

Pujya Dr. K.C. Varadachari - Volume -2

SRI AUROBINDO AND universal

RELIGION

The problem of universal religion has been not only urgent but inevitable, especially with the development of science. Spiritualism or spiritual life that previously delighted in rejecting the material world, and renouncing all that savoured of the materialistic and sensate, had to come to terms with matter. This is the modern phenomenon. It is likely that in some form it had occurred in the past. The achievement of a balance between the spiritual extreme and the materialistic extreme is the goal of all religious process, and that it is struck by their oppositional integration is a fact of evolution. This is the logic of the conflict or adjustment of environment with heredity in the field of psychology.

Comparative studies in Indian culture by Westerners in the early decades of this century have high-lighted the differences between the Indian (Eastern) and the western (European) approaches to reality and life. Swami Vivekananda undoubtedly realised the basic stress in the two hemispheres. He states the basic stress in France as the “political independence of that country.” Britain has always ‘a give and take policy’, whereas the Hindu has always the goal of spiritual independence in the forefront

of his aims.

“This is the national purpose : whether you take the Vaidika, the Jaina or the Bauddha, the advaita, visistadvaita, or the dvaita - they are all of one mind. Leave that point untouched and do whatever you like, the Hindu is unconcerned and keeps silence: but if you run foul of him there, beware you court your ruin.” (Vol. V. p.45B)

Further, Svami Vivekananda refers to the kind of advice given to the West, and compares it with that given to the East :

“Jesus Christ, the God of the Europeans has taught
‘Have no enemy, bless them that curse you. Whosoever shall smite Thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also. Stop all your work and be ready for the next world; the end of the world is near at hand.’”

Our Lord in the Gita says :

“Always work with great enthusiasm. Destroy your enemies and enjoy the world”. (Vol. V. p.453 ff)

This appears to be ironical but it reveals that what the West needs is the renunciation of action and realisation of the Next or Higher world, whereas India requires the dedication to this world. Hence the advices are different. This recalls the Upanisadic seer who told the devas, the asuras and the manavas to practise dama, dana and daya

by uttering the multi-meaninged imperative 'Da'. To each according to his need - this is the advice of the knowing teacher.

Buddha, said Svami Vivekananda, ruined us by teaching the renunciation whereas Christ ruined Greece and Rome by teaching them the same way. (Vol. V. p.454). However both these doctrines are controverted by the modern spirit of utilitarian materialism that is pervading the entire globe.

It is necessary to recognize that good qualities are not the privileged monopoly of any one race or nation or religion. Both the East and the West have their own goals. With India the prominent idea is mukti or liberation from all bonds : with the Westerners it is dharma - that which makes for happiness in this world and in the next according to rules established. "This moksa path is only in India and nowhere else." (Vol.V.p.446)

The broad distinctions between the eastern, or Hindu, ideal and the western ideal are given by Svami Vivekananda.

Sri Aurobindo is more explicit and full in his appraisal of the distinctions between the Eastern and Western Spirit. In the remarkable essays in reply to Mr.W. Archer who asked the question whether India was civilized, Sri Aurobindo in a most trenchant form lists why India is

civilized and why the West cannot be civilized at all. Continuing the same topic in his essays on the Defence of Indian Culture he eloquently and fully explains the spiritual value of Indian Culture.

Perhaps the super-journalist is right in exclaiming that “East is East, West is West And never the twain shall meet” (Rudyard Kipling)

Sri Aurobindo clearly contrasts the spirit of the East with the West.

The Graeco-Roman culture is predominantly mental and intellectual, and the modern European culture is predominantly materialistic, whereas India continues to manifest her spiritual tendency. And India in essence or quint-essence expresses the Asiatic way of life. Perhaps we have yet to be able to explain how China today is seeking to express the spiritual, for in fact she is now out-Russianising the Russian way of revolution, a dialectical materialism, with its militant crudeness. Whilst the West tries always to impose her pattern of life by force of arms and by other ways less honourable even in her conversion through religion, India’s method has always been an infiltration of the world with her ideas. This was a fact even during the period of her being conquered by the West. There is an increasing infiltration of India’s spiritual thought into Europe and America. The testimony of three entirely

different minds of the greatest power in this field, Emerson, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, shows how deeply they have been influenced by Indian thought.

Critics of Indian religion and philosophy from the West have not been able to judge except from their own standards, or rather from their levels. Indian thought had symbolically and significantly explored the possibilities of these levels, and the standards for each level have been established clearly. Thus, religion too falls into groups or levels: there is a natural religion suitable to men or cultures which is based on the appreciation of the transcendent in Nature - for such, annam or rayi is the Brahman. For those to whom the life-principle or breathing principle is important the highest religious or spiritual principle is prana - prana is Brahman. For the mentalistic groups, mind is brahman, and for the intuitive minds or groups, vijnana is Brahman. But for the highest group Ananda is Brahman. Religion of the last group goes beyond all the earlier ones, and it is for this that all the other religions make one yearn. The Upanisad has clearly shown how these levels of contact with reality happen, and how men have different levels. As are men so are their religions or their apprehension of God.

