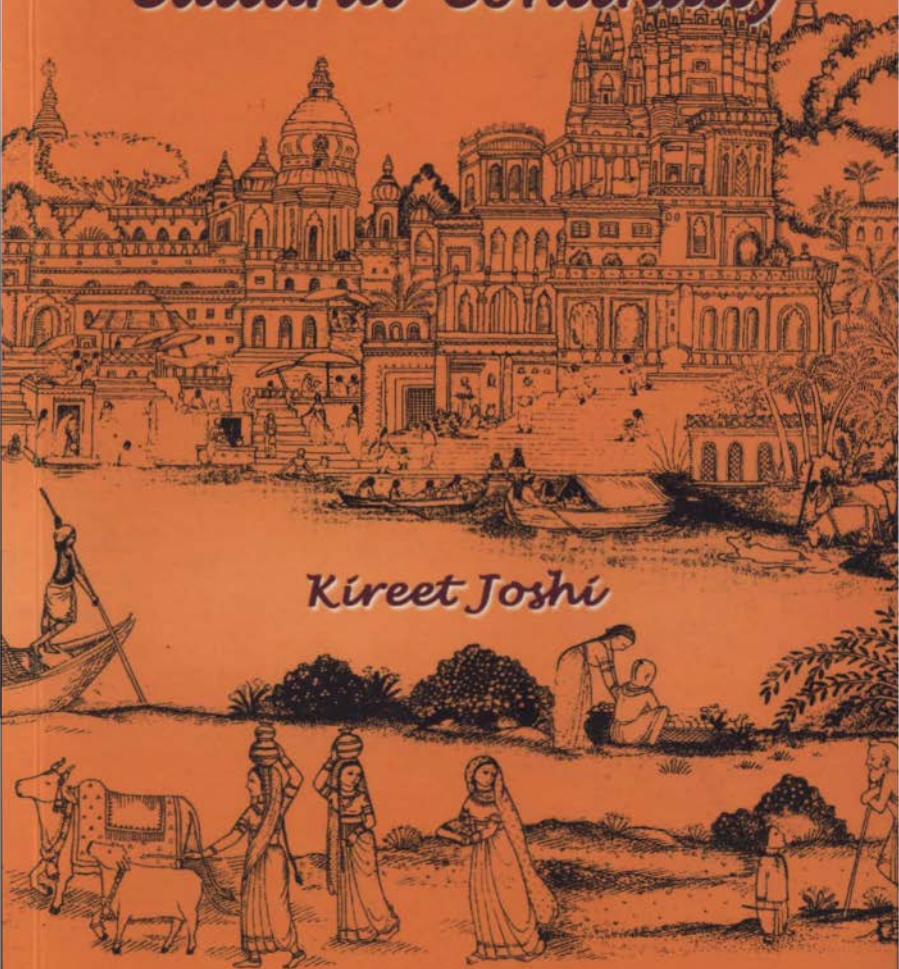


Indian Identity and Cultural Continuity

Kireet Joshi



*Indian Identity
and
Cultural Continuity*

Kireet Joshi

The Mother's Institute of Research

© Author

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission from the author or the publisher.

First Edition, 2011
ISBN: 978-81-909651-7-0

Published by: Popular Media, Jhilmil Industrial Area, Delhi 110095
popularmedia@ymail.com, popularmedia.in

Contents

Preface

1.	Indian Identity and Cultural Continuity	7
2.	Indian Culture: Past, Present and Future	17
3.	Ancient Indian Wisdom and Contemporary Challenges	35
4.	Indian Culture and Its Message	50
5.	Philosophy of Indianness	61

