed insurrection and even a mutiny, in these articles, he stated "the present circumstances in India seem to point to passive resistance as our most natural and suitable weapon."⁸ He made some significant statements in these articles. According to him—in armed rising, "a daring minority purchases, with their blood, the freedom of the millions ; but for passive resistance, it is necessary that all

should share in the struggle and the privation.” He further elaborated, a free nation would be better equipped, if it could start “with a fully developed unity and strength...Passive resistance affords the best possible training for these qualities.” He advocated what he called defensive resistance and according to him “Defensive Resistance is the sole alternative to that ordeal of sanguinary violence on both sides through which all other countries . . . have been compelled to pass, only at last ‘embracing Liberty over a heap of corpses.’”⁸ The last clause quoted by him is significant—as it shows his abhorrence of “embracing Liberty over a heap of corpses”.

He used the term Passive Resistance in a general sense but while particularising, he used the term—Defensive Resistance. He elaborated his idea thus—“the first principle of passive resistance is to make administration under present conditions impossible by an organised refusal to do anything which shall help either British commerce in the exploitation of the country or British officialdom in the administration of it.”⁸ This he called “Defensive Resistance” and this was much more than what Parnell had practised in Ireland. He suggested several steps e.g., boycott not only of British goods but also of all Government institutions including Government service, police, military, law courts, etc. He wanted the people not only to refuse to purchase British goods but asked them “not to condone such purchase by others”. For such purchasers, he prescribed, “to mete out the heaviest penalty to such cases—the penalty of social excommunication.” He advocated “the policy of self-development in every department of national life, not only Swadeshi and National Education, but national defence, national arbitration courts, sanitation . . .” He wanted to “extend defensive resistance to run parallel on every line with self-development.”⁸

Aurobinda did not advocate no-tax campaign at the initial stage because it would require—particularly “in a vast country

like India... a close organisation linking province to province, district to district... representing the single will of the whole nation which could alone fight on equal terms the final struggle of defensive resistance, with bureaucratic repression. Such an organisation and authority has not yet been developed.”⁸ He further stated a no-tax campaign was likely to bring “the extreme military and police violence,” and that would “inevitably bring about the last desperate struggle between the forces of national aspiration and alien repression.” So, for the condition then prevailing, he confined defensive resistance to “lawful abstention from any kind of co-operation with the Government.”⁸ Echoing the American cry—“no representation, no taxation” he gave the slogan “no control, no co-operation.”⁸ In the *Karmayogin* (December, 1909) he repeated his slogan—“no co-operation, without control.”

To begin with, he advocated resistance “within the bounds of law, so long as law does not seek directly to interfere with us and render impossible our progress.”⁸ But when laws are applied in an arbitrary manner, he would not object to advocate violence against violence. He stated, “Our defensive resistance must therefore be mainly passive in the beginning, although with a perpetual readiness to supplement it with active resistance whenever compelled.”⁸

To Aurobinda, the main thing was the independence of India; the means were to be decided according to the circumstances prevailing. When he prescribed defensive resistance as the most suitable means, he alerted the nation—to have “a perpetual readiness to supplement it with active resistance whenever compelled.” According to Aurobinda, “the choice of a subject nation of the means, it will use for vindicating its liberty, is best determined by the circumstances of its servitude.... It is the nature of the pressure (i.e., of the Government) which determines the nature of resistance.

8. Doctrine of Passive Resistance (Sri Aurobinda).

Where the denial of liberty is enforced by legalised murder and outrage or by brutal coercion, the answer of violence to violence is justified and inevitable.”

When we read in one of the articles “Morally and materially she (India) has been brought to the verge of exhaustion and decay, by the bureaucratic rule ; and any further acquiescence in servitude will result in that death-sleep of centuries..,” We are reminded of the Independence Pledge which the nation had to take from 26th January 1930 onward. In that pledge we read, “The British Government has ruined India economically, politically, culturally, and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence.” The spirit which Aurobinda preached in those articles was more or less re-echoed in that pledge.

Passive resistance was a prevalent political idea in Bengal then. Swadeshi and Boycott programme was a form of passive resistance. Tilak addressing the students of Calcutta said—“The method of passive resistance had been discovered by Bengal at the time of partition.” In their own way, Pal, Rabindranath, Aswini Kumar Dutta—preached the same idea in different spheres and in different forms. Aurobinda put the idea as an elaborated political philosophy. When Aurobinda advocated passive (or defensive) resistance and withholding of co-operation, he anticipated what Gandhi, later on, put into action. Speaking about the Surat Congress, he stated the Moderate leaders deliberately selected Surat, as Gujarat was then known to be of a very moderate temperament. But he stated, after the advent of Gandhi, Gujarat “became one of the most revolutionary provinces.”⁶ The word “revolutionary” in this connection denotes that Aurobinda considered the movements of 1920 and of 1930-32 to be revolutionary movements.