“The tendency of the normal western mind is to live from below upward and from out inward” says Sri

Aurobindo. (p. 23 F.I.C.)

From annam or matter it proceeds slowly and gradually towards the spirit, if necessary, by a series of negations, as to the nature of the Ultimate Reality. It arrives in the spiritual in the lives of some of its most profound thinkers. But in most, it stands at different levels. We can discover by a study of the Western mystics and philosophers how the different schools represent different conceptions of the Ultimate. Materialism, Vitalism, mentalism, transcendentalism (supermentalism), are but many ways or levels of defining the Ultimate; which however is all these and something 'more' and beyond. This India discovered in the very dawn of her history. Her aim has been to find a basis of living in the higher spiritual truth, and live from the inner spirit outwards; to exceed the present way of mind, life and body; to command and dictate to external nature. As the old Vedic seers put it "their divine foundation was above even while they stood below, let its rays be settled deep within us. *nicinah sthur upari budhna esam asme antar nihitah ketavah syuh.* (p. 2k F.I.C.)

The Indian concept of civilization and attainment are broadly

“More high-reaching, subtle, many-sided, curious and profound than the Greek,

More noble and humane than the Roman,

More large and spiritual than the old Egyptian,

More vast and original than any other Asiatic civilization

More intellectual than the European prior to the 18th century possessing all these and more it was the most powerful, self-possessed stimulating and wide in influence of all past human cultures.” (p. 50 F.I.C.)

Sri Aurobindo does not think that with such a radically different type of being and development of culture-attitude, East and West could meet from two opposite sides and merge in each other and found, in the life of a unified humanity, a common world culture! Though this has been fondly hoped for by the early workers in the field of comparative religion, philosophy and culture such as for instance the theosophists.* But the problem is not so easy and not so harmoniously simple. Further the cult of secularism has begun to take shape as a solution to the problems of justice in the context of conflicts and differences of religion, caste, class, race and so on.

Compare this with what was the attitude of theosophists towards Svami Vivekananda. cf. Collected works Vol. 111. p. 208 ff .

And “the tendency to secularism is a necessary consequence of the cult of life and reason divorced from their inherent inlook” (p. 95 FIC). ‘Western civilization is proud of its successful modernism’ and “it labours to

establish unity by accommodation of conflicting interests and the force of mechanical institutions, but so attempted it will either not be founded at all or will be founded on sand.” (p. 46 FIC). It is being currently realised that, as Sri Aurobindo put it, the purely intellectual or heavily material culture of the kind Europe now favours bears in its heart the seed of death, (p. 8). And today, the life of the West is still chiefly governed by the rationalistic ideas and a materialistic preoccupation, (p. 19 FIC).

* Sri Aurobindo p. 19

“Theosophy with its comprehensive combination of old and new beliefs, and its appeal to ancient spiritual and psychic systems, has everywhere exercised its influence far beyond the circle of its professed adherents. Opposed for a long time with obloquy and ridicule, it has done much to spread the belief in karma, reincarnation, other planes of existence, evolution of the embodied soul through intellect and psyche to spirit; ideas which once accepted must change the whole attitude towards life.”

It is one of the claims of modern writers that we should make spiritual truths intelligible, that is to say, put them in the language of the common man or address them to the common intellect. And old criticism of any writer was that he did not put everything in the logical form of alternatives where one of them was right the other was wrong. This of course is most fruitful for debate and

helpful also in fixing meanings for and against. However, our spiritual life does not seem to accept this logic of debate or dichotomy or dilemma, except in the field of rational dialectic. There have been many who have approved the systems of thought on the basis of their conforming to their logical demands of self-consistency and non-contradiction.

One of the contentions of western writers on religion was that India has no religion in the sense in which the west has; secondly, since God has only a second place in Vedanta (Advaita), God is not really God. What perhaps may be conceded is that India has spirituality, not religion. No one aspires for realization of God except as a means to liberation. God is not the goal but only a means to the ultimate and which is liberation from all samsara, the cycle of rebirths, from all karma. The attainment of God is of course equated by some vedantas with the attainment of liberation also. Though one might attain the luminosity and other resplendent attributes, and one possesses all godly attributes with the exception of the creation-sustention-destruction of the world (jagad-vyapara-varjam), one is promised that once one attains that condition there is no return to the condition of bondage - no return, no return says the Veda (anavrttisabdat). This is to emphasize that once one realises the ultimate condition or divine status, one does not fall into the lower, nor is there any possibility of such

a fall.

Religion as the union with god attained through worship, prayer, surrender, dedication and discrimination, service and self-offering in all one's parts, is personalistic. God is conceived as a supreme Personality, the Uttama Purusa who is different from the individual and from Nature; who is beyond the lower personal and the higher impersonal. The western concept of God could hardly conceive of the Divine as Impersonal, and it is not strange. The attempt of Islam to conceive of God as an impersonal being, or one who cannot be contained in any form whatsoever, could hardly lead one to the devotion that is characterised by personal service to the Divine. A religion without worship but only with mere surrender or prayer involves quite a strain on the human imagination and vision. It may be true that for the really enlightened and advanced types, the Impersonal as a freedom from all personal and individual or private relations spells a great experience of limitless bliss. However, for the individual who experiences this Impersonal it may reveal a cosmic greatness and largeness, or brihatva, that is exciting consciousness relieved from all sensate and mental limitations. The experience of the Void, sunya, and Vast is Impersonal. It is not an abstraction but something which our mind and sense cannot grasp. The Divine has been again and again declared to be beyond the reach of the senses and the mind and breath, though

it is by its power that one senses, mentates and breaths. Beyond both, there is the experience of the Uttama Purusa, which is the experience of God as He is in Himself, and not for us.

The experience of the Gita is undoubtedly very important, and its unequivocal utterance about the divine personality or God-head which includes all the perfect qualities (vibhavas or Divya gunas), and excludes all that savours of imperfection, and which is truly universal and omnipervasive and omniscient, grants the spiritual aspirant's religious experience a richness that is unmatched. It is because the impersonal of the rationalist excludes those imperfections that ensue out of a sense of partiality and discrimination even in the interests of truth, goodness, and purity in the affairs of men that one delights in the impersonal. But it is not either religious or spirituality, being but an abstract quality worship at best. In this it is clear also that the individual soul does not really seek the impersonal status, albeit without any name and form in the sense we give to the things of our experience, though this has been proposed by distinguished scholars and mystics too. The Nirvana of Buddhism is different indeed from the brahma-nirvana, for it is the richness of the Brahman that one gains, and one's individual private nature is transfigured into that of the Brahman's supracosmic nature.

The Absolute is Godhead, and none other. This Absolute

has several statuses. His supreme triplicity of Sat, Cit and Ananda are available in all manifestations or projections of the One Divine. There is therefore the possible experience of Brahman in all, and as All. The manyness is present all through, and its play with the oneness is the eternal emergence and immergence in time and in space. All these many are in the one as even the one is in all the many. The discovery of the One in the many is as important a part of philosophy as the discovery of the many in the One. Religion and spirituality are definitely engaged in this process of discovery even as in a lesser way science and philosophy are doing in the fields of Nature and Psychology.

Sri Aurobindo reveals that the general attitude of rationalism or intellectualism will not help solve the problems of religion or spirituality. It cannot help even the understanding of cultures based on the intuitional approaches of religion and spirituality, “The whole root of difference between Indian and European culture springs from the spiritual aim of Indian civilization.” It has, as compared and contrasted with other cultures, ‘a striking originality and solitary greatness! ... “Not only did it make spirituality its highest aim of life, but it even tried, as far as that could be done in the past conditions of the human race, to turn the whole of life towards spirituality.” (p. 139 FIC).

Distinguishing between religion and spirituality, Sri

Aurobindo points out that “religion is in the human mind the first native, if imperfect, form of the spiritual impulse.., Spirituality indeed moves in a free and wide air far above the lower stage of seeking which is governed by religious form and dogma ... it lives in an experience which, to the formal religious mind, is unintelligible.” (p.140 FIC).

The western mind deems a fixed intellectual belief to be all important part of a cult. It considers falsely that an intellectual truth is the highest verity and even that there is no other. However, the highest verities for Indian thought are truths of the spirit. Intellectual truth is only one of the many doors to the Infinite. It is many-sided and not narrow one. Most varying intellectual beliefs can be equally true because they mirror different facets of the Infinite - they form many side-entrances which admit the mind to some faint ray of the supreme Light ! “There are no true or false religions, but rather all religions are true in their own way and degree. Each is one of the thousand paths to the One Eternal.” (p.142 F1C) In this conception Sri Aurobindo echoes the discovery of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and that of Svami Vivekananda.

Sri Aurobindo analyses that Indian religion affirmed four necessities for a full religious life; firstly a belief in a highest consciousness or state of existence, universal and transcendent of the universe, from which all comes, in

which all lives and moves without knowing it, and of which all must one day grow aware, returning towards which is perfect, eternal and infinite.

Secondly, every individual must prepare himself to become or grow conscious of this; thirdly, it provided a course of many-branching discipline, and lastly, for those not yet ready for these higher steps it provided an organization of the individual and collective life, a framework of personal and social discipline and conduct. “The first three of these elements are the most essential to any religion, but Hinduism has always attached to the last also a great importance; it has left out no part of life as a thing secular and foreign to the religious and spiritual life.” Further the core of Hinduism is a spiritual, not a social discipline.

Again he emphasizes that the fundamental idea of all Indian religion is one common to the highest human thinking anywhere. ‘This Truth of being was not seized by the Indian mind only as a philosophical speculation, a theological dogma, an abstraction contemplated by the intelligence. It was not an idea to be indulged by the thinker in his study, but otherwise void of practical bearing on life. It was not a mystic sublimation which could be ignored in the dealings of man with the world and Nature. It was a living spiritual Truth, an Entity, a Power, a Presence that could be sought by all according to their degree of capacity, and seized in a thousand

ways through life and beyond life.’ (FIC p.144) Again he is emphatic that “the Infinite alone justifies the existence of the finite, and the finite by itself has no entirely separate value or independent existence. Life, if it not an illusion, is a divine play, a manifestation of the glory of the Infinite.”

