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## **Humanity at the Crossroads: Does Sri Aurobindo Offer an Alternative?\***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In the light of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, this paper looks into some of the problems of contemporary man as an individual, a member of society, a citizen of his country, a component of this world, and of nature itself. Concepts like Science; Nature;;Matter; Mental Being; Mana-purusa; Prana-purusa; Citta-purusa; Nation-ego and Nation-soul; True and False Subjectivism; World-state and World-union; Religion of Humanism are the focus of this paper.*

*Nature: Beneath the diversity and uniqueness of the different elements in Nature there is an essential unity that not only allows for this diversity but even supports it. Nature is both a benefactor and a force: a benefactor, because it acts to carry out the evolution of mankind; a force, because it also supplies the necessary energy and momentum to achieve it.*

*Natural calamities: If mankind can quieten the tsunamis and cyclones and droughts and earthquakes that rage within, and behave with care and compassion towards Nature, not exploiting, denuding, or denigrating it, there is a strong possibility that Nature too will behave with equal care and compassion towards man and spare him the natural calamities than rend him asunder.*

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*Science: The limitation of science become obvious, according to Sri Aurobindo, when we realize that it has mastered knowledge of processes and helped in the creation of machinery but is ignorant of the foundations of being and, therefore, cannot perfect our nature or our life.*

*Science and philosophy: The insights of philosophy could become heuristic and algorithmic models for scientific experimentation.*

*Matter: An interesting aspect of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is his acceptance of the reality of matter even while highlighting its inadequacies; the ultimate goal, according to him, is the divination of matter itself.*

*Purusa: If the mana-purusa (mental being) were to log on to the genuine citta-purusa (psychic formation), without necessarily logging off from the prana-purusa (frontal formation), it may help quieten the turbulences within, which may be a prelude to the quietening of the disturbances without, whether it be physical maladies, cravings (for food, fame, fortune, etc.), destructive competitiveness; or wars, terrorism, ethnic conflicts, communal riots, and the other such social maladies that afflict mankind today.*

*Nation-ego (false subjectivism) and Nation-soul (true subjectivism): Sri Aurobindo considers Nation-ego an example of false subjectivism, in which national identity and pride are stressed to prove one's superiority and suppress or exploit the rest. The Nation-soul, as an example of true subjectivism, attempts to capture one's traditional heritage and values in its pristine form, not as a reaction to hurts and angers or as compensation for real or imagined injuries or indignities of the past.*

*World-state (false subjectivism) and World-union (true subjectivism): Similarly, a World-state founded upon the principle of centralization and uniformity, a mechanical and formal unity, is an example of false subjectivism, while a World-union founded upon the principle of liberty and variation in a free and intelligent unity is an example of true subjectivism*

*Human actualization: Even if two human beings are similar, in so far as they are human beings, there is so much diversity between them. Part of the movement towards human self-actualization lies in the fact that this diversity should not be forcibly curbed, as also the realization that beneath all that appears disparate there is an essential unity. Also, man is not the end product of evolution but an intermediate stage between the animal and the divine. Moreover, he is endowed with consciousness that enables him to cooperate with the forces of evolution and speed up and telescope the next stage of evolution.*

**Key Words:** *Science, Nature, Matter, Mental Being, Mana-purusa, Prana-purusa, Citta-purusa, Nation-ego and Nation-soul, True and False Subjectivism, World-state and World-union, Religion of Humanism*

## Introduction

- I.1. To say that Sri Aurobindo is not easy to comprehend would be a huge understatement, if nothing else. While that can dissuade a number of people from going any further, it can motivate a number of others to study him that much more closely. Let us hope that some of us fall in the latter category.
- I.2. Moreover, Sri Aurobindo has written prolifically and has expressed himself on a vast array of topics. This makes it all the more important to study his teachings, while also making him more liable to the barbs of critics itching to point out loopholes; and there are quite a few of these around: we mean critics with this attitude, not loopholes. Let us also hope that at least some of us do not belong to that category.
- I.3. Humanity today is indeed passing through numerous crises, and yet surviving. While we all, no doubt, wish to continue to evolve through all this survival (hopefully even reaching the supramental state promised by the great seer of Pondicherry), our concerns here are a little more pedestrian. We propose to look into some of the problems of contemporary man as an individual, a member of society, a citizen of his country, as a component of this world and of nature itself. Come to think of it, these concerns are not all that pedestrian after all.
- I.4. Some concepts like Science, Nature, Matter, Mental Being, *Mana-purusa*, *Prana-purusa* and *Citta-purusa*, Nation-ego and Nation-soul, True and False Subjectivism, World-state and World-union, and the Religion of Humanism will be the focus of this paper. Why not the rest, you may ask. Well, not that the others are not important. But we believe these particular concepts deserve our focus here. Especially so today, as humanity finds itself at the crossroads, and searches, rather gingerly, for some tentative answers, which may hopefully translate into permanent solutions.

## II. Science, Matter, And Nature

II.1. While science is engaged, with ample justification, in highlighting the distinguishing characters, the “discontinuities and discreteness of the elements of Nature, ... there is a level of reality which is continuous and yet to be grasped by the physical senses and science.”<sup>1</sup>

What is this level of reality which is continuous? It is to understand that Nature has immense potentialities; it is like a sleeping God. If awakened, it can raise all the elements that constitute it, including man, through the different levels of existence—material, vital, mental, and beyond, i.e., the supramental. This is possible only if we first of all realize that beneath the diversity and uniqueness

of the different elements in Nature, there is an essential unity that not only allows for this diversity, but even supports it. Which means if the diversity of elements in nature is fundamental, equally fundamental is the unity that runs through these diverse elements.

One of the important assignments for the scientific man of today would be to engage in tracing out this unity, while he is justifiably busy engaged in his methods of categorizing, classifying, differentiating, etc. Otherwise, it is in danger of remaining just a mass of formulae, ignorant of the foundation of being, and a poor instrument to perfect our nature or our life:

*.....our science itself is a construction, a mass, of formulas and devices; masterful in the knowledge of processes and in the creation of apt machinery, but ignorant of the foundations of the being and of World-being, it cannot perfect our nature and therefore cannot perfect our life.<sup>2</sup>*

Of course the larger problem remains: whether science will arrive at *the* ultimate truth, or *any* ultimate truth. To this too, Sri Aurobindo makes a rather insightful remark:

*...one might ask whether science has arrived at any ultimate truth; on the contrary, ultimate truth even on the physical plane seems to recede as science advances.<sup>3</sup>*

Which makes us remember the astute remark of George Bernard Shaw: "Every true scientist is a metaphysician," and that of Albert Einstein: "Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind".<sup>4</sup> By religion, may we add, Einstein most probably meant spirituality, compassion, morality, and the ennobling aspects of religion (not its dogmatic and fanatical manifestations). How best to make science collaborate (if not combine) with philosophy and with spirituality and the other ennobling aspects of religion (especially compassion and brotherhood) is an important task before the votaries of science today.

At the same time, let us realise that Science, with its methods and approach, is the favourite whipping boy of most philosophers.<sup>5</sup> So much so, we suspect it is in danger of becoming immune to even philosophy's legitimate pleas. However, a happy meeting ground would be a realization of each other's limitations and, more important, working together in an atmosphere of intellectual integration, wherein the insights of philosophy could become heuristic and algorithmic models for scientific experimentation. For, let's face it, if science cannot lay claim to being the sole guardian of humanity, neither can philosophy.

This challenge and realization has to be accepted by both sides for the sake of the welfare of society and at times for, if nothing else, its very survival.

II.2. The forces of Nature have exercised a fascinating influence on human

beings. While we know that many of these forces are promotive to existence, we also know that a number of them are far from being so. Earthquakes, cyclones, floods, and natural calamities in various forms have a devastating effect on the constituents of Nature. In what sense, then, can the following statement have meaning: “the forces of Nature expressed through laws are not destructive, rather it is expressive and promotive of the human mind, its thought and action, and their freedom.”<sup>6</sup>

The forces of Nature which cause natural calamities, such as the recent tsunami, the multiple earthquakes, cyclones, and famines, which have ravaged this country, and a number of others all over the world—how can such forces of Nature not be destructive but, rather, be expressive and promotive? Of course, we can find a convenient escape route by saying that what the author quoted above referred to were not the forces of Nature as such, but (the forces) as expressed through the fundamental laws. In that case, however, we are not concentrating on certain events but on the laws which govern them, and we can very well say that such laws are expressive and promotive at a deeper level, in ways which may not be comprehensible to our superficial and distressed awareness. Maybe it is so. A justification for natural disaster: that it is a means for bringing about population control or to reduce the evil in society, has been advanced by a number of thinkers even earlier, Gandhi being not the least of them when he talked of the justification for the Bihar earthquake of 1934. To the mind acutely aware of the tragedy involved in such natural calamities, such reasoning defies comprehension. It may be convenient to believe that behind every action manifest in Nature is the Supreme, trying to arouse and guide us to perfection; but at the same time, let us fervently hope that none of those on that path to perfection were a part of the disaster and that they continue to remain so “protected.”

Strange and incomprehensible are the ways of Nature. Equally strange and incomprehensible can be the ways by which man justifies the vagaries of Nature. Having said that, however, even expression of the destructive forces of Nature can be “expressive and promotive of the human mind, its thought and action, and their freedom”<sup>7</sup> in at least one way: It has made a number of people express their solidarity towards the disaster-affected victims, and it has helped promote the feeling of care and compassion for the disadvantaged in the more privileged and fortunate sections of the world. Well, every cloud has a silver lining. It is just that here the cloud seems to be enormous and the silver lining appears to be far too thin.

II.3. Let us come to another interesting aspect of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy, which may possibly help resolve the issue, and that is his acceptance of the reality of matter while highlighting its inadequacies. “Sri Aurobindo is naturalist in a special sense. He affirms the reality of matter and at the same time highlights its imperfection. He affirms the reality of life-world and points out its imperfection and even distortion. He analyses the rich complexity of the human mind and

also shows its inadequacy to grasp the integrality of reality as a whole.”<sup>8</sup>

Ha. Do we now have an answer? That matter exists but is imperfect. The world exists but is imperfect, even distorted. Hence it is subject to calamities and disasters. That the human mind is rich and complex, all right, but it may not be able “to grasp the integrality of reality as a whole”.<sup>9</sup> Which means even when things go drastically wrong in Nature or in man, we should be able to understand that there is integrality even in such a reality; a reality that only a holistic approach will make obvious.

This is because the human mind, howsoever rich and complex it may be in its ability, is still inadequate in its grasp of the integral nature of phenomena as they express themselves in Nature outside, and in nature within as well.

Of course, to understand the mysteries of events and happenings around us, we must, besides helping correct the situation outside, examine the tsunamis and earthquakes and cyclones and floods and droughts that afflict us within. The tsunamis of our desires devastate our rationalities, the floods of greed rampage our morality, the droughts of compassion dwarf our sense of fraternity, and the earthquakes of our personal tragedies break down the edifices of our beliefs. To that extent, all such tragedies and events in Nature ostensibly have a destructive, but fundamentally an expressive and promotive effect, on human nature.

*All the law of Nature is a thing precise in its necessities of process, but is yet in the cause of that necessity and of its constancy of rule, measure, combination, adaptation, result a thing inexplicable, meeting us at every step with a mystery and a miracle, and this must be either because it is irrational and accidental even in its regularities or because it is suprarational, because the truth of it belongs to a principle greater than that of our intelligence. That principle is the supramental; that is to say, the hidden secret of Nature in the organization of something out of the infinite potentialities of the self-existent truth of the spirit, the nature of which is wholly evident only to an original knowledge born of, and proceeding by, a fundamental identity, the spirit's constant self-perception. All these processes are actually spiritual and supramental in their secret government, but mental, vital, and physical in their overt process.*<sup>10</sup>

While every disaster is heartrending, it is also an occasion and an invitation to human growth. This of course is not in any way to reduce the impact that such tragedies have on our brethren or to trivialize the issue by offering smart intellectual justification for events. But in some special sense, the ill-understood and inexorable ways of Nature, and the forces that move it, are guiding man's destiny and, hopefully, his actions in the direction of not just survival but of an integral evolution. We pray that this hope becomes a conviction, furthering man's self-actualization and also strengthening his resolve to live in harmony with Nature and his brethren, rather than remain only an excuse to quieten

internal disturbances arising out of bafflement with the inscrutable vagaries of Nature. An example of one such integral evolution is the following thought that we place for your consideration:

If mankind can quieten the tsunamis and cyclones and droughts and earthquakes that rage within, and behave with care and compassion towards Nature, not exploiting or denuding or denigrating it, there is a strong possibility that Nature too will behave with equal care and compassion towards man and spare him the natural calamities than rend him asunder. This is the lesson of the tsunami tragedy that engulfed us recently, and of all such tragedies that have ravaged mankind from time immemorial.

This realization may be considered one manifestation of how human consciousness, which is in the “twilight zone of reality...is being increasingly brightened by the light beyond the supermind”.<sup>11</sup> Only the descent of the supramental consciousness on the earth can rid humanity of the “poverty of the powers of consciousness besieged by maladies of various kinds.”<sup>12</sup>

#### II.4. Let us now consider Man and his relation with Nature:

*In Man, two ends of Nature, the growing animal sector and the arc of the Above, meet and interact, supplementing and complementing each other.*<sup>13</sup>

What is the essence of being a Man? Firstly, that he is an animal, and secondly, that he is capable of evolving because of “the arc of the Above,” which finds a resonating chord in his inner being. If the chord is well tuned, it will vibrate in harmony with the symphony from above. It makes sense to say that the major part of our energies must be directed to such self-tuning.

This is one important task before mankind today. But it must be supplemented by the knowledge that the two forces of Nature working on man interact in him, not to contradict each other or to disturb his fundamental equilibrium (although it may disturb his superficial equilibrium to an extent), but in a manner which supplements, that is adds on to, and complements, that is completes, the work of these two forces in their attempt to bring about man’s evolution. To that extent, Nature is both a benefactor and a force: a benefactor, because it acts to carry out the evolution of mankind; a force, because it also supplies the necessary energy and momentum to achieve it. In this way, it is both the visionary and the executor; both the propagator and the creator. (And having seen the destructive role of Nature earlier, we see the trinity of Creation–Perpetuation–Destruction, the Brahma–Vishnu–Mahesh, being manifest in Nature too.) Moreover, as it is guided by and acted upon by “the arc of the Above,” it fulfills its role in mankind’s evolution that much more integrally.

The task before the thinking mind of today is to realize this happening, to be receptive to the changes and modifications it brings about in him, to tune in to the integral rhythms this arouses within and with the living–nonliving environment around, and to allow for the actions that spontaneously and inevitably spring therefrom.

### III. Purusa, Nation-Soul, And World-Unity

III.1. Let us come to the concepts of *mana-purusa*, *prana-purusa*, and *citta-purusa*:<sup>14</sup>

*The mental being (mana-purusa) has a frontal formation (prana-purusa) and transcendental psychic formation (citta-purusa).*<sup>15</sup>

We must also understand these concepts in the light of what Sri Aurobindo considers false subjectivism and true subjectivism.<sup>16</sup>

The *mana-purusa*, which is the mental being, is acted upon by the *prana-purusa*, which is the vital being, and the *citta-purusa*, which is the psychic formation. (The *mana-purusa* can be roughly compared to the mind, the *prana-purusa* to the living body, and the *citta-purusa* to the soul.) The *prana-purusa* can give rise to obsessive vital cravings, which can be a drag on the *mana-purusa*; while the *citta-purusa*, which is subliminal and transcendental, uplifts him to function at a higher plane. The *mana-purusa*, while it cannot avoid the legitimate needs of his *prana-purusa*, must not get obsessively preoccupied with it, because that would lead to man becoming unduly pragmatic and making “our political interests also perniciously narrow.”<sup>17</sup>

This is exactly what happens in the man of today who is obsessively preoccupied with satisfying his physical needs and emotional desires at the cost of his spiritual development and, hence, is perpetually dissatisfied. The consequent disease, deviance, psychopathology, and social strife that we see around us are manifestations of the frustration that results due to such dissatisfaction.

The obsessive craving for foods, fads, fashions, fame, fortune, and for possessions, human and material, involve a pathological linking of the *mana-purusa* with the *prana-purusa* and a delinking with his *citta-purusa*. The ills of hyper-consumerism and drug and other dependences are also a manifestation of this obsessive need to satisfy the *prana-purusa* delinked from the *citta-purusa*. The attempts to rewrite history, to avenge historical wrongs, to seek communal retribution, to use fear and terror to achieve ideological and “religious” goals, all these involve a pathological linking of the *mana-purusa* with a *prana-purusa* masquerading as a *citta-purusa*—for the *citta-purusa* has both a real and a false form—and the inevitable dissatisfaction that results therefrom, which further fuels such action.



However, if the *mana-purusa* were to *log on* to the genuine *citta-purusa*, without necessarily *logging off* from the *prana-purusa*, it may help quieten the turbulences within, which may be a prelude to the quietening of the disturbances without, whether it be physical maladies, cravings (for food, fame, fortune etc), destructive competitiveness, wars, terrorism, ethnic conflicts, communal riots, or other such social maladies that afflict mankind today.

To *log on* to the genuine *citta-purusa* means to *log on* to the unity that underlies the diversity within human beings. Somewhere down the line it also means to *log on* to the integrality that underlies all existence. This would amount to being the true subjectivism of Sri Aurobindo and would help get rid of the false subjectivism that binds contemporary man's *mana-purusa* unhealthily and obsessively with his *prana-purusa* or with a false *citta-purusa* that negates the essential unity that underlies the diversity amongst beings and all existence itself. In other words, the first halting but resolute steps on the journey to true subjectivism must be taken in this manner by the man of today.

III.2. A related concept for us in these times is that of Nation-ego and Nation-soul as described by Sri Aurobindo. He considers Nation-ego an example of false subjectivism, in which national identity and pride are stressed upon to prove one's superiority and to suppress or exploit the rest. The example he quotes frequently is that of Nazism in Germany, obviously because he lived during that period:

*She (Nazi Germany) had mistaken her vital ego for herself; she had sought for her soul and found only her force. For she had said, like the Asura, "I am my body, my life, my mind, my temperament," and became attached with a titanic force to these; especially she had said, "I am my life and body," and that there can be no greater mistake for man and nation. The soul of a man or nation is something more and diviner than that; it is greater than its instruments and cannot be shut up in a physical, a vital, a mental, or a temperamental formula...It is evident that there is a false as well as a true subjectivism and the errors to which the subjective trend may be liable are as great as its possibilities and may well lead to capital disasters. This distinction must be clearly grasped if the road of this stage of social evolution is to be made safe for the human race.<sup>18</sup>*

For us today, it is necessary to analyze and place in perspective such fascist and fundamentalist ideologies and forces, which not only raise their ugly heads once in a while but also attempt to capture the social consciousness of communities. The implications of this statement for India should be obvious. But if some people feel like implicating the extreme Right here, let us not forget that the extreme Left can be equally guilty; for dogmatism and fanaticism has the curious ability to cut across ideological boundaries.

Distinct from the Nation-ego is the concept of Nation-soul. The Nation-soul is

an attempt to capture one's traditional heritage and values in its pristine form, not as a reaction to hurts and angers or due to real or imagined injuries or indignities of the past. Anger, hurt, and indignity can be a spur, but never the driving force, of any constructive movement. This is because an ideology or organization, or even a movement, which is based wholly or even mainly on anger or the desire for retribution, or for the resurrection of past glories that involved subjugation of people, can only breed discord, further strife, clashes, and enmity between groups and peoples. This has been at the source of the various ethnic conflicts since time immemorial and continues to plague mankind even today.

More germane to the issue for us in India today is whether concepts like *hindutva* are a manifestation of Nation-ego or Nation-soul. While the protagonists would immediately jump up and claim that it is a manifestation of the Nation-soul, the opponents would be equally insistent it is a perfect manifestation of the Nation-ego: and a puerile manifestation, if ever there was one.

Our purpose here is not to take sides, to act the arbiter, or to incite passions, which is easy even for philosophers. The *prana-purusa*, whether we like it or not, continues to exercise a great hold even here. Be that as it may. If the votaries of *hindutva* propagate their ideal, not only as an affirmation of the cultural and civilizational underpinnings of this nation's great heritage, but to use it as a convenient handle to intimidate and suppress minorities, then it would be akin to the Nazi's attitude towards the Jews.

However, if it is not exclusivist and is a careful and compassionate assertion of the tradition, the heritage bequeathed, and the values eternally followed and universally applicable, and a careful extract of that in the tradition which stresses the unity that underlies all beings and of existence itself, such a *hindutva* need have no difficulty becoming a true subjectivism and ideology fit for the Nation-soul. In this there is a challenge and an opportunity, as much for the votaries of this concept as its opponents: for the votaries to reaffirm that it is a concept of Nation-soul and never to allow it to become a concept to justify Nation-ego; for the opponents of today to be vigilant that it does not so happen, and at the same time not to cry wolf, or get unduly alarmed at a genuine affirmation of all that was noble and sublime in the Indian tradition, which needs a careful sifting, reappraisal, and rejuvenation as much by the votaries as by the adversaries of today. For:

*This is what a true subjectivism teaches us: firstly, that we are a higher self than our ego or our members; secondly, that we are in our life and being not only ourselves but all others; for there is a secret solidarity which our egoism may kick at and strive against, but from which we cannot escape.*<sup>19</sup>

In this connection, the larger context should not be forgotten. For, with our

narrow preoccupations we may forget that India may indeed have a larger role to play in the world:

*Another point very important to remember is that Sri Aurobindo always placed India's freedom in the larger context of the destiny of the human race. This fact is most remarkable because revolutionaries talk only about their own country. However, Sri Aurobindo always had a deeper vision of what India should do for humanity. In fact, he said that India has to be free in order that it can play its role in the emancipation of the human race.<sup>20</sup>*

**III.3. Let us now come to another important distinction made by Sri Aurobindo which is equally important today: the distinction between World-state and World-union:**

*To that reason two alternative possibilities and therefore two ideals present themselves, a World-State founded upon the principle of centralization and uniformity, a mechanical and formal unity, or a World-union founded upon the principle of liberty and variation in a free and intelligent unity.<sup>21</sup>*

This is a logical extension of his distinction between Nation-ego and Nation-soul.

Just like his spiritualism does not negate matter, his idea of global unity does not negate the idea of national freedom. Nations bring their own civilizational diversities and they need to preserve their cultural autonomy even whilst coming together and thinking in terms of global issues:

*A free world-union must in its very nature be a complex unity based on diversity and that diversity must be based on free self-determination.<sup>22</sup>*

The concept of a World-state, on the other hand, is a false subjectivism according to him, because it would result in bringing about forced and imposed uniformity:

*The ideal of uniformity, like the cult of state, is tainted by antilibertarianism. It amounts to the denial of the basic principle of human unity amidst civilizational diversity and cultural autonomy. He (Sri Aurobindo) thinks that our experiments with the 'Ideal of One World' must be free from misplaced commitment to barren uniformism and hegemonism.<sup>23</sup>*

The very movement towards uniformism is fundamentally flawed. It is a misplaced extension of the scientific attitude of finding out only commonalities in peoples and phenomena. Even if two human beings are similar, in so far as they are human beings, there is so much diversity in them. Part of the movement

towards human self-actualization lies in the fact that this diversity should not be forcibly curbed, as also the realization that beneath all that appears disparate, there is an essential unity. We should stress on such disparate as leads to the growth of human and national potential, while at the same time not forgetting to accent on the essential unity of all mankind. This is a true and genuine affirmation of the ideal of World-union, as distinct from a narrow, mechanistic, and constricting ideal that the concept of a World-state represents. In other words, all such movements toward Internationalism, which stifle the genuine cultural, civilizational, and patriotic aspirations of its member states, will always be a failure. Those that accept and respect their cultural and ideological diversity, and yet help them to come together on broad consensual issues, motivated by respect and compassion for such diversity of cultural and ideological expression, and embraced by the deepest undercurrent of the integrality that underlies all human beings everywhere, these alone will succeed in forging true Internationalism and world unity. What is applicable to the member nations of the world is equally applicable to the member states of the Indian union, if we wish to forge a vibrant and evolving Indian nation. At a more fundamental level, this is applicable to the union of all living and nonliving beings everywhere.

#### **IV. Religion of Man, Religion of Humanity, Divination of Matter, Evolution To Divinity**

IV.1. What can be the religion of the Man of today, besieged as he is by the numerous pulls and pressures of creeds, dogmas, and religious ideologies, which have been ritualized and fossilized beyond recognition by dogmatic followers who are adept at offering glib rationalizations for the sufferings of mankind:

*...the orthodox religions looked with eyes of pious sorrow and gloom on the earthly life of man and were ready to bid him bear peacefully and contentedly, even to welcome its crudities, cruelties, oppressions, and tribulations as a means for learning to appreciate and for earning the better life which will be given us hereafter.<sup>24</sup>*

Sri Aurobindo is quite categorical in emphasizing that neither an “idol, nor the nation, the State, the family, or anything else ought to take (the) place (of)...” the fundamental idea that mankind is the godhead to be worshipped and served by man.<sup>25</sup> For that alone will ensure that the body of man, the life of man, the heart of man, and the mind of man develop in their quest for divinity. For this, the fundamental concept has to be:

*Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, colour, nationality, status, or political or social advancement. The body of man is to be respected, made immune from violence and outrage, and fortified by science against disease and preventable death. The life of man is to be held sacred, preserved, strengthened, ennobled, and uplifted. The heart of man is to be held sacred also, given scope, protected from*

*violation, from suppression, from mechanization, freed from belittling influences. The mind of man is to be released from all bonds, allowed freedom and range and opportunity, given all its means of self-training and self-development and organized in the play of its powers for the service of humanity.*<sup>26</sup>

IV.2. The challenge that Sri Aurobindo throws to orthodox or organized religion is but appropriate: That man must be sacred to man, regardless of all distinctions. A religion that uplifts man on the spiritual plane, that helps acknowledge and bind the essential humanity across ideological/cultural/geographical boundaries, without spreading hatred or superiority/exclusivity amongst its followers, that alone can be a true religion. Moreover, in sustaining and perpetuating the outer symbols and structures of religion, man may forget to resurrect the inner spiritual symbols and structures, which alone can sustain true religiosity. Such symbols, when honestly searched for, will only lead to respect for all humans and even all living forms. It will also forge mutual respect and understanding of the diverse religions of the world and help generate a quest to underscore the essential spiritual unity which underlies these diverse religious strands.

Also, any religion which neglects the advancement of man's spiritual quest so as to sustain its dogmas and rituals and to command blind obedience will, in the final analysis, turn out to be promoting a false God. Sri Aurobindo's accent on the religion of humanity is to make organized religion beware of the dangers of fossilization and make us aware once again of the fundamental tenet of humanism that:

*Man is the measure of all things.*<sup>27</sup>

This reminds us of another great contemporary of Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi, and what he said about the practical aspect of religion:

*Religion which takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion.*<sup>28</sup>

IV.3. Coming back to Sri Aurobindo, we cannot but be impressed with the breadth and expanse of his thoughts and the invitation he offers us to change and evolve. In his vision of change is involved both the divination of matter and the active involvement of human beings in reaching the next stage of evolution. The insightful comments of a keen Aurobindo researcher on both these issues is worth a close look:

*..his goal was not individual salvation. His goal was not even a collective salvation; it was nothing short of a divination of matter, a transmutation of terrestrial consciousness... He was not satisfied with this matter and felt it had got to change, and the only way to change the texture of the matter, molecular or otherwise, is to bring down the light and*

*the power of supramental to bear upon terrestrial consciousness. That was the key.*<sup>29</sup>

*According to Sri Aurobindo, man is not the end product of evolution. Man is simply an intermediate creature, between the animal and the divine...with the advent of man, for the first time, there is a creature on planet earth that can cooperate consciously with the force of evolution. This is the great difference. Evolution need no longer be blind and instinctive. Human beings are endowed with consciousness that enables them to cooperate with the evolutionary thrust. And thereby perhaps, speed up and telescope, what otherwise would have taken another billion years, into a much shorter time span. The concept that has evolved is that man is an intermediate creature between the animal and the divine, and is endowed with consciousness that enables him to cooperate with the forces of evolution* <sup>30</sup>

The seer of Pondicherry invites man to be an active participant and collaborator in a transformation that unchains him from his dogmas and inspires him to attain the highest, not only for himself but also for all mankind. The insightful comments of another keen Aurobindo researcher are appropriate here:

*If we make a serious study of Sri Aurobindo, we shall find ourselves to be a participant of that adventure of consciousness which invites us to collaborate with that wide-ranging Yoga that can liberate us from the fetters of dogmas and preconceptions and inspire us to realize the highest and the best, not only for ourselves but for the entire humanity.*<sup>31</sup>

## **V. Disaster, Despair, Hope, And Integrating Quietude**

V.1. Together, we have taken a rather brisk but eventful walk through the fascinating lanes and bye-lanes of Sri Aurobindo's thoughts.

As humanity stands at the crossroads today, we find one road which leads to disaster, a road paved by the misadventures of science coupled with the ulterior motives of man. Another leads to despair, because of the pessimism and cynicism that comes from viewing the ugliness of modern life. The third is lit by hope, based on the wonderful advancements of science and technology. The last pathway is lit brilliantly, by an all-embracing integrating quietude, and that is by a mankind rooted in matter but soaring towards the spirit.

*Humanity, thou art afoot. Take what course thou wilt.*

## **Concluding Remarks**

Beneath the diversity and uniqueness of the different elements in Nature, there is an essential unity, that not only allows for this diversity but even supports it.

Science has mastered knowledge of processes and helped in the creation of machinery but is ignorant of the foundations of being, and therefore cannot perfect our nature or our life.

If the *mana-purusa* (mental being) were to *log on* to the genuine *citta-purusa* (psychic formation), without necessarily *logging off* from the *prana-purusa* (frontal formation), it may help quieten the turbulences within, which may be a prelude to the quietening of the disturbances without, whether it be wars, terrorism, ethnic conflicts, communal riots, and other such social maladies that afflict mankind today. To *log on* to the genuine *citta-purusa* means to *log on* to the unity that underlies the diversity within human beings. And, somewhere down the line, it also means to *log on* to the integrality that underlies all existence.

Nation-ego is an example of false subjectivism, in which national identity and pride are stressed to prove one's superiority and suppress or exploit others. The Nation-soul as an example of true subjectivism attempts to capture one's traditional heritage and values in its pristine form. *Hindutva*, if it has to be legitimate, must attempt to be an expression of Nation-soul and not Nation-ego.

A World-state founded upon the principle of centralization and uniformity, a mechanical and formal unity, is an example of false subjectivism, while a World-union founded upon the principle of liberty and variation in a free and intelligent unity is an example of true subjectivism

The movement towards human self-actualization lies in the fact that human diversity should not be forcibly curbed, as also the realization that beneath all that appears disparate, there is an essential unity.

Man must be sacred to man regardless of all distinctions of race, creed, color, nationality, status, and political or social advancement.

Man is not the end product of evolution but an intermediate stage between the animal and the divine. He is endowed with consciousness that enables him to cooperate with the forces of evolution.

The ultimate goal is the divination of matter itself.

### **Take Home Message**

The diversity of Nature, as also of man, is based on an essential unity, which needs to be grasped.

Science has mastered processes and machinery but is ignorant of the foundations of being.

Nation-ego, in the form of national pride and identity to prove one's superiority and for exploiting others, is false subjectivism, which must be distinguished from Nation-soul that attempts to capture one's traditional heritage and values in its pristine form, which is true subjectivism.

A World-state based on centralization and uniformity is false subjectivism, while a World-union founded upon liberty and variation in a free and intelligent unity is true subjectivism.

Man can evolve towards divinity, as can matter.

### Conflict of Interest

None declared.

### Declaration

This is our original unpublished work, not submitted for publication elsewhere.

## References and Notes

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13. Chattopadhyaya, *op. cit.*
14. This is Prof. Chattopadhyaya's formulation, an interesting one, but not presented in this manner in Sri Aurobindo's writings. The latter talks of *Manomaya purusa* (mental person, the mental being), and *pranamaya purusa* (the true, vital being; soul in life), and *citta* (*not citta purusa*; *citta* meaning basic consciousness; mind stuff, the general stuff of mental conscious-



ness. He also talks of *cittakasa*, *cittapramatha*, *cittasakti*, *cittashuddhi*, *cittavrtti*, *cittavrttinirodha*, *citti*, *citti acitti*, *cittim acittim cinavan vi vidvan etc.* However, that need not detract us from the burden of the argument Prof. Chattopadhyaya forwards.

15. Chattopadhyaya, *op. cit.*
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29. Singh Karan, *op. cit.*
30. *Ibid*.
31. Joshi, Kireet, *op. cit.*

## Questions That This Paper Raises

1. Do the teachings of Sri Aurobindo have any relevance for today's times?
2. How can science, while supplying processes and machinery, also help in understanding the essence of being?
3. Is Nation-ego and Nation-soul a viable distinction? Or for that matter, World-state and World-union? What are their practical ramifications?
4. How does one capture one's traditional heritage and values in their pristine

form (Nation-soul) without trying to prove one's superiority, or for exploiting others (Nation-ego)?

5. How does one ensure liberty and variation in a free and intelligent unity (World-union) while avoiding centralisation and uniformity (World-state)?
6. Is divination of man and matter possible? How?

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