

NCERT

"The first principle of true education is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process."

-SRI AUROBINDO

"In the right view of both life and Yoga, all life is either consciously or sub-consciously a Yoga. For we mean by this term a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the Cosmos."

-SRI AUROBINDO

"The education of a human being should begin at birth and continue throughout his life. Indeed, .it should begin even before birth; in this case it is the mother herself who proceeds with this education by means of a twofold action: first upon herself for her own improvement, and secondly, upon the child whom she is forming physically."

-THE MOTHER



राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

First Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture – 2008

BY MANOJ DAS

Memorial Lecture Series



1872-1950

To Prepare for the Future

“All the studies and in any case the largest part of the studies consist of learning the past in the hope that it will make you understand the present better.

“But if one wants to avoid the danger that the students remain clinging to the past and refuse to see the future, it is necessary to take good care to explain to them that all that happened in the past aimed at preparing that which is happening now and only prepares the way for the future which is truly the most important thing, for which we should prepare ourselves.

“It is by cultivating the intuition that one prepares oneself to live for the future.”

–THE MOTHER

Two Poles of Discernment

“From the point of view of education, this would be very important: to see the world as it is, exactly, unadorned, in the most down-to-earth and concrete manner; and to see the world as it can be, with the freest, highest vision, the one most full of hope and aspiration and marvellous certitude – as the two poles of discernment.”

–THE MOTHER

The True Basis of Education

“The true basis of education is the study of the human mind, infant, adolescent and adult. Any system of education founded on theories of academic perfection, which ignores the instrument of study, is more likely to hamper and impair intellectual growth than to produce a perfect and perfectly equipped mind. For the educationist has to do, not with dead material like the artist or sculptor, but with an infinitely subtle and sensitive organism. He cannot shape an educational masterpiece out of human wood or stone; he has to work in the elusive substance of mind and respect the limits imposed by the fragile human body.”

–SRI AUROBINDO

Yoga and Education

“The key to knowledge is within, for it is the awakened soul within that observes, records, sorts out, omits, unites, transmutes, and turns facts and information into knowledge, knowledge into wisdom, and wisdom into the dynamo of right aspiration and action. The spark is indeed within, albeit often obscured by the thick fog of the egoistic prison-house. It is the true task of education to provide the atmosphere, the friendly help or guidance, the leverage that will release the spark and make it flame forth into a blaze of consciousness characterised by an ever increasing intensity and wideness. The physical, the vital, the mental, all will be drafted into this adventure of consciousness, but still the soul will be the rider of the chariot that is the body, with the vital and mind as the twin horses of the race. Sri Aurobindo has defined Yoga as ‘a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being, and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence.’ In its far aims as also in its essential processes, education coalesces with Yoga..”

–DR. K.R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR: SRI AUROBINDO (A BIOGRAPHY)

The Hidden Splendour

“Every human being carries hidden within him the possibility of a greater consciousness beyond the frame of his normal life through which he can participate in a higher and vaster life. Indeed, in all exceptional beings it is always this consciousness that governs their life, and organises both the circumstances of their life and their individual reaction to these circumstances.

“What the human mind does not know and cannot do, this consciousness knows and does. It is like a light that shines at the centre of the being radiating through the thick coverings of the external consciousness. Some have a vague perception of its presence; a good many children are under its influence which shows itself very distinctly at times in their spontaneous reaction and even in their words.”

–THE MOTHER

NCERT MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES

First Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture
Dorozio Hall, Presidency College, Kolkata

2 July 2008

MANOJ DAS



राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

June 2008

Ashadha 1930

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© National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2008

Published at the Publication Department by the Secretary, National Council of Educational Research and Training, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi 110 016 and printed at M/s Gita Offset, C-90, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I, New Delhi 110 020

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OUR OBJECTIVES

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is an apex organisation assisting and advising the Central and State Governments by undertaking research, survey, development, training and extension activities for all stages of school and teacher education.

One of the objectives of the Council is to act as a clearing house and disseminator of ideas relating to school and teacher education. We have initiated the current Memorial Lecture Series in order to fulfil this role and to commemorate the life and work of great educational thinkers. Our aim is to strive to raise the level of public awareness about the seminal contributions made in the field of education by eminent men and women of India. We expect that such awareness will set off a chain of discourse and discussion. This, we hope, will make education a lively subject of inquiry while simultaneously encouraging a sustained public engagement with this important domain of national life.

The memorial lecture series will cover public lectures commemorating the life and work of nine eminent Indian educational thinkers and practitioners.

Title	Venue
Gijubhai Badheka Memorial Lecture	Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai
RabindranathTagore Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar
Zakir Hussain Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education, Mysore
Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education, Bhopal

B.M. Pugh Memorial Lecture	North East Regional Institute of Education, Shillong
Savitribai Phule Memorial Lecture	SNDT , Women's College, Mumbai
Marjorie Sykes Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education, Ajmer
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture	Presidency College, Kolkata
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture	India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi.

We invite men and women of eminence from academia and public life to deliver these lectures in English or any other Indian language. Our intention is to reach large audiences consisting in particular of teachers, students, parents, writers, artists, NGOs, government servants and members of local communities.

The table below provides a summary of the nine lectures organised under the Memorial Lecture Series programme in the year 2007-2008.

NAME	DATE	VENUE	SPEAKER	THEME	CHAIRPERSON
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture	January 17, 2007	India International Centre New Delhi	Prof. Christopher Winch, Professor, Educational Philosophy and Policy, King's College London, U.K.	Individuals Workers or Citizens; Reflections on the Limits of School Based Educational Reform	Prof. Mrinal Miri Former Vice Chancellor NEHU, Shillong
Zakir Hussain Memorial Lecture	January 19, 2007	Regional Institute of Education Mysore	Dr. Radhika Herzberger, Director, Rishi Valley School, Chittor, Andhra Pradesh	Religion, Education and Peace	Prof. B.L. Chaudhary, VC Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur, Rajasthan
Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lecture	August 17, 2007	Regional Institute of Education, Bhopal	Prof. Karuna Chanana, Former Professor at Zakir Hussain Centre for Educational Studies, School of Social Sciences, JNU	Women in Indian Academe; Diversity, Difference and Inequality in a Contested Domain	Prof. R.S. Sirohi Vice Chancellor Barkatulla University

B. M. Pugh Memorial Lecture	March 11, 2008	Laitumkhrah Womens College, Shillong	Shri Ratan Thyiam, Chairperson, Chorus Repertoiry Theatre, Shillong	Theatre Language and Expression	Prof. T. Ao Dean School of Humanities, NEHU, Shillong
Marjorie Sykes Memorial Lecture	April 8, 2008	Jawahar Rang Manch Ajmer, Regional Institute of Education Ajmer	Ms. Medha Patkar, Social Activist	Socialization vs. Politics of Education	Prof. M.S. Agwani, Former Vice Chancellor, JNU
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture	July 2, 2008	Dorozio Hall, Presidency College, Kolkata	Shri Manoj Das, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry	Education for a Faith in the Future	Prof. Sanjib Ghosh, Principal, Presidency College, Kolkata
Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture	July 19, 2008	Regional Institute of Education, Bhubneswar	Prof. N.R. Menon, Member, Commission on Centre State Relations	Realizing Equality of Status and of Opportunity: Role of Government, Judiciary and Civil Society.	Principal, Regional College of Education, Bhubneswar
Gijubhai Badekha Memorial Lecture	August 2008 (scheduled)	MIDS Chennai	Shri U.R. Ananthamurthy	Learning to be a Writer in the School of Life	Chairperson, MIDS, Chennai
Savitri Phule Memorial Lecture	August/September 2008	SNDT Women's College, Mumbai	Dr. Sunderaraman Director, State Health Resource Centre	Yet to be given by speaker	To be finalised shortly

I must acknowledge the contribution of Ms Shadab Subhan, Junior Project Fellow for helping me with the finalisation of this manuscript.

We hope all these lecture series will be of use to our audiences as well as the wider public.

ANUPAM AHUJA
Convenor

SECTION 1

On Sri Aurobindo: His Vision of Man and His Lights on Education

Manoj Das

AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS LIFE AND VISION

A GOLDEN PARADOX

Calcutta a hundred years ago was a far cry from the Kolkata of 2008. A public speaker had no opportunity to ring out a resounding voice courtesy the microphone. The public transport system was in its infancy and the greater part of the would-be audience had to trek miles to hear its leaders and often pass the night on pavements after the event, under blinking kerosene lamps. Population of the city was less than that of an average town of today. Keeping this perspective in mind, let us appreciate the report that follows, reproduced from *The Times*, London, from an issue of August 1909:

“As things were, the audience of August 7 consisted of about 5,000 persons, of whom about half was youthful...The sole orator of the Calcutta boycott meeting, Babu Bhupendranath Bose, excited no enthusiasm whatever, partly because his speech was too moderate and partly because it was audible to a small number. The Bengalis have primitive ideas as to the organisation of a meeting and Babu Bhupendranath was expected to harangue an open-air audience, numbering some thousands, from the top of a small dining table. Mr. Bradlaugh or Dr. Clifford would have failed under such conditions. The remarkable fact was, however, that damped as the crowd was by a lone essay, it burst into loud cheering when Mr. Aurobindo Ghose was seen standing near the dining table aforesaid. He was unquestioningly the hero of the meeting.”

What the report does not say – rather could not have said – how the “hero of the meeting” who was never given to histrionics, who spoke in a soft voice and, last but not the least, in English with chaste British accent, could be the object of such adoration. With the historic Surat Congress and the famous Alipore Conspiracy Case behind him, he was a legend non-pareil. Even years after he had disappeared from the British India, this was what Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had to say: “When I came to Calcutta in 1913, Aurobindo was already a legendary figure. Rarely have I seen people speak of a leader with such rapturous enthusiasm and many were the anecdotes of this great man, some of them probably true, which travelled from mouth to mouth.” (*An Indian Pilgrim*)

Leaders of those days, in the popular perception, were made of special stuff but even among them Sri Aurobindo was outstanding. Let us see the impression of the renowned statesman M.R. Jayakar, then a young delegate to the Calcutta Congress of 1906: “I then had my first opportunity of observing from close quarters the Congress leaders of those times with some of whom my contact increased later. I then saw Aurobindo Ghose and his associates. What struck me were his great earnestness and dignified appearance. He had not then developed, so far as outside appearance could show, into a complete Yogi, but I got from a distance, an indication that his political philosophy was different from that of those who surrounded him.” (*The Story of My Life*)

One’s life story or biography is constructed with events in which one was involved, and events galore mark the life of Sri Aurobindo. No wonder that by now volumes were written on his life. But he had discouraged the very first writer proposing to write his life story, saying that no one could write about his life, for it had not been on the surface for men to see. In other words he considered the external aspect of his life of no much consequence when compared to his inner life devoted to the pursuit of a hitherto unexplored truth, the destiny of man in terms of spiritual evolution – a vision to which the world is lately waking up slowly but steadily. The

struggles and experiences he went through in the realms of consciousness were far more formidable than the storms and tumults marking his life on the surface.

Nevertheless, following the tradition of biographical accounts, we can have a bird's eye-view of the objective phases of his life.

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on the 15th of August 1872, in the very house that is well-known today as Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, on the south side of Shakespeare Sarani. He was the third child of his parents, Dr. K.D. Ghose and Swarnalata Devi. Dr. Ghose, a highly qualified physician trained in the West, served as the chief of the district medical services of those days and was famous for his kind and charitable dispensations on one hand and for his thoroughly anglicised life style on the other hand. Even though Sri Aurobindo's maternal grandfather Rajnarayan Bose, was revered as a Rishi as well as "the Grandfather of Indian nationalism", the veteran had no chance to exercise his influence on Sri Aurobindo who at the age of five, was admitted to the Loretto Convent at Darjeeling, run by an Irish Christian mission and meant for European children. Then, at the age of seven, the boy, along with his two elder brothers, was led by his parents to Manchester, and left under the care of a Latin scholar, Mr. Drewett. In 1884 the boys were shifted to London and Sri Aurobindo entered the St. Paul's School. In 1890 he was admitted as a probationer for the Indian Civil Service. Also a scholarship offered by St. Paul's helped him to enter the King's College, Cambridge. In 1892 he passed the first part of the classical Tripos in the first class, bagging all the prizes for Latin and Greek, as well as the I.C.S. examinations, achieving excellence in all the papers.

But by then he had decided not to join the bureaucracy set up by the colonial masters to rule India. His father, no longer enamoured of the British masters or their conduct, used to mail to him clippings of newspapers carrying stories of the colonial misgovernment. Sri Aurobindo got himself disqualified by not appearing for the riding test, even after he was given fresh chances for it.

His well-wishers having no idea that Sri Aurobindo had manoeuvred his own disqualification were upset. G.W. Pothero, a senior Fellow of King's College, wrote to James Cotton, the brother of Sir Henry Cotton, "He performed the part of the bargain as regards the college most honourably and took a high place in the first class of the classical Tripos, Part 1, at the end of the second year of his residence. He also obtained certain college prizes showing command of English and literary ability. That one should have been able to do this (which alone is quite enough for most under-graduates) and at the same time to keep up the I.C.S. work, proves very unusual industry and capacity. Besides his classical scholarship he possessed knowledge of English literature far beyond the average of under-graduates, and wrote much better English than most young Englishmen."

Such efforts could have probably succeeded but for this young scholar's role in the formation of a secret association of Indian students, named "Lotus and Dagger", its members taking a solemn vow to dedicate their future to the cause of their motherland's liberation. (Incidentally, barring Sri Aurobindo, the vow did not seem to have meant much for the members in the later phase of their life.) Sri Aurobindo had also spoken at the Indian Majlis at Cambridge, of which he was the Secretary, criticising the British rule in India.

It so happened that the Maharaja of Baroda, Sir Sayaji Rao Gaekwad, was on a visit to London and James Cotton introduced Sri Aurobindo to him. The Maharaja lost no time in offering to the young man a position in his government.

On the eve of his return to India, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Me from her lotus heaven Saraswati
Has called to regions of eternal snow
And Ganges pacing to the southern Sea,
Ganges upon whose shores the flowers of Eden blow.

Envoi

Such was the paradox; one designed by parents and circumstances to grow and live as a model of westernised life, was back in motherland, already filled with a profound love for her. Probably such a beginning had its purpose, for as savants like Roman Rolland saw, he was the greatest synthesis hitherto achieved of the wisdom of the East and the West.

A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL LIFE

Sri Aurobindo was back in India after fourteen years, in February 1893. A great peace embraced him the moment he set his foot on the Indian soil – a peace that never left him. But the quiet home-coming had been preceded by a tragedy. The ship he was scheduled to sail by sank off the coast of Lisbon. Dr. K.D. Ghose, who had no knowledge of his son having changed his plan at the last moment and chosen another ship, was shocked at the news. He died of heart-attack muttering his son's name. Sri Aurobindo's mother had been mentally ill and was residing at her parents' house at Deoghar.

Hereafter began a new phase of Sri Aurobindo's life. He wrote, in a letter to a seeker much later: "Since I set foot on the Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and infinite bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material Space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies."

From Bombay Sri Aurobindo proceeded to Baroda and was assigned different portfolios in the princely government before his appointment as the Professor of English and later also of French, in the Maharaja's college. His students found in him a most inspiring guide, as some of them recollected. During this period, extending from 1893 to 1905, his interest and activities outside his official functions, as we can perceive, flowed along four different streams simultaneously. He delved deep into the heritage of Indian literature, the spiritual lore in particular,

mastering Sanskrit, Bengali and developing a knowledge of several other Indian languages. Secondly he continued with his creative writing that he had begun while in England. But very few knew about the third stream of his activities carried on in secrecy. He keenly observed the political situation in the country and decided to give it a radical new turn. With the help of his younger brother Barindra and some other trusted lieutenants he organised and inspired numerous secret revolutionary societies in Bengal and several other provinces of the country. Fourth, he began practising Yoga.

He used to visit Bengal from time to time and in 1901 he married Mrinalini Devi, the daughter of Bhupal Chandra Bose. Although she lived for a while in Baroda and accompanied Sri Aurobindo to Nainital and a few other places, hers was mostly a quiet life, devoted to reverentially watching her husband's travails and praying for him. She died in Calcutta in 1918.

The Indian National Congress launched in 1885 more or less under the British patronage, had begun to arouse greater expectations among the intelligentsia, but its moderate leadership never dared to take steps beyond submitting petitions to the authorities that mostly went in vain. For the first ever time a powerful call was given to the organisation by Sri Aurobindo, through a series of articles in the journal *Indu Prakash* of Bombay, for shedding its lacklustre stand and boldly voice the aspirations of the people. He wrote, using a pseudonym, "I say of the Congress, then, this – that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts not the right sort of men to be leaders – in brief we are at present the blind led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed."

A noted Bengali litterateur, Dinendra Kumar Roy, lived with Sri Aurobindo for some time to help him learn Bengali. Sri Aurobindo of course rarely needed any guidance, but

the memoir of those days left by Roy is a valuable document. Callous towards food and sleep, Sri Aurobindo, Roy writes, sat absorbed in his studies for three quarters of the night, oblivious of swarms of mosquitoes around him. The Gaekwad depended on him for writing for him important documents and speeches and once in a while required his company probably for the sake of it. Roy was shocked that Sri Aurobindo would casually say that he had no time and the vehicle would go back, at a time when so many Indian as well as European dignitaries waited for days to have a brief interview with the Maharaja. "He was alone and he did not know what it was to run after pleasures. He did not spend even a pie in the wrong way, yet nothing was left with him at the end of the month."

Roy concludes his impression thus: "He was not a man of this earth; he was a god came down from heavens..."

STORM WITHOUT: TRANQUILLITY WITHIN

The Baroda phase of Sri Aurobindo's life came to an end in the wake of the mighty popular upsurge against the infamous move by Lord Curzon, the Governor-General of India, to partition Bengal, when before a huge gathering the affluent patriot Subodh Mullik announced a donation of a lakh of rupees for founding a national college, free from any control by the foreign government – and Sri Aurobindo was requested to come down to Calcutta to head it. (The people hailed Mullik as *Raja*, an appellation that became permanently affixed to his name – a solitary event of its nature.)

Sri Aurobindo readily responded to the call and resigned his well-paid Baroda job for a symbolic allowance that before long dwindled to nothing. He became the centre of the college, the unfailing source of inspiration for the students and the staff; a new orientation to the philosophy of education that would strengthen the student's faith in himself and his motherland, prepare him to derive joy from sacrifice for a noble cause, teach him to view things globally with due attention to progress in any field anywhere in the

world and absorb the lessons into the national genius, was in the making when exigency obliged him to stand aside from the experiment.

It happened like this. In March 1906 a weekly newspaper was launched by Barindra Kumar and his team, with Sri Aurobindo's blessings. Entitled *Yugantar*, it became a phenomenal success in terms of both circulation and influence. It presented the ideals of freedom in no uncertain terms and several of its lead articles were written by Sri Aurobindo. The renowned nationalist Bipin Chandra Pal now decided to bring out an English newspaper of the same kind and his scheme materialised in August 1906. He sought Sri Aurobindo's help. In the backdrop of an atmosphere charged with anti-British sentiments because of the move for the partition of Bengal, such a journal was the need of the hour and Sri Aurobindo joined hands with Pal right from the start, but without in any way revealing his association with the publication. Whose masterly hand wrote those surprisingly powerful articles? No other person than Bipin Chandra Pal himself paid this tribute to Sri Aurobindo later, in *Swaraj*: "The hand of the master was in it from the very beginning. Its bold attitude, its vigorous thoughts, its clear ideas, its chaste and powerful diction, its scorching sarcasm and refined witticism, were unsurpassed by any journal in the country, either Indian or Anglo-Indian...Morning after morning, not only Calcutta but the educated community almost in every part of the country eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day...Long extracts from it began to be reproduced in the exclusive columns of *The Times* of London."

Even the then Editor of *The Statesman*, S.K. Ratcliffe, recollected later how the paper was "full of leading and special articles written in English with brilliance and pungency not hitherto attained in the Indian Press...the most effective voice of what we then called nationalist extremism."

While the readers were mystified about the author of

the main articles in the *Bande Mataram*, the British intelligence found it out. Sri Aurobindo also knew that it will not be possible for him to steer clear of the hostility of the authorities if he had to play his role in the political upheaval of the time, however sincerely he may try to keep himself in the background, and that the inevitable should not happen while he headed an educational institution, the first of its kind. Thus he resigned his position as the Principal of the National College.

The inevitable of course happened sooner than expected. In 1907 the government prosecuted the *Bande Mataram* and, as its editor, Sri Aurobindo. Despite his total reluctance to come to limelight, this case made him a legend overnight. It was at this time that Rabindranath wrote his celebrated poem, "*Rabindra, O Aurobindo, salutes thee, O friend, O country's friend, the voice-incarnate of India's soul...*"

The Prosecution failed to prove that Sri Aurobindo was the editor. His acquittal was almost a national jubilation, making the government even more anxious to remove him from the public scene. The anxiety turned into determination before long, because of his role in the historic 23rd session of the Congress at Surat at the end of 1907, where the Moderate leadership received a death blow from the Nationalists led by Sri Aurobindo and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

In the previous year, at the Calcutta session of the Congress under the Presidentship of Dadabhoy Naoroji resolutions quite radical in nature, demanding Swaraj and upholding Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education had been passed for the first time and they were to be endorsed and some more resolutions along that line were expected to be passed in the next session of the Congress scheduled to take place at Nagpur. But the Moderates, who were in no mood to antagonise the rulers managed to change the venue to their stronghold, Surat. As if that was not enough, they chose Rash Behari Ghose to preside over it whereas Lajpat Rai, just released from jail, had been the choice of not only the Nationalists but also the greater body of the Congress.

A showdown at Surat was inevitable. The session began before an audience over ten thousand strong. The President-elect, Dr. Rash Behari Ghose, followed by other leaders, ascended the decorated dais amidst cheers from the moderates. Dewan Bahadur Ambalal Desai proposed him. But as soon as Sir Surendranath Bannerji stood up to second the proposal, his words were drowned in an ear-splitting roar of protest. The greatest orator of Bengal had the jolt of his life. Let us have a look at the first hand record left by the veteran British journalist and author, Henry Nevinson:

“Waving their arms, their scarves, their sticks and umbrellas, a solid mass of delegates and spectators on the right of the Chair sprang to their feet and shouted without a moment’s pause...the whole ten thousand were on their feet, shouting for order, shouting for tumult. Mr. Malvi (Chairman of the Reception Committee) half in the chair, rang his brass Benares bell and rang in vain. Even a voice like his was not a whisper in the din. Again and again he shouted, unheard as silence. He sat down and for a moment the storm was lulled. The voices of the leaders were audible, consulting in agitated tones...Again Surendranath sprang on the table and again the assembly roared with clamour. Again the Chairman rang his Benares bell and rang in vain. In an inaudible voice, like a sob, he declared the sitting suspended.”

The next day was no different. Once again the session ended in turmoil. Two different conferences were held the day after. The Nationalists held theirs in a large courtyard – and they came in a most orderly and quiet manner. Observes Nevinson, “Grave and silent, I think without saying a single word, Mr. Aurobindo Ghose took the Chair and sat unmoved, with far-off eyes, as one who gazes at futurity. In clear, short sentences, without eloquence or passion, Mr. Tilak spoke till the stars shone out and someone kindled a lantern by his side.” (*The New Spirit in India*)

Nevinson travelled with the delegates by train. At every halt he heard thunderous shouts hailing the Nationalists,

Sri Aurobindo and Tilak in particular. The young Aurobindo became the object of adoration of the masses. A year later, during the Alipore trial, the prosecution witnesses narrated how Sri Aurobindo's carriages used to be drawn by his youthful admirers who gave the horses a holiday. The redoubtable Counsel for Prosecution, Barrister Norton complained, "Aurobindo was treated with the reverence of a king wherever he had gone. As a matter of fact, he was regarded as the leader not merely of Bengal but of the whole country."

Though the Moderates, by the virtue of their wealth, personal influence and blessings of the powers that be continued to be active for some more years, they were a waning force. The Surat Congress marked the No Return point in the nation's march towards its goal and Sri Aurobindo was the first leader to declare openly "complete and absolute independence" as that goal.

PRELUDE TO THE STRUGGLE FOR A DIFFERENT LIBERATION

In a pre-dawn swoop on the 2nd of May 1908 a group of young men, "all educated and belonging to respectable families" according to the investigating report, residing in a garden at Murari Pukur in Calcutta, the property of Sri Aurobindo and his brothers, were rounded up, accused of secret revolutionary activities. Simultaneously another police party surrounded Sri Aurobindo's residence at Grey Street and arrested him. The 'dangerous materials' discovered in the house were some letters Sri Aurobindo had written to his wife from Baroda and a lump of earth collected from Sri Ramakrishna's place at Dakshineswar that someone had given to Mrinalini Devi, considering it sacred.

Famous as the Alipore Conspiracy Case, the trial in the court of the Sessions Judge, Mr. Beachcroft, Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge classmate and a brilliant scholar second only to Sri Aurobindo in several subjects, continued more or less for a year, 1908-1909. An eminent lawyer of the time, Mr. Norton, was specially brought from London

to serve as the Counsel for the Crown. The young Calcutta lawyer who voluntarily came forward to defend Sri Aurobindo was the future celebrity, Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das. His inspired and prophetic words at the conclusion of his argument have become immortal: "My appeal to you is that a man like this who is charged with the offences imputed to him stands not only before the bar in this Court but stands before the bar of the High Court of History and my appeal to you is this: That long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India, but across distant seas and lands..."

While the newspapers of the day did their job very well in carrying the reports of the trial to the people agog with excitement, while political leaders and intellectuals waited with bated breath for its outcome, Sri Aurobindo took no interest in the sensational proceedings. He was in a different world:

As he spoke later, "I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva, who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade... I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the Prosecuting Counsel and it was not the Counsel for the Prosecution that I saw; it was Sri Krishna who sat there and smiled." (*Uttarpara Speech*)

Sri Aurobindo was acquitted once again. The *Bande Mataram* had ceased publication. He launched the *Karmayogin*, a weekly in English, followed by a Bengali weekly, the *Dharma*. The rulers, however, could not be in peace with Sri Aurobindo at large. The one most eager to deport him was Lord Minto, the Governor-General of

British India. Unfortunately for him, Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India, vetoed the gentleman's fond resolution again and again, stating categorically, "As for deportation I will not listen to it."

While they were debating on the issue in great earnestness and confidentiality, Sri Aurobindo, in obedience to an *Adesh*, a direction from above, suddenly left Calcutta for the French pocket of Chandernagore and thence to Pondicherry, where he arrived on the 4th of April 1910. Even then in his last but one letter to Morley, Minto wrote on 26 May 1910, "As to the celebrated Aurobindo...I can only repeat what I said to you in my letter of April 14th that he is the most dangerous man we have to now reckon with ... and has an unfortunate influence on the student class and Indians who know him quite well have told me he is quite beyond redemption."

Sri Aurobindo of course had figured several times in the House of Commons, but on the 28th of April 1910, that exalted forum witnessed a stormy debate on him – the first ever of that length and lively exchange on any Indian leader. Earlier Sir Ramsay MacDonald, the leader of the Labour Party and the future Prime Minister, had demanded to know, on the basis of some news in the *Times*, why a warrant had been issued against Sri Aurobindo, and he had been told that it was for a seditious article in the *Karmayogin*. Twice thereafter Sir Ramsay wished to see that article, but when the Treasury Bench failed to produce it, he flashed a copy of the magazine himself and read out the article concerned passage by passage and challenged anybody to point out where lay any element of sedition in it. The Members heard with amazement, only once Mr. J. King interrupting the speaker asking him if the original article was not in Bengali and if the author was not a Bengali, to which Sir Ramsay replied, "The article is in the most excellent English. Mr. Aurobindo Ghose could no more write an article in Bengali than I could."

This series of debate ended on the 21st of February 1911, nearly a year after Sri Aurobindo had settled down

at Pondicherry, when Mr. O'Grady asked "whether the publisher of the *Karmayogin* was prosecuted for issuing the article by Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, for writing which a warrant was issued against Mr. Ghose; whether that trial resulted in the acquittal of the publisher on the ground that the article was not seditious; and whether the Government has now withdrawn the warrants issued in connection with the article?" and to which Mr. Montagu, the Under Secretary of State, replied: "The answer to the first part of my Hon. Friend's question is Yes, to the second, Yes; and to the third, Yes."

THE EVOLUTIONARY CRISIS AND BEYOND

India, for Sri Aurobindo, was not just a piece of earth, but a godhead, a consciousness that had a unique role to play in the destiny of mankind and for that Her freedom from bondage to an imperial power was indispensable and in his seer vision Sri Aurobindo had seen it a *fait accompli*. It was a different freedom he must struggle for thenceforth – humanity's freedom from its bondage to a colossal ignorance, the cause of its manifold suffering. At Pondicherry he plunged into an exploration of the spheres of consciousness embracing everything as well as at the root of everything, determined to unravel the future that awaited man.

The Mother, French by birth but of Middle-Eastern ancestry, first met Sri Aurobindo in 1914. The *Arya*, a monthly, was launched under her initiative. Several of Sri Aurobindo's major works were serialised in this publication. The Mother had to leave for France a year later, but the magazine continued publication. She returned to Pondicherry in 1920 and the Ashram took shape under her loving supervision. From 1926 Sri Aurobindo remained totally engrossed in his Yoga, leaving the Ashram and the ever-increasing demand for help from innumerable seekers, to the Mother's care.

Sri Aurobindo's realisations and his vision, as put forth

in his works like *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and the epic *Savitri*, invite us to an adventure in consciousness and help us transcend several narrow concepts that prevail widely about yoga, spirituality, education and, last but not the least, the significance of evolution. There are certain basic truths that man is trying to find through all his activities, consciously or unconsciously. Says Sri Aurobindo: "The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts, and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation, for it survives the longest period of scepticism and returns after every banishment, is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last, – God, Light, Freedom, Immortality." (*The Life Divine*)

Can this primeval quest of man find its fulfilment? For ages those who were seriously looking for that goal broke away from the so called mundane life and sought it in a state of ascetic other-worldliness. Was the world then doomed to remain only a field of travails or a simple illusion as any number of wise mystics would look upon it – without any spiritual culmination?

Says Sri Aurobindo, "If a spiritual unfolding on earth is the hidden truth of our birth into Matter, if it is fundamentally an evolution of consciousness that has been taking place in Nature, then man as he is cannot be the last term of that evolution; he is too imperfect an expression of the spirit, Mind itself a too limited form and instrumentation; Mind is only a middle term of consciousness, the mental being can only be a transitional being." (*The Life Divine*)

Once we appreciate the truth that “Evolution is nothing but the progressive unfolding out of the density of material consciousness and the gradual self-revelation of God out of this apparent animal being,” (*The Hour of God and other Writings*) our attitude towards all problems and issues of life cannot but radically change.

About evolution Sri Aurobindo observes further, “We speak of the evolution of Life in Matter, the evolution of Mind in Matter; but evolution is a word which merely states the phenomenon without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out of living form, unless we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness. And there seems to be little objection to a farther step in the series and the admission that mental consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond mind.” (*The Life Divine*)

We could very well be in the threshold of an evolution taking a stride beyond mind. In fact, “At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way.”

Sri Aurobindo visualised the next stage of human evolution possible with the descent of a gnostic power, the supramental, capable of transforming the life of man as it is today into a life divine. And here comes the relevance of Yoga. It is not a business of dabbling in bizarre feats of achieving some supernatural powers. “In the right view both of life and Yoga all life is either consciously or subconsciously a Yoga. For we mean by this term a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent existence we see partially expressed in man and in the

Cosmos. But all life, when we look behind its appearance, is a vast Yoga of Nature attempting to realise her perfection in an ever increasing expression of her potentialities and to unite herself with her own divine reality.” (*The Synthesis of Yoga*)

Over the ages Yoga had taken diverse courses, one major line giving great emphasis on *Jnana* or Knowledge, another on *Bhakti* and *Prema* (Devotion and Love) and yet another on *Karma* or Action. But since all the disciplines had a common goal, Sri Aurobindo culls out their salient features and makes a synthesis of them. There was no dichotomy between spirit and matter, between a life spiritual and the world. “World is a becoming which seeks always to express in motion of Time and Space , by progression in Mind, Life and Body what is beyond all becoming, beyond Time and Space, beyond mind, life and body.” (*The Upanishads*)

While analysing the history of human aspiration, the great endeavours towards perfection man had made through the ages in different areas of his activity, social, cultural, scientific and political and presenting a picture of the destiny of man through his integral vision in his immortal works, Sri Aurobindo never cut himself off the current national or world events. During the World War II he announced his support for the Allies as he could foresee the devastation the civilisation would have suffered had the victory gone to the Nazi camp. On the eve of India winning independence he sent an emissary to the leadership of the day suggesting that the Cripps proposal be accepted. His counsel went in vain; but looking back several of the leading figures of the day, K.M. Munshi for example, agree that the division of the nation could have been avoided had the leadership heeded the advice. Instances are so many; but one thing is certain, Sri Aurobindo did not expect much from the present humanity in terms of harmony and light of wisdom, though he was the greatest optimist known to us because of his faith in mankind’s inner capacity to transcend his present limitations.

Sri Aurobindo passed away on the 5th of December, 1950.

LIGHTS ON EDUCATION

It follows, in the light of the evolutionary vision of Sri Aurobindo that the true process of education should help the child to bring out the best inherent in his being. But that must be accomplished not through any imposed curriculum, but through an environment and system that can spontaneously bring out the hidden splendour in every child's consciousness. We conclude this section with a few passages from Sri Aurobindo:

“The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task-master, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface. The distinction that reserves this principle for the teaching of adolescent and adult minds and denies its application to the child, is a conservative and unintelligent doctrine. Child or man, boy or girl, there is only one sound principle of good teaching. Difference of age only serves to diminish or increase the amount of help and guidance necessary; it does not change its nature.

“The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is he himself who must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature. There can be no greater error than for the parent to arrange beforehand that his son shall develop particular qualities, capacities, ideas, virtues, or be prepared for a

prearranged career. To force the nature to abandon its own *dharma* is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it and is forced to accept instead something imperfect and artificial, second-rate, perfunctory and common. Everyone has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.

“The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. The basis of a man’s nature is almost always, in addition to his soul’s past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, sounds, habits to which he is accustomed. They mould him not the less powerfully because insensibly, and from that then we must begin. We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move. If anything has to be brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced on the mind. A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development. There are souls which naturally revolt from their surroundings and seem to belong to another age and clime. Let them be free to follow their bent; but the majority languish, become empty, become artificial, if artificially moulded into an alien form. It is God’s arrangement that they should belong to a particular nation, age, society, that they should be children of the past, possessors of the present, creators of the future. The past is our foundation, the present our material, the future our aim and summit. Each must have its due and natural place in a national system of education.” (“A System of National Education”: *The Hour of God and other Writings*)

SECTION 2

Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture 2007-08

EDUCATION FOR A FAITH IN THE FUTURE

(Aspects of the talk to be delivered by Manoj Das)

Abstract

In the history of recorded time there had never been another century more dominated by paradox than the 20th century — the formidable backdrop of the current decade. Great adventures and explorations were contrasted by devastations and disillusionments. While the evolutionary spirit seems intent upon opening up a vast avenue for a new humanity through scientific, technological and progress in human relationship, an ominous sense of uncertainty and anxiety characterises our life – a situation that has brewed confusion in practically every aspect of our existence.

Education is that which liberates – had been a cardinal doctrine in Indian prudence. Has that doctrine grown anachronistic? Is the sweeping spell of pragmatic, if not totally utilitarian, forces at work in the field of education necessarily the highest ideal because it is modern?

It is time to have a deeper look at the very purpose of education – a question that spontaneously leads to the far more profound issue of the very purpose of life. Is there an ideal or a vision that can challenge the prevailing trends and offer us a way out of the present gloom?

The talk will attempt a brief examination of these issues in the light of Sri Aurobindo's vision of human destiny and education.

OF ROOTS AND BRANCHES

With the proliferation of newspapers and newsmagazines as well as the gradual increase in the number of their pages, reports and essays on important issues and topics, sometimes through special supplements, have become a regular feature and one such recurrent topic, no doubt, is education. Also more volumes on the subject have been published, including a series by the UNESCO, during the past three decades than ever before. My observation in this regard, of course, is limited to publications in English. It shows on one hand that public interest in the subject has grown wider, but on the other hand, if this speaker can be pardoned, there is reason for us to wonder about the nature of this wider interest, for a wider interest alone is not a sure sign of a serious or deeper interest. The interest the media has cultivated among an even wider readership in a category of news that are billed out as art, culture and literature are rarely anything more than entertainment, glamour and items for titillation.

No doubt, the level to which the concept of Education can be diluted has a limit, unlike topics of culture such as art or literature. The danger in the case of Education is less perceptible. When something ugly or vulgar is presented as art or music or dance, we can shut our eyes or ears to it, we can very well do without them, but when Education is presented as a discipline entirely devoted to external accomplishments, mastering ever new inventions in technology, promotion of career and prosperity, we may not find anything amiss in it because we need such opportunities; there is nothing vulgar or apparently degrading in them. The worldwide challenge of competitions and the demands of what is often termed as fast life does not give us respite enough to reflect on the question if what we accept as Education today is the genuine stuff, if Education did not have some greater role to play in our life than obtaining to us the aforesaid accomplishments and vocational facilities.

That brings to mind a brief dialogue, but a significant one. Thoreau and Emerson both had been students at Harvard. Once while the two celebrated alumni were reminiscing over their days in that famous university, Emerson said that by now their alma mater had several branches of Education. Thoreau, who was better acquainted with the ground realities, observed, "Yes, indeed, prolific branches there are; but what about the roots?"

Life, it was agreed, was the greatest university, but a certain outlook was required to be cultivated in the young to transform their bare experiences in the world to lasting lessons. From its very indeterminable beginning, Education in its classical sense had two aspects: first it cultivated in the student a quest for knowledge and next trained him or developed in him a skill for supporting himself in the existential sense as well as for playing a purposeful role in the community. Innumerable testimonies are there in the Indian tradition of literature and philosophy to suggest that the teachers of yore succeeded in striking a balance between these two ideals of Education for a considerable length of time. They studied the *pravritti* – the inherent inclination of the student and accordingly helped him to choose his *vritti* or vocation. If the vocation was already fixed by heredity, the pupil was taught the way of taking equal care, if not more, of his *pravritti*, that was generally in consonance with his *swadharma*, the inner law of his being.

It will take long to identify the historical forces that disrupted this balance, resulting in those who cared for their inner self breaking away from the so called worldly life and those who led a normal life as social beings distancing themselves from their inner self. This unfortunate development, by now, has reached its culmination. We rarely remember that beneath our surface self dominated by our senses, craving for pleasure and pride and given over entirely to satisfaction of ambitions and desires, we had an inner self thirsting for truth and the knowledge of a different order.

But, such is the constitution of man that the satisfaction his surface self seeks does not come. Hence the multiple innovations in the means of enjoyment and search for pastures new for pleasure.

This is the psychological state of affairs that had inevitably given a diabolical boost to consumerism. As a thinker observed, once we knew necessity to be the mother of invention whereas today it is the invention that is the mother of necessity. Our illusory needs, illusory hopes for joy are continuously whetted by the militant intelligence behind consumerism manipulating our taste and dream. By and by it is the culture of hedonism that prevails and blinds us. "Modern man is drinking and drugging himself out of awareness, or he spends his time shopping, which is the same thing," says Earnest Becker, in his *Denial of Death*.

A CONFESSION AND A QUESTION

May I be allowed to bring in the confession of a gentleman, as a representative illustration of the pattern at work. This is from a successful scholar, about ten years senior to this speaker, who as an entrepreneur proved equally successful but had stopped short of reducing himself to a robot. I quote:

"You know, like many other youths of the immediate post-independence decade I carried in my mind the residues of idealism that had inspired the best among my preceding generation for so much sacrifice. In the changed circumstance, I had two ideal ways open before me. I become an element in the bureaucracy and serve the country honestly or contribute to the economic progress of my country through some independent enterprise. I chose the latter, for I had some dynamism in me. I do not know when I forgot my mission. It was, I'm afraid, a gradual but fast process of decline that my mind was unable to detect. I was amidst a corrupt gang of business associates and I could not have competed with them without being corrupt. To my amazement my college-day friends who

were equally idealistic like me and some of whom were by then either in politics and power or in the administrative service and whose help naturally I needed from time to time, seemed to have subjected their minds to the same brand of morphine. Thus together we continued to slip farther and farther down along the path of moral paralysis. But there was still that puny substance called conscience somewhere deep down the self and at times it would hum a sad song; there was somewhere in me that forgotten love for silence and serenity that would nostalgically remind me of Davies we studied in our High School: *What is this life, if full of care; we have no time to stand and stare?* But the demand of exigency, of strike in the factory, of betrayal by a distributor, blackmail by hoodlums, sudden fall in export, to mention of a few, would drive those precious moments away into oblivion. My children grew up amidst affluence and in their show of loyalty to me shouldered the burden of my wealth as well as my worry, but without the idealism that had launched me into the adventure or the knowledge of the struggle I had put into it. My grandchildren grew up amidst a new culture or call it a lack of culture if you please, and divided their time between pleasure on one hand and the care of their early diabetes, blood pressure, etc. I was condemned to look on as one of my grandsons, in his early thirties, was dying in the intensive care ward, suffering from a heart ailment. He had returned from the West, with the highest training available in management. Poor boy! The last query he made, before closing his eyes finally, was regarding the very first export deal he was handling. While the family wept, I only wondered, what was the use of all his super specialisation in management if he could not manage his heart? What is the education we imparted to him if the very last question he must ask should be nothing nobler than export? What was the meaning of our having inspired him to study more and more, do better and better when it led to his forgetting that there were more worthy issues for reflection at that moment than an export deal? Now, in

my eighties, I wonder what the meaning of my own life was either. In search of happiness I spent the whole life in tension. I read the other day, what I had read fifty years ago, that making a cosy bed-room at a cost of one million rupees is no guarantee for even one minute's sound sleep. The truth overwhelms me now; but why had it no effect on me at all fifty years ago? I tell you, my friend, something was grotesquely wrong in the education we received. True, colleges in our time had not been cursed with careerism as it is today, but as I deeply reflect on what went amiss, I find that nothing in our system told us that life was not all that we lived on the surface, that there was an inner life, that there was an element called soul, that our true happiness or sense of contentment depended on it."

Consumerism thrives on keeping us forgetful of the inner life. Glamour and dazzle constitute the life consumerism would like us to live; momentary sense-satisfaction, through power or pleasure, is the purpose for which we live. This even could pass, but the problem is it is proving to be more and more frustrating. There are some well-researched studies in this regard and I refer to one of them, *The Price of Privilege* by psychologist Dr. Madeline Levin. She observes that students today are much more smart and intelligent. As their parents have more resources to spend, they buy them cell phones, cars, other luxuries and provide them with enough money to spend at will. But they don't give them love or intimate company. They have greater expectations from their children in terms of social and economic success. They drive the kids into the race for excellence, not excellence as human beings, but as status-achievers. And what is the result? I quote a few lines from Dr. Levin's study: "We know that this group of kids has three times the rate of depression and anxiety disorders as ordinary teenagers, as well as substantially higher rates of substance abuse, cutting and suicide. The most dangerous feelings a child can have are of self-hatred; yet middle-class parents are unwittingly instilling those feelings by expecting so much."

The situation conjures up in my mind a comical scene: At the middle of a road there is a boulder, obstructing smooth passage. Atop the boulder there is a lamp. If you ask why is the boulder there, the answer is, to hold the lamp. Should you ask why is the lamp there, the answer is so that the pedestrians or drivers avoid dashing against the boulder. We embrace tension in order to live, and we must live in order to go on experiencing tension. The illusion is both justify each other; the reality is both cancel each other, thereby rendering the whole thing absurd. The list of factors adding to this condition of absurdity is long and it is better not to refer to them at the moment.

VALUES THEN AND NOW

Philosophers and thinkers have identified many a sign that differentiates man from the other creatures on our planet. One of them is, be he conscious of it or not, man lives by some values. Not that the value had to be necessarily lofty. The noted social reformer of Gujarat, Ravishankar Maharaj, devoted years to change the life of a tribe of hereditary burglars. One day, as he talked to a young practitioner of the tradition, he said with disarming frankness, "Maharaj, if you ask me to give up my practice, I will do so. But the fact is, Goddess Lakhmi, buried under their floors of householders, shouts out to me as I pass by, asking me to liberate Her. Only then I dig a hole on the wall and enter the house and coup out the treasure."

Alas, the values in which the masses believed have faded out one by one. Once men were ready to die for their kings; the situation is a distant memory. Religion was the most powerful, the most meaningful and satisfying value people upheld in their life and with which they justified their existence. But today the tradition is kept alive more for political and egotistic purpose than for true faith. If gods and goddesses are worshipped with great hullabaloo, it is not for devotion, but for festivity and rivalry among local formations of collective ego. I am told that in a city

that had been the home of some of the greatest intellectuals and spiritual giants not only of India but also of the world, a film star is ritualistically worshipped as a deity, making the devaluation of divinities complete.

If the age of institutional religion is past, spirituality, the only alternative that could play even with greater effect the role religion at its best played, had not yet made a bold debut, not to speak of filling up the vacuum.

We all know how Curzon's move for partition of Bengal created such an upheaval that the British rulers had to agree to "unsettle the settled fact". But later developments brought about not only the partition of Bengal, but also the partition of India, thereby planting the most damaging blow to our value of nationalism and patriotism.

Family values had broken down. This is not to say that the family relationship had vanished. That has so far survived the changing life patterns. But what had received the most horrendous jolt is the institution of human relationship, the trust men could have in men, thanks to the fact that most of the sophisticated criminals, swindlers of the people's treasures and saboteurs of national security and manipulators of legal provisions to serve their selfish interest are people with handsome degrees and diplomas. The respect the educated commanded till the other day, the term Vidya associating in the popular imagination a personality like Vidyasagar, the epitome of truth and nobility, is only a memory. In other words, the moral value that went with education had been reduced to zero. That reminds me of what the late Dr. Malcolm Adisesaiah, noted educationist who held an important position in the UNESCO, once told us at Pondicherry: London was bombarded during the World War II. The state of aviation being what it was, the degree of accuracy with which the pilots hit their targets was surprising. The mystery was solved when, at the end of the war, it was found out that the bombers were those German students who got their higher education in London as British Council scholarship holders.

And who must occupy the vast space vacated by such values? The answer unfortunately is not any new set of values, but wrong values. They assault intelligence, common sense and higher tastes. Their immediate preys are the students. Let me refer to one such value. Several studies have shown how pop and rock music contribute to both physical and mental problems of the young. I quote from one serious study of the problem, *The Closing of the American Mind* by Allan Bloom:

“...It has risen to the current heights in the education of the young on the ashes of classical music, and in an atmosphere in which there is no intellectual resistance to attempts to tap the rawest passions. Modern-day rationalists are indifferent to it and what it represents. The irrationalists are all for it. ... But rock music has one appeal only, a barbaric appeal to sexual desire — not love, not Eros, but sexual desire undeveloped and untutored. It acknowledges the first emanations of children’s emerging sensuality and addresses them seriously, eliciting them and legitimatising them, not as little sprouts that must be carefully tended in order to grow into gorgeous flowers, but as the real thing. Rock gives children, on a silver platter, with all the public authority of entertainment industry, everything their parents always used to tell them they had to wait for until they grew up and would understand later...

“Ministering to and according with the arousing and cathartic music, the lyrics celebrate puppy love as well as polymorphous attraction, and fortify them against traditional ridicule and shame. The words implicitly and explicitly describe bodily acts that satisfy sexual desires and treat them as its only natural and routine culmination for children who do not yet have the slightest imagination of love, marriage or family....”

The Indian film lyrics are perhaps not lagging behind in such unabashed suggestiveness, for the clever culture-vultures know that most healthy inhibitions could be eliminated through means that have some pretensions to culture. Academically sound studies have established how

this process of reckless exploitation in the name of culture had found as its intimate allies in drug and violence, directly related to mercenary consumerism. In an era of rapid growth of global communication and exchange, we cannot expect such developments to remain confined to any one continent. In fact it has already become a world-wide phenomenon in the absence of any bulwark against the nefarious network, often enjoying the patronage of powers that be.

What is wrong with this tide – this collective resignation to hedonism – is not its immoral and unethical character, for one can argue that morality and ethics change from time to time. The situation is bad because it is against the spirit of evolution, because it is a negative reaction to the call for an adventure in consciousness. Hedonism not only fails to deliver the promised pleasure, it drains one of one's zests for life, and leads to either self-destruction or anarchy.

So far I have only articulated the obvious, for nobody can really be unaware of this situation, whether one be involved or not in the world of education. And, needless to say, the obvious is a picture of gloom. Is there any remedial possibility involved in the spirit of education itself? Sometime ago I read a summary of the *Education for All* global monitoring report covering up to year 2005. The situation might have slightly changed, but it says that approximately 103.5 million children do not go to schools. About 800 million adults are illiterate. Of this seventy per cent live in nine countries of the sub-Saharan Africa and East and South Asia, "notably India, China, Bangladesh and Pakistan". The report calls upon the governments concerned to undo the situation, but what is surprising and disheartening, those who have commented upon the report have, without exception, looked at Education as technology-intensive training. One comment stresses the importance of trade among nations and wishes education in the developing countries to be accordingly oriented.

Here lies the crux of the problem. Trade and technology are indispensable no doubt, but we seem to have forgotten

that they are only parts of the external aspect of Education; they must not become synonyms of Education. They are designed to serve man; man is not designed to serve them. They are by no means to be shunned, for the evolutionary time-spirit has placed them at our disposal so that we become more efficient masters of our environment. But trade and technology do not constitute progress, they are external aids for progress and the true progress is a growth in consciousness. Once in a while we come across an essay on Montessori or Bernstein or Sadler and their sophisticated theories, but they are in academic magazines with meagre circulations and are like a cry in the wilderness, for no theory or doctrine could stand the sudden and powerful sway of education for sake of trade and technology.

THE CRISIS AND BEYOND

As Sri Aurobindo looks at the situation, "At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of its destiny; for a stage has been reached in which the human mind has achieved in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way." I wonder if anybody could find a better definition of Education than what the Indian scriptures had given: *Sa vidya ya vimuktaye – Education liberates.*

Education can of course liberate us from this impasse, for it has the greatest support for that action in the process of evolution itself, for, in a sense, evolution itself is a route along a gradual realisation of liberation. The manifestation of the earliest forms of life as plants out of the apparently lifeless matter was a step towards liberation of the imprisoned consciousness. A far greater degree of freedom of consciousness – and an exercise of that freedom in infinitely variant ways – was possible with the emergence of the primeval creatures, from worms and insects to the whale and the dinosaur, from the birds to the beasts of incalculable varieties. That urge for freedom inherent in

Nature, for releasing its possibilities and potentialities, took a new and hitherto most significant turn with the emergence of man and, needless to say, man is the only creature who had never stopped growing. With relentless zeal he had not only adapted himself to the changing environment, but also had obliged the environment to adapt to his demands. Emerging from the state of primeval Nature he had created for himself new worlds of art, architecture, literature, music, philosophy and the spiritual quest. His activities and achievements in all these spheres have again meant nothing but the gradual realisation of his own potentialities, a joy in the freedom of experience, adventure and expression.

If the process of evolution itself is a movement of consciousness realising its own freedom from its bondage to material and other limitations, the 20th century we have just left behind had been the witness to the most momentous events and ideas ensuring greater freedom for man in several fronts. Imperialism, colonialism, monarchy and feudalism all collapsed ensuring man's social, political and economic freedom. Revolutions and reformations, emancipation of women from social taboos and discrimination, end of apartheid, all point in the same direction. Science and technology have played their role in according a greater dignity to the individual.

But these facts of outer freedom do not come to much – they even are vulnerable to misuse — unless there is achieved the other freedom, the freedom from ignorance. Sri Aurobindo believes that the realisation of such a freedom is not only a possibility, but also is a certainty inherent in the very nature of evolutionary developments. The true role of Education is in preparing and helping man to arrive there – at a new phase of evolution. Man is neither an accident nor a freak of Nature. He is an evolving being, awaiting his fulfilment. No doubt he had come a long way from his primitive state via a stage dominated by vital or raw life impulses, he has been a mental creature for long and has achieved marvels with his intelligence and intellect. But proud of intellect though we may be, Einstein warns,

“We should take care not to make the intellect our god; it has of course, powerful muscles, but no personality.” (*Out of My Later Years*)

As the Italian thinker Preme Levi stated, “Normal human beings are biologically built for an activity that is aimed towards a goal.” A goal always implies a call to go farther than where we are. Till the other day, so far as India was concerned, the ennobling goal of freedom kept the youths inspired. Since the achievement of that goal, we have been fed with the illusion of false goals, bereft of nobler values. We must replace them with the most optimistic goal, an aspiration for transcending the present dimly lighted state of our consciousness and entering a new phase of consciousness. In his great works such as *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*, Sri Aurobindo had elaborately explained this inevitable future and we the teachers could capture from them a thrilling new purpose for our endeavour. Once we subscribe to a sublime vision, feel inspired by an extraordinary destination, our approach to our work spontaneously receives a new impetus.

TOWARDS AN INTEGRAL EDUCATION

The Mother founded the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education as a part of Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry to enable the student to apply to his life to the extent possible the vision of Sri Aurobindo. To a question why any degree or diploma is not bestowed on a student, she made the following observation:

“For the last hundred years or so mankind has been suffering from a disease which seems to be spreading more and more and which has reached a climax in our times; it is what we may call ‘utilitarianism’. People and things, circumstances and activities seem to be viewed and appreciated exclusively from this angle. Nothing has any value unless it is useful. Certainly, something that is useful is better than something that is not. But first we must agree

on what we describe as useful – useful to whom, to what, for what.

“For, more and more, the races who consider themselves civilized describe as useful whatever can attract, procure or produce money. Everything is judged and evaluated from a monetary angle. That is what I call utilitarianism. And this disease is highly contagious, for even children are not immune to it. At an age when they should be dreaming of beauty, greatness and perfection, dreams that may be too sublime for ordinary common sense, but which are nevertheless far superior to this dull good sense, children now dream of money and worry about how to earn it.

“So, when they think of their studies, they think above all about what can be useful to them, so that later on when they grow up they can earn a lot of money.

“For them study has no other purpose, no other interest.

“To learn for the sake of knowledge, to study in order to know the secrets of Nature and life, to educate oneself in order to grow in consciousness, to discipline oneself in order to become master of oneself, to overcome one’s weakness, incapacities and ignorance, to prepare oneself to advance in life towards a goal that is nobler and wiser, more generous and more true... they hardly give it a thought and consider it all very utopian. The only thing that matters is to be practical, to prepare themselves and learn how to earn money.”

The passages tell us all that Education ought to be and all that it is not today. Without a collective awakening to the ignored purpose of Education, the rapid corrosion of life by utilitarianism inevitably leading to hedonism, cannot be checked. It is the elite who are expected to realise this, to begin with. They can influence the Educational authority or machinery to stop the macabre deterioration in the system we have already discussed. We must not feel helpless or too weak to do anything in this direction, for the evolutionary time-spirit will be with us. Despite the

current signs to the contrary, the secret aspiration in our consciousness will guide us d the present imbroglio.

I conclude with a few more passages from the Mother – on her integral approach to Education:

“The education of a human being should begin at birth and continue throughout his life.

“Indeed, if we want this education to have its maximum result, it should begin even before birth; in this case it is the mother herself who proceeds with this education by means of a twofold action: first, upon herself for her own improvement, and secondly, upon the child whom she is forming physically. For it is certain that the nature of the child to be born depends very much upon the mother who forms it, upon her aspiration and will as well as upon the material surroundings in which she lives. To see that her thoughts are always beautiful and pure, her feelings always noble and fine, her material surroundings as harmonious as possible and full of great simplicity – this is the part of education which should apply to the mother herself. And if she has in addition a conscious and definite will to form the child according to the highest ideal she can conceive, then the very best conditions will be realised so that the child can come into the world with the utmost potentialities. How many difficult efforts and useless complications would be avoided in this way!

“Education to be complete must have five principal aspects corresponding to the five principal activities of the human being; the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual. Usually these phases of education follow chronologically the growth of the individual; this, however, does not mean that one of them should replace another, but that all must continue, completing one another until the end of his life.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Born in 1934 in a remote coastal village of Orissa, Manoj Das grew up amidst loving rural folks and Nature's splendours — evergreen meadows containing primeval lakes abounding in lotuses, and the sea — but also had the horrific experience of a devastating cyclone followed by famine crushing his locality. At the age of eight he stood witness to his affluent home on the sea being plundered by savage gangs of bandits, not once but twice.

In town for study, writing came to him spontaneously and his first book in Oriya was published when he was fourteen. At fifteen he launched *Diganta*, which, in course of time grew into a significant literary journal in the state. In search of some panacea for human suffering he became a revolutionary youth leader while in college, leading several agitations, courting jail, becoming unopposed President of the University Law College Union, General Secretary of the Students Federation and playing an active role in the Afro-Asian Students Conference at Bandung, Indonesia, in 1956.

His quest, however, led him to mysticism and, after serving as a lecturer in English at Cuttack for four years, he, along with his wife, Pratijna Devi, a scion of the Raj family of Kujang whose parents were renowned freedom fighters, joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry in 1963 which became their permanent abode. He teaches English literature as well as the works of Sri Aurobindo at

the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education and Pratijna Devi teaches psychology.

His research in the archives of London and Edinburgh in 1971 brought to light some of the significant glimpses of India's struggle for freedom led by Sri Aurobindo in the first decade of the twentieth century. He received the first Sri Aurobindo Puraskar for this pioneering work by Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, Kolkata (the birth place of Sri Aurobindo), supported by the Government of West Bengal.

Though outside his home state he is widely known as one of the best-loved and serious among the Indian writers writing in English, he is also probably the foremost successful bi-lingual writer in the country, with about forty books in English and an equal number of books in his mother tongue. He had been a regular columnist for some of the major newspapers in India such as *The Times of India*, *The Hindustan Times* and *The Hindu* and major Oriya dailies like *The Samaj* and *The Dharitri*. He was the editor of a prestigious English monthly, *The Heritage* (1985-1989), and an author-consultant to the Ministry of Education, Government of Singapore (1981-1985), visiting the island nation twice a year for taking classes of a hundred teachers.

He was the leader of the Indian Writers' Delegation to China in 2000.

A number of his short stories have been translated into major languages of the world apart from those of India and they are highly appreciated in the academic circles in the West. The numerous accolades he has received include India's national award for creative writing — the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Orissa Sahitya Akademi Award (twice), The Sahitya Bharati Award (by now Orissa's premier award which began with him), the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad (Kolkata) Award, the Sri Aurobindo Puraskar (Kolkata), the BAPASI (Booksellers and Publishers Association of South India) Award as the best writer in English in the South for the year 1998 and Rotary's 'For the Sake of Honour'.

The President of India decorated him with the Padma Shri on the Republic Day, 2001. This was followed by India's most prestigious award for literature, the Saraswati Samman. Utkal Sahitya Samaj, the honorary literary organization of his home state, Orissa, bestowed on him Utkal Ratna. While the Berhampur University offered him the status of Professor Emeritus, the Utkal University of Culture, in its very first convocation in 2004, chose him alone to receive the D.Litt. (Honoris Causa). Once again, the Utkal University, the oldest university in the state, bestowed D.Litt. on him in its 2006 convocation. For the third time, the Fakir Mohan University of Balasore conferred D.Litt. on him in 2007.

Lately, the Sahitya Akademi, our national academy of letters, has conferred on him its highest honour, Fellowship, which, according to its constitution, is "reserved for the immortals of literature".

While his admirers in the West included Graham Greene and H.R.F. Keating, scholars have found in his short stories and novels the Indian ethos at its authentic best. His latest publications are: *Selected Fiction* (Penguin), *The Escapist* (a novel) (Institute of Languages), *My Little India* (National Book Trust, India) and *The Lady Who Died One and Half Times and Other Fantasies* (Rupa) and *Chasing the Rainbow* (Childhood memoirs) (Oxford University Press).

Two of his novels are translated into Bengali. They are *Amrita Phala* (Mitra & Ghose) and *Tandraloker Prahari* (Sahitya Akademi)

He is acknowledged as one of the ablest interpreters of India's literary and cultural heritage.