Sri Aurobindo, writing on the life-breath of Hindu Ethics, says:

“The universal embracing dharma in the Indian idea is a law of ideal perfection for the developing mind and soul of man; it compels him to grow in the power and force of certain high and large universal qualities which in their harmony build a high type of manhood. In Indian thought and life this was the ideal of the best, the law of the good or noble man, the discipline laid down for the self-perfecting individual - arya, srestha, sajjana, sadhu. This ideal was not a purely moral or ethical conception, although that element might predominate: it was also intellectual, religious, social, aesthetic, the flowering of the whole ideal man, the perfection of the total human nature. The most varied qualities meet in the Indian conception of the best, srestha, the good and noble man, arya. In the heart, benevolence, beneficence, love, compassion, altruism, long-suffering, liberality, kindness, patience; In the character, courage, heroism, energy, loyalty, continence, truth, honour, Justice, faith, obedience, and reverence where

these were due, but power too to govern and direct; a fine modesty and yet a strong independence and noble pride; in the mind, wisdom and intelligence and love of learning, knowledge of all the best thought, and openness to poetry, art and beauty, an educated capacity and skill in works; in the inner being a strong religious sense, piety, love of God, seeking after the Highest, the spiritual turn; in the social relations and conduct a strict observance of all the social dharmas, as father, son, husband, brother, kinsman, friend ruler or subject, master or servant, priest, or warrior or worker, king or sage, member of clan or caste.”

“This was total ideal of the Arya, the man of high upbringing and noble nature. The ideal is clearly portrayed in the written records of ancient India during two millenniums and it is the very life-breath of Hindu Ethics. It was the creation of an at once ideal and rational mind, spirit-wise and worldly-wise, deeply religious, nobly ethical, firmly yet flexibly intellectual, scientific and aesthetic, patient and tolerant of life’s difficulties and human weaknesses, but arduous in self-discipline.”

“But even this was only a foundation and preparations for another bigger thing which by its presence exalts human life beyond itself into something spiritual and divine. ... Law and its observance are neither the beginning nor the end of man immortality, freedom

and divinity are within his reach.”

(Foundations of Indian culture: a rationalistic critic of Indian Culture: pp.120-1)

The basic tradition of Indian religious epistemology was that it never considered intellectual or theological conceptions about the supreme Truth to be the thing of central importance. “To pursue that Truth under whatever conception or whatever form, to attain to it by inner experience, to live in that consciousness, this was held to be the sole thing needful.” (p.145). Thus among the basic approaches it is necessary to develop adhyatma-yoga, inner experience, which alone can give knowledge of anything, terrestrial, celestial, psychological or transcendental, as they are in Truth in their Reality, what they are in themselves - tathatathya, yathartha.

Referring to Advaita, Visistadvaita and Dvaita as three modes of religion rather than of philosophy, Sri Aurobindo points out that “The Spirit, Universal Nature, (whether called Maya, Prakrti, or Shakti) and the soul in living beings, Jiva, are the three truths which are universally admitted by all the many sects and conflicting religious philosophies of India. Universal also is the admission that the discovery of the inner spiritual self in man, the divine soul in him, and some kind of living and uniting contact or absolute unity of the

soul in man with God or supreme Self or eternal Brahman, is the condition of spiritual perfection,... and the one important truth of spiritual experience is that He is in the heart and centre of all existence..." (ibid).

As he remarks "the truth announced is not peculiar to Indian thinking; it has been seen and followed by the highest minds and souls everywhere". The one basic achievement of India has been this; where other religions had failed to stamp their culture and existence with this spiritual quality and foundation, India has succeeded in stamping religion with the essential ideal of a real spirituality. It brought some living reflection of the very highest spiritual truth, and some breath of its influence, into every part of the religious field. "The ideas of Maya, Lila, divine Immanence are as familiar to the man in the street and the worshipper in the temple as to the philosopher in his seclusion, the monk in his monastery, and the saint in his hermitage." (p.147)

The West has cherished the aggressive, and quite illogical, idea of a single religion for all mankind, a religion universal by the very force of its narrowness, one set of dogma, one cult, one system of ecclesiastical ordinances. Sri Aurobindo calls this a narrow absurdity, this grotesque creation of human unreason; this vast attainment of the spiritual consciousness, the consciousness of the real nature of spiritual experience to be of the Infinite which embraces all variety of spiritual

experiences and knowledge, even as Svami Vivekananda held. (p.148)

Man lives at different levels, conscious of some of them but unconscious of some others. The majority of mankind lives on the surface. “Even the choice spirits raised from the grossness of the common vital and physical mould by the stress of thought and culture do not usually get farther than a strong dwelling on the things of the mind. The highest flight they reach - and it is this that the West persistently mistakes for spirituality - is a preference for living in the mind and emotions more than in the gross outward life, or else an attempt to subject this rebellious life-stuff to the law of intellectual truth or ethical reason and will, or aesthetic beauty, or to all three together.”

Further “ a mere intellectual, ethical and aesthetic culture does not go back to the inmost truth of the spirit: it is still an Ignorance, an incomplete, outward and superficial knowledge”. It lacks clearly the power to transform the outer in the light of the inner of which it is ignorant. However, the several religions reveal their inability to arrive at the transformation of their outer by the light and power of the spiritual. “The Christian discipline was not only to despise the physical and vital way of living, but to disparage and imprison the intellectual, and distrust and discourage the aesthetic thirsts of our nature. It emphasized against them a limited spiritual

emotionalism.”