Preface

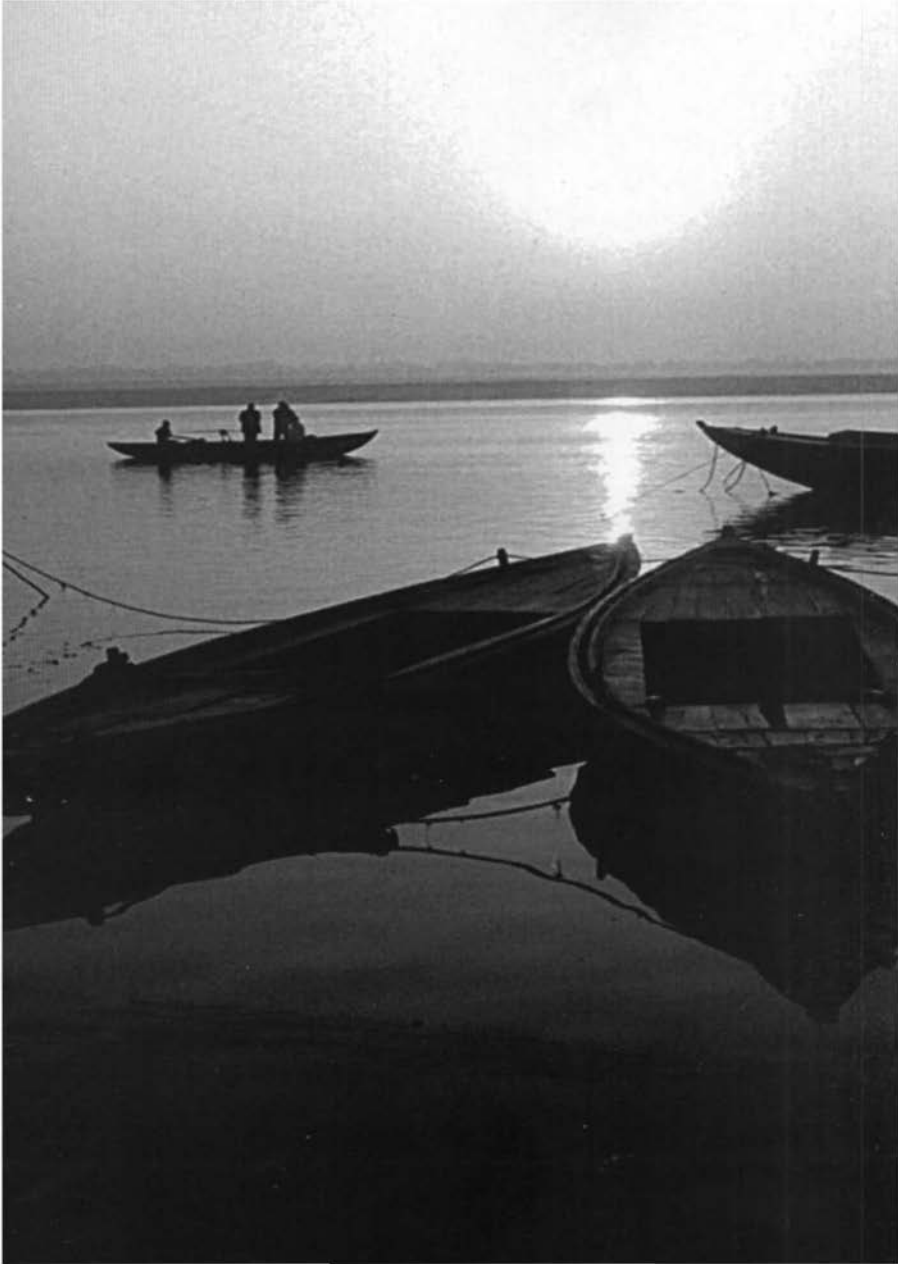
The subject of this book is gigantic, the few chapters that are included will serve the purpose of introducing the subject, and it is hoped that a much more detailed work will be undertaken by some eminent scholar who has more authentic qualification than I can claim.

Kireet Joshi



Indian Identity and Cultural Continuity

The history of India is so long and complex and the continuity of Indian culture so enigmatic and astonishing that it is difficult to bring out in a brief compass those quintessential elements which distinguish India's identity and the real secret of her continuity through millennia. To many, who are not acquainted with Indian modes of life and thought feel so baffled that they might even declare that there is no such thing that one can trace from the confusing multiplicity and variety any single central thread by means of which Indianness can be understood or defined. To them, India still seems to be somewhat primitive which places together polytheism, monotheism, monism and nihilism, or else allows itself to be a field of battle between various conflicting philosophies, sharply criticising each other, and yet forgetful of the differences and compromising with a curious sense of tolerance, or to allow itself to be a perplexing scenario of endless castes and classes, lumping them all together in a framework that is neither capitalistic nor socialistic and yet sharing virtues of neither but vices of both. To them, it seems strange and inexplicable as to how India has managed to survive through vicissitudes of tides and ebbs and how, in recent history in which the degeneration became extremely marked, she has been



able to rise with some kind of rapidity and even surprising boldness in a mood that can challenge the great, rationalistic, scientific, progressive and well-structured modernity of the West.

But all this enigma can be more easily cleared up if we can go back to the Vedas and try to understand that these records of ancient people contain not only wisdom but also quest of knowledge that had borne fruits in the form of great discoveries of the psychological being and had even attained lofty levels of perfection. For the Vedic seers were discoverers and they had discovered not only the triple world of matter, life and mind but, as the Aṅgīrasa's legend tells us, they had even opened the gates of the fourth world *turiyam svid* and found there the key to divine perfection. They had discovered oneness and multiplicity and found the wideness in which varieties of experience can find their culmination in a rich harmony and unity.

What we call Indianness was shaped by the Vedic quest, and this quest arrived at an affirmation that:

1) beyond the body, life and mind, there is a spirit, — vast, universal and transcendental which can be attained and realised and in realising which one finds oneself liberated in peace and delight that cannot be diminished or annihilated; and

2) that this realisation can come, — not by neglecting body, life and mind, but only when these powers or at least some of them are greatly developed, cultivated, sharpened and perfected.

The Vedic quest also provided another element of

Indianness, and that is its insistence on *ṛta*, the law of life and the law of development of individual and of the collectivity, a law which is, in a sense, eternal or the *sanātana*, and which is yet so supple that for each stage of life, each epoch of time, each nation, each collectivity and each individual it provides its own specific rhythms that govern their specific and unique development of life. This is what has come to be developed in due course as "*sanātana dharma, yuga dharma, rāshtra dharma, kula dharma*", and even *swādharmā*. The profundity and depth of the concept of dharma, which is not religion, but which is a complex principle of guidance that can lead individuals and collectivities from lower levels to higher levels, and which in reaching culminations widens itself into freedom to the infinity of the spirit.

Another element that the Vedic quest provided to the Indian identity was that what is important in the human quest is not specific doctrine or thought-formulation but the search for or an orientation towards the highest which can be experienced, realised, and verified, repeated and made permanent. This is what explains how the Indian consciