

THE VISION OF TRANSFORMATION

by

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DISCUSSION PAPER

on

Arabinda Basu's

THE INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

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Pondicherry was a window from which Sri Aurobindo Ghose (August 15, 1872 - December 5, 1950) looked out upon the world. His vision was global from the start. At the age of eighteen he wrote The Harmony of Virtue, later described by him as the daring effort of a mere lad to provide "an explanation of the cosmos on the foundation of the principle of Beauty and Harmony." Even as a nationalist leader, he looked beyond India's shores and developed a philosophy of humanity. This paper is therefore precisely suited to the theme of the conference. As far as global philosophies go, Aurobindo's philosophy is global in the most global sense of the word. Not content with the Vedantic ideology of liberation, he puts forth the vision of transformation.

Thus shall the earth open to divinity
And common natures feel the wide uplift,
Illumine common acts with the Spirit's ray
And meet the deity in common things.
Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine.

--Savitri

The author of this paper is Dr. Arabinda Basu from Pondicherry. He combines his mentor's roles of scholar and yogin, and is himself part of that global succession.

In his introduction, Basu addresses the issue of "global philosophy" by raising basic questions, but does not supply introductory answers linking his subject with the theme. As a result, there is initial ambiguity as to direction. Perhaps his intent is first to define "philosophy," which, when understood in his subject's sense, will translate as "global philosophy."

The first section (pages 1-10) is an attempt to explain the riddle of how Aurobindo could have written philosophy without being a philosopher. It is argued that Aurobindo was not a philosopher because he "read little philosophy, Eastern or Western." Moreover, philosophers did not appeal to him because the philosophies they produced were inherently flawed by their reliance on the intellect. Reason cannot deliver essential truth because it is speculative, reductionist, abstract, and non-objective. Rationalistic systems are "only feasible selective constructions of great selective ideas."

Aurobindo's critique of reason is not tantamount to its rejection. He surveys "the movement of knowledge" and finds that the beginning of the "awakened human mind was intuitive and symbolic." This was true both in Vedic India and in ancient Greece.

The age of intuitive apprehension was followed by the period of rational philosophy. The intellectualising of philosophy made it precise and logical, but at the price of fixity, rigidity, and dogmatic exclusiveness.

What is now needed is not the dethronement of reason but its purification. Once the narrow accretions are removed, reason will reveal powers that are not now evident.

By recourse to such arguments and observations, it is concluded that Aurobindo, the non-rationalist yogi, was not a philosopher. At the same time, he did engage in philosophy to the extent that he formulated his spiritual experiences in

intelligible terms. What emerges is two philosophies--the "philosophy" of the philosophers, and the "philosophy" of Aurobindo. The latter is "true" philosophy (2). It is based on "yogic experience and knowledge." Its real value for man is "to give him light on the matter of his being, the principles of his psychology, his relations with the world and with God, the fixed lines of the great possibilities of his destiny." Though essentially a search for truth, philosophy "should not only have a message for life but the power to direct it."

The possibility of such a philosophy emerges by the synthesizing of two kinds of knowledge: the "higher, supra-intellectual knowledge," and the "lower science which is concerned with an outward knowledge of the phenomena." Truth is one. All religions and philosophies are limited and divergent attempts to grasp it. On the other hand, Integral philosophy leads to the "unity of God, men and Nature and all that is in Nature." Yoga is the true way to integral knowledge. It is a scientific method attuned to human consciousness. Consciousness is not confined to human psychology, but is a power inherent in the supreme Self. By virtue of all-pervading consciousness, the Self is the ~~imm~~most Reality of all existence.

This brings us to the second section of the paper (pages 11-28) in which we are given Aurobindo's view of the relation of man and the universe to Ultimate Reality.

Reality is unknowable, but the Incomprehensible knows

itself as Satcitananda. As Sat, it is pure existence, beyond the polarities of Being and Becoming, Unity and Multiplicity. As cit, it is a conscious Force that moves intelligently. As ananda, it is unlimited Bliss.

The universe is the manifestation of the involution of the Divine. The reason for creation is play (lila). The process of creation is as follows:

1. Satcitananda Unmanifest.
2. Satcitananda Manifest (Existence, Consciousness, Bliss)
3. Supermind.
4. Overmind
5. Intuitive Mind
6. Illumined Mind
7. Higher Mind
8. Mind
9. Soul
10. Life
11. Matter

Consciousness is present on all levels of nature, though its presence is veiled.

By a reversal of the above process, divine consciousness evolves from the level of the inconscient, to the vital and mental levels. With man, evolution becomes a self-conscious activity. Participation in it is the fulfilment of man's deepest aspiration. However, mere mental activity cannot bring man integral knowledge. The mind divides. Man must rise to the level of the Supermind. Here, knowledge is by identity, and all diversities are understood by a unitary consciousness. Such knowledge is expressed through appropriate action.

The means to divine perfection is through integral yoga.

It is integral in method, combining the traditional triple paths; and it is integral in result, effecting a radical transformation of the individual in the totality of his internal being and external relationships. Yogic ascent is paralleled by divine descent through which body mind and spirit are suffused.

Thus, in Aurobindo's "comprehensive Advaita (Monism)" there is no felt opposition between God and the world. Once man sheds his original nescience and abandons individuality, he beholds the One in the many, and the many in the One. Nothing is excluded--matter is Brahman--, though the system is not pantheistic.

The final section of the paper (pages 28-39) deals with the application of philosophical theory to the practical guidance of life. The ideal is of the "total evolution of man into superman" characterized by "Wisdom, Force and Love, a veritable god wearing the earthly robe of matter."

The transformation of society has primarily to do with "inner psychological forces." The social logic is that once the subjective life of man is spiritualised, the economic and political life of society will correspondingly be rectified. The spiritualizing of society entails the transformation of the group soul to a life of freedom.

As with society, so with humanity. "Nature is preparing humanity for an eventual unity!"

Critique

The paper is a well-written piece of research which accomplishes what it set out to do. However, in the spirit of "progressive evolution," some veils can be lifted.

1. Since it is assumed (preface) that the subject is little known, a brief biography will help.

2. Pages 1-9 can be condensed and clarified by defining "philosophy" through one set of terms. The "riddle" is not that mysterious. If it is argued that Aurobindo did not know much philosophy, does not this limitation invalidate his judgment upon philosophy? If it is claimed that Indian philosophy departed from its existential base, following the Vedic period, how does one still maintain that it "has always understood its double function" of being rational and practical?

3. Pages 10-28. Itemise the process of Involution/Evolution. Eliminate oscillation between the items. Are these items fixed, or can additions be made? Missing in this section is any reference to Mother, shakti. Aurobindo saw an incarnation of shakti in the person of Mirra Richard. What appeal can this global philosophy expect by identifying "Mother" as the embodiment of the descent of the Supermind?

4. Pages 28-39. If all creation is sanctified by Spirit, why does the evolved person lose interest in the body, vital desires, culture, etc.? By what definition is he "the salt of the earth" ? If "Nature is preparing humanity for an eventual unity," how is this teleology consistent with human freedom, and where do we discern its evidence in global affairs?

5. Appendix. The problem of evil is sufficiently important to be brought into the main discussion and may be located in the section dealing with the unconscious, ego, ignorance, and individuality. Does the subjective resolution of the problem do justice to the objective dimensions of pain and evil in society and in the world?