The development of the spiritual, or its evolution so to speak in humanity, moves in different channels. Whilst the Indian dynamism registered the spiritual attainment and its application to the varied levels of human behaviour, the other movements had proceeded on the lines of the intellect, and the vital and physical. But as man is not merely spiritual but also intellectual, vital and physical, there intervene periods of obscuration or decay of each one of these, in order to make up for the final integration. This danger is, if it is a danger, something that has occurred everywhere. Spiritual illuminations gathered from the past tend to be obscured and stifled by the lower levels of the intellect which claim to be self-sufficient of course for its limited work. This has happened even in Greece and the other western countries.

“The old knowledge was prolonged in a less inspired, less dynamic and more intellectual form by the Pythagoreans, by the Stoics, by Plato and the Neo-Platonists; but still in spite of them and in spite of the only half-illuminated spiritual wave which swept over Europe from Asia in an ill-understood Christianity, the whole real trend of Western Civilization has been intellectual, rational, secular, and even materialistic, and it keeps this character to the present day.” (p. 169)

Sri Aurobindo points out that what hurt Buddhism and determined its rejection in the end was not its denial of a Vedic origin or authority, but the exclusive trenchency of its intellectual, ethical and spiritual positions.” (p. 172)

The aim of religion is the most important single factor in the evaluation of its workings. The one question is whether it is consistently developing the spiritual, in the context of man’s life on earth. In so far as this spiritualising of life on earth and the liberation of man are available in any religion, to that extent that religion may be said to have met the needs of man.

Sri Aurobindo considers that religion is not open for all kinds of men. In this there is the recognition of the differences between stage and stage. In India, according to him, two complete external stages have taken place. “The early Vedic was the first stage: religion then took its outward formal stand on the natural approach of the physical mind of man to the Godhead in the universe, but the initiates guarded the sacrificial fire of a greater spiritual truth behind the form. The Puranic-Tantric was the second stage: then religion took its outward formal stand on the first deeper approaches of man’s inner mind and life to the Divine in the Universe, but a greater initiation opened the way to a far more intimate truth and pushed towards an inner living of the spiritual life in all its profundity, and in all the infinite possibilities of an uttermost sublime experience.” There

has been a preparation for the third stage which belongs to the future. (p.180)

The grand scheme of Indian spirituality is presented by Sri Aurobindo with imaginative insight and with authentic understanding. “No Indian religion is complete without its outward form of preparatory practice, its supporting philosophy and its Yoga or system of inward action, or the art of spiritual living.” (p. 191) And “the business of the ancient Rishi was not only to know God, but to know the world and life, and to reduce it by knowledge to a thing well understood and mastered with which the reason and will of man could deal on assured lines, and on a safe basis of wise method and order.” (p. 190) The ripe result of this effort was the shastra.

Sri Aurobindo is convinced that mankind is still no more than semi-civilised, and that it was never anything else in the recorded history of the present cycle. He recalls that each civilization has contributed to the development of man: “Greece developed to a high degree the intellectual reason and the sense of form and harmonious beauty; Rome founded firmly strength and power and patriotism and law and order; modern Europe has raised to enormous proportions practical reason, science and efficiency and economic capacity; India developed the spiritual mind working on the other powers of man and exceeding them, the intuitive reason, the philosophical harmony of the Dharma informed by the religious spirit,

the sense of the eternal and the infinite.” (p.202)

The spiritual force always tried to go beyond religion, and religion constantly tries to effectuate the spiritual aspiration.

Man has to pass beyond religion itself, which is at present just what his own intellectual reason is able to deem as the spiritual and Ultimate. There is a truth which goes beyond all reason and its constructions, and it is to this eternal that the inward spirituality awakens and moves. Indian religion is spiritual religion.

It can be seen that Sri Aurobindo, in his exposition of the nature of religion vis a vis spirituality, clearly propounds that religions are of an imperfect order trying to mediate between the highest spiritual condition and the intellect, reason, instinct and physical ways of human understanding. Man's emotion creates certain needs, even as his will and intellect have their own thirsts to quench. Religions, like so many others, demand not merely the satisfaction of one part of man but the whole man. It is one of the greatest drawbacks of certain thinkers and psychologists to omit or play down the importance of certain facets of man's unified or unifying nature. Indeed in a dynamic conception of man there is a constant interplay of the triple modes of man's nature, his emotion, will and thought, which in terms of Samkhyan guna psychology could be equated with the

tamas, rajas and sattva. Their interplay and integration or to adopt the modern term “homeostasis”, is one of profound significance in all the areas of human conduct. Religion is no exception to this. Sri Aurobindo, following the ancient clues, has most luminously expounded the ideal and purpose of the quartets - caturvarga, caturvarna, caturadhikara of Indian religious and spiritual formulations. He has shown how they answer to the fourfold nature of man as a physical, vital, mental and supramental being, leading up to the spiritual existence that is the transcendent goal. Considered in the light of the exposition, almost all the problems of religions seem to fall into their respective places. In a way the archetypal forms or patterns of religious behaviour have been exhibited in the light of revelational vision, and human intellects all over the world have drawn their light and reflections in themselves according to their need and circumstances.

Sri Aurobindo does not enter into the field of comparative religion in the sense that he does not expound the doctrines of each religion and appraise the principles of absolute Religion, if there is to be one, or of a universal religion as such. He undoubtedly speaks about the necessity for humanity to attain significant unity, and propounds the Ideal of Human Unity. There are two major goals in religion, firstly it is the

individual's realisation of his own spiritual nature, and consequently his freedom, from whatever limits or circumscribes that nature; secondly, his association which that realisation brings about with God, the Universal Absolute Reality and with His creation or creatures in terms of spirituality. And nothing that in any sense abridges this sense of communion in the truly spiritual and universal sense would be worthwhile.

Recent studies on comparative philosophy between Sri Aurobindo and western Philosophers* have revealed how, through independent spiritual intuitions directly sought and gained, Sri Aurobindo has reformulated with great advantage some of the major discoveries in philosophical and spiritual or mystical fields. His synoptic concern for a world philosophy or spirituality has made him present a universal philosophy of the Spirit in the true sense of that

* S.K. Maitra : Meeting of the East and West in Sri Aurobindo's

philosophy. Ed. Haridas Chaudhuri & Frederic

Spielberg: Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. 1960.

term, which embraces organismically the several levels, undoubtedly hierarchical and real, and dynamically supported by the highest super-cosmic consciousness

itself. While clearly realising that philosophy must concern itself, and could concern itself, with that which falls within the ambit of Consciousness. Sri Aurobindo pointed out that the consciousness that man already has and possesses is much less than what he, in fact, can attain to. The super consciousness is something that is available to man, provided he would open out to it, and this superconsciousness is the only integral consciousness that can truly grasp reality in its fullest and real sense. Piecemeal intellectuality, depending on piecemeal systematisations, distort our consciousness and make for illusions of system. Fragmentation of reality is as much as distortion when one seeks to act in terms of partial knowledges or non-universal uniformities or laws.

In one sense intellectual or empirical philosophies suffer from this radical defect - they leave out other states of consciousness except the waking or sensorial. Religion seeks to make up for this defect by opening up fields or levels of consciousness which philosophy has shut out. It becomes more comprehensive and satisfying. But even religions do not lead up to the highest limits of divine gnosis. Therefore we move from one religion and from one sect to another, in order to discover higher openings of consciousness not merely intellectually satisfying or emotionally soothing, but truly universal and liberating man from his thralldom to the limitations of

sense, imagination and sleep or absorption. Spirituality transcends these, and makes one enter into a true infinity and eternity. Religions, in varying degrees, are pointers to transcendence but the price paid for that is dedication to the Ultimate Reality or Spirit in love and total self-offering for the sake of that Experience of God alone.

Sri Aurobindo is convinced that a rationalistic religion can never lead to that summit of spirituality which every individual can attain. If such a rationalistic religion is framed, as indeed it has been done, though it really does some good in so far as it infuses faith in reason, it otherwise leaves out much that is invaluable. Reason can help to get rid of religionism with all its spurious qualities of creed and cult, ceremony and symbol, its churchianity or ‘false theocracy’ depending on the ‘Kingdom of the Pope’, rather than on the Kingdom of God in the heart. For it is the ‘deepest heart, the inmost essence of religion’.... is the essence, is ‘the search for God and the finding of God’ (Human Cycle p.173 Pondicherry ed.) But reason is valuable in so far as it mediates between the supra-rational intuitions and the human mind, and makes intelligible to man his own higher capacities of generalisation and inference. However “the limitations of reason become very strikingly, very characteristically, very nakedly apparent when it is confronted with the great order of psychological truths and experiences which we have kept

in the background - the religious being of man and religious life.” (ibid p.170)

An attempt was made to expound a Religion of Humanity in the West.

“Religion of Humanity was mind-born in the 18th century - the manasa putra of the rationalist thinkers who brought it forward as a substitute for the formal spiritualism of ecclesiastical Christianity.” (Ideal of Humanity ch. 34)

“ It tried to give itself a body in Positivism which was an attempt to formulate the dogmas of this religion, but on too heavily and severely rationalistic a basis for acceptance even by an Age of Reason. Humanitarianism has been its most prominent emotional result. Philanthropy, social service and other kindred activities have been its outward expression of good works... Democracy, socialism pacifism are to a great extent its by-products or at least owe much of their vigour to its presence..” (ibid)

According to Sri Aurobindo its basic principles are

I. Mankind is the godhead to be worshipped and served by man.

II. Respect, service, progress of the human being and human life are the chief duty and chief aim of its human spirit.

III. No injunctions of old creeds, religious, political, social, cultural are valid when they go against the claims of Humanity.

This religion of humanity is today holding the field, though higher light is breaking in. It was a corrective, even as Science has been a corrective, to the aberrations of religious beliefs. It is a basic question however “whether a purely intellectual and sentimental religion of humanity will be sufficient to bring about so great a change in our psychology” (ibid. p.) However, it is to be noted that we are even today under the impact of the religion of humanity, now known as humanism. It is also a religious attitude that seems to have had a great fascination for Swami Vivekananda and his followers. Undoubtedly based on” a sort of primal intuition” as Sri Aurobindo puts it, its aim was, and still is, to recreate human society in the image of three kindred ideas, liberty, equality and fraternity, (ibid) *

However, a religion of humanity having these triple ideals which are indeed mystic in origin cannot really be successful unless fraternity becomes the unifying principle. “It is the real key to the triple gospel of the idea of humanity. Fraternity cannot merely rest on belief or analogy, but on something more abiding and more thoroughly rooted in a spiritual experience of the ‘fatherhood or motherhood of God’”. Though freedom, equality and unity, according to Sri Aurobindo, are the

very nature of the soul, unity cannot be equated with fraternity except by the intuition of the ‘fatherhood’ of God. Thus the concept of a religion of humanity demands the acceptance of the ‘fatherhood of God’ for its very success. Svami Vivekananda’s and Mahatma Gandhi’s clearest bases for service of the Daridra Narayana or humanism requires a spiritual basis which rationalism has been unable to grant. **

* Dr K.C. Varadachari’s Radio Talk on Sri Aurobindo Paper on Talk on Svami Vivekananda.

** Age of Reason : Thomas Paine
Rights of Kan : -do-

Therefore “Reason is an insufficient, often an inefficient, even a stumbling and at its best a very partially enlightened, guide for humanity in that great endeavour which is the real heart of human progress and the inner justification of our existence as souls, minds, and bodies upon the earth.” (p.163 Collected works. Human Cycle Ch. xiii).

One of the moat distressing phenomenon of the present day is the misunderstanding of the very nature of Spirituality. Dr B.G. Tiwari, in his book on Secularism & Materialism in Modern India, complains that almost all the thinkers of the Renaissance are secularising because of their love for activity, and that true

spirituality lies in inactivity or passivity. It is a complete misstatement of the spiritual position. One has to distinguish between spiritual and secular activities, the one leading to the inner and central reality of one's being and the other leading outward to surface reality. The former leads to the permanent whereas the latter leads to the impermanent. The achievement of the sthita-prajna state or aksara condition is midway towards the Ultimate. There is a state of Brahman which is that of the Supreme Purusa or Person, as stated by Sri Krsna, whose activities are of divine nature. The Samkhyan purusa is of the nature of aksara, but not of the status of the Supreme Person. Therefore, to say that all activity is secular is a misnomer. Secondly, the vyavaharic activities of dharma are not also secular when they are done as kartavyam karma acts which ought to be done. Ethical activities which are determined by one's svadharma and svabhava can either lead one towards spiritual or secular life. By no kind of argument can it be claimed that one can pursue both at the same time - live and act secularly as also live spiritually and remain a passive (saksi) witness. However, for one who pleads that the whole universe is illusion and that all activity is mithyacara, there is obviously no relevance for dharma-performance, even as a purificatory measure for removing the illusion.

What the renaissance thinkers had attempted was to

deepen the spiritual activity to embrace the secular activities as well. It is to reveal that all is Spirit, and activity also is spiritual. Such spiritual activity differs undoubtedly from the activities governed by, or motivated by, the desires and attachments (artha-kama) and by egoism (ahamkara). But when spirit begins to descend into one's being, all activities are taken over by the Spirit and there takes place a gradual sublimation of the quality of action, and man realises freedom of his nature or rather resumes his role as a spiritual being in a material world plastic to the stress of the divine nature and action. The secular begins to be absorbed in the spiritual. Therefore the activity of matter and egoism which advaita chastises as absolutely contradictory to the spiritual is mistaken for the divine activity that the Gita pleads for. It is clear that Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak had taken their lead from the Gita in pleading for divine action rather than accept the self-stultifying inactivity suffers from its gunas, the God's activity is absolutely free from guna-activities.

While it is to be conceded that in a natural world, a world which has not a ray of divine presence, the rule of the three gunas would be absolute, and all activity would be deemed to be of the nature of rajas, yet when the divine activity or presence is assumed or brought down or descends, all activities including those of rajas would

get transformed, or annulled, or sublimated. It is therefore not possible to accept the view that all activity is secular and taboo. As it was pointed out by Sri Krsna, no one can cease to do or act, for that is not merely the nature of Nature but of the Spiritual itself. Sri Aurobindo points out that the Spirit has two poises, the poise of Non-activity which supports the Activity, as well as the poise of Activity which cannot be totally severed. **Spiritual activity embraces the secular, whereas secular activity inhibits the spiritual, because of its seeking to be particularised.**

The divine life is therefore a spiritual inactivity, but is spiritual activity based on supreme peace. It is then that all activity exudes the peace that pervades all existence. In any case, if a divine humanity should be the goal of existence, then it becomes clear that we should divinise all activities or at least aim at it. If we concede that all is Spirit, that all is divine, even then it behoves us to remove all that obstructs that divine. If it is something that cannot be dissipated by mere textual knowledge, then it follows that this reverse activity or removal-activity should be cultivated. Sadhana becomes absolute condition, and sadhana is activity that uplifts.

It is of greatest interest to find that Sri Aurobindo was deeply concerned with the problem of Indian Vedic Religion as the most universal religion from which all religions, by a process of diversification and

particularisation or localisation, had come into being. Each one of them has emphasized one aspect, and by that fact had ceased to be capable of remaining universal, though the emphasis was for some time at any rate put forward as a universal truth. They can be universal truths without being at the same time comprehensive Truth. It is the ambiguity in the word universal that has lead to the deep misunderstanding. Universal means that which is for every one; universal also means that which comprehends all or includes all. This is what Svami Vivekananda also emphasized in respect of all religions other than the Vedanta which is parent of all; But no one has really presented fully this aspect.*

Sri Aurobindo has further expounded the nature of evolution of the Spiritual Man in his Life Divine. Man evolves from the lowest to the highest via religion. The studies in comparative religion work out themselves on the lines of social organisation from the tribal, communal, clan, national and then individual. Organized religions have this unit-character of sectarianisms. Tribal gods vie with each other to become national gods. But the truly intuitive and mystical experiences of the individuals constantly tend to liberate man from his boundaries. The religions remained private possessions, permitting no entry of new or alien members. However, the proselytizing religions had

tended to embrace all mankind. This undoubtedly helped the concept of One God and one Humanity. Each human being therefore was given the chance to lose his private nature or merge himself in humanity. This was undoubtedly a great advance. But its basic defect was its emotional appeal rather than a rational appeal.

The age of reason induced this attempt at a universalizing of religion by denuding it of its emotionalism. However the tendency has been to take an oblique turn towards approaching the heart of man through service of man, rather than liberating the understanding which has not become even to a little extent rational, appealing to the head or logic. Rationalistic religions which had intervened have provided certain basic lines of universal understanding of the problems of religion. But these have not succeeded beyond a certain limit. Man has begun to be alienated from both his heart and head. The ascent to a higher form of universalism than reason had become necessary. Neither emotionalism nor humanitarianism, neither reasoning logistically nor scientifically, could satisfy the soul of man. A deeper level, or a higher truth, had to be found. This is the Spiritual level or the life of Spirit which transcends the levels of religion that we have known so far. This was what was mooted by the Upanisadic seers as the Brahman or Absolute Spirit from whom alone mankind can receive its highest benediction. This is the Universal

Godhead who is the meaning of all existence, intelligence - consciousness, and all delight.

* Idea of God : K.C. Varadachari.

Visistadvaita : (Travancore University lectures II).

This is the spiritual principle which every individual must arrive at in his spiritual progress or evolution for such a person perceives all as One Spirit. As Sri Aurobindo puts it “ A diversity in oneness is the law of the manifestation, the supramental unification and integration must harmonize the diversities, but to abolish them is not the intention of the Spirit in Nature. (Life Divine p. 790 Am. ed.)

The study of the Aurobindonian approach to religion and spirituality reveals how the evolution of spirituality proceeds through several stages, and as it ascends, more and more of the truly spiritual gets manifested. Religions are institutions founded by great seers for the promotion of the orderly and harmonious development of man towards his highest destiny. It is of course a fact of great importance to realise that in a world of multiplicity, variety develops, and this itself imposes inequalities that tend to develop barriers or walls of separation which lead to conflicts of all sorts. The only solution to this problem, the only way to make these separative walls

less opaque and movable or removable, is to develop the inward life, not of religion but of spirituality. Hinduism claims this universal quality that belongs to the spirit. It makes meaningful the social organisation and the hierarchy of values for the gradual evolution of the divine type of man. The higher we go, the clearer becomes the vision that reveals the meaningfulness of progress, and the unity of the Spirit through all the diversity. Sri Aurobindo sees in all religions the impulse to move higher; but untouched by the ever descending spirit into lower formations, these religions tend to either break up or deteriorate into fanatical creeds to be sustained and supported by lower nature or emotion. That mystical religion is about the best which leads to an openness to the higher descent*.

In the main lines of his thought Sri Aurobindo agrees with Svami Vivekananda. He agrees that at the present moment in the world's history not only India needs the verification of its spiritual activity, which unfortunately was neglected by denial of all activity as inconducive to spiritual realisation, but demands the descent of the spiritual transcendent force. It would be wrong to introduce rajas, the material element into the body spiritual of India, but it is necessary to bring down the truly spiritual force - the supermind - or vijnana - which in one sense is the spiritual aspect of the original of the prakrtic rajas. It is the only force that can tame the rajas

of the West and the tamas of the East, and uplift both to the transcendent state beyond even the sattva of prakrti.

* Sri Aurobindo has made references to Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroaster, Chinese books in the life Divine and to Islam in the Ideal of Human Unity. But there is no attempt to present their systems as a whole, as modern writers or theosophists have tended to do.

Practical guide to Integral Yoga - 2nd ed, 1965.

p. 384 - “The Indian systems did not distinguish between two quite different powers and levels of Consciousness, one which • we call the Overmind and the other the true Supermind or Divine Gnosis. That is the reason why they got confused about Maya and took it for the Supreme Creative power.”