A relevant question has been raised—if Aurobinda had advocated passive resistance as the most suitable method, why

had he encouraged formation of secret revolutionary organisation for an armed insurrection and even indulging in assassination? These acts of young men were necessary not so much for hurting the adverseries as for rousing the dormant and immobile mass-mind—by acts of self-immolation of those young men. That is why he said—“Oppression is God’s method of preparing the nation.” By such desperate violent acts, those young men invited oppression on themselves as also on the nation.

In an article in the *Bandemataram* on 29th April 1908, Aurobinda elaborated the idea of self-immolation. He stated, “A nation cannot afford to haggle with Providence or to buy liberty in the cheapest market from the Dispenser of human fate. The sooner the struggle now commences, the sooner the fate of India is fought out between the forces of progress and reaction, the better for India and for the world... A band of men is needed who can give up everything for their country, whose sole thought and occupation shall be the stimulation of the movement by whatever means the moment suggests or opportunity allows... The salvation of a country cannot be the work of our leisure moments, the product of our superfluous energy... Devoted servants of India are needed who will ask for no reward, no ease, no superfluities... This attitude of utter self-abandonment is the first condition of success. An immense and incalculable revolution is at hand and its instruments must be themselves immense in their aspiration, uncalculating in their self-immolation... The victims of that sacrifice are ourselves, our lives, our hopes, our ambitions, all that is personal... The greatest must fall as victims before the God of the sacrifice is satisfied.”

In this article written two days before his arrest perhaps he anticipated his arrest and gave a final message to his countrymen. This message is one of “courting sufferings and self-immolation” and that is the only way to prepare the

path of revolution because through that means only, it would be possible to rouse the dormant and immobile masses of India. He concluded this article thus: "Revolution, bare and grim, is preparing her battle-field, mowing down the centres of order which were evolving a new cosmos, and building up the materials of a gigantic down-fall and a mighty new creation. We could have wished it otherwise ; but God's will be done !"

Before concluding, I should like to state a brief conversation I had with Gandhi. In 1940-41 I had to go to Gandhi at Sevagram on several occasions. Once Gandhi told me in a sad voice, "In all my previous movements, I had the blessings of Sri Aurovinda but I do not know why he has been opposing this movement. I wish I had his blessing in this movement also." Aurobinda later on explained in *Sri Aurovinda on Himself* why he opposed the anti-war movement conducted by the Congress. But this is beside the point of our discussion.

Aurobinda's ideal was independence or *Swaraj*; and he carried on an unceasing campaign for that both through writing and action. His main theme was—"India must live her own life and not the life of a part or subordinate in a foreign Empire." He alone could declare—"The whole world is interested in seeing that India becomes free, so that India may become herself." Perhaps no other leader of his time put forward the claim of India's independence so unambiguously and so persistently as he.

Aurobinda built up revolutionary organisations in Bengal with the aim of an armed insurrection. He initiated the youngmen of Bengal to the path of courting suffering and "self-immolation" and he expected that thereby a new consciousness would be aroused in the dormant nation. He was not a pacifist and had no ethical objection to adopt violent methods for nation's freedom. But he preferred the path of passive resistance or defensive resistance—i.e., to withhold all co-

operation and assistance from the Government. This, I think, is a major contribution Aurobinda has made to our freedom struggle.

What Aurobinda preached, he admitted in his statement in the Court. He said, "If it is suggested that I preached ideal of freedom to my country which is against the law, I plead guilty to the charge. If that is the law here, I say I have done that and I request you to convict me. If it is an offence to preach the ideal of freedom, I admit having done it. I have never disputed it... I felt I was called upon to preach to my country to make them realise that India had a mission to perform in the comity of nations. If that is my fault you can chain me, imprison me but will never get out of me a denial of that charge." This is a spirit with which Aurobinda took up the task of building up a revolutionary movement in the country. And he did it successfully.

The forces generated by him and the ideals preached by him brought up a band of youngmen who did not hesitate to put them on the God's anvil to receive "the blows—not to destroy but to recreate". Such acts of self-immolation led to the setting up of the Rowlatt Committee ; that Committee's report converted the mild, loyal Gandhi into a rebel ; and in Aurovinda's words, Gandhi "becomes the master of the future" because, fulfilling Aurovinda's own analysis in 1893, Gandhi "succeeds in understanding and eliciting his (the proleteriat's) strength." The immobile masses were made mobile by Gandhi. And Gandhi adopted the path of withholding all co-operation to the Government—the idea preached by Aurobinda so forcefully.*

I like to thank you all present for giving me a patient hearing. Rishi Bankim's *Bandemataram* charmed and inspired Aurovinda. So I end with "*BANDEMATARAM*".

* In preparing this essay the following books were also consulted—
(i) *Prophet of Indian Nationalism*—Dr. Karan Singh. (ii) *Gandhi or Aurovinda*—by B. C. Chatterjee. (iii) *Indian Renaissance*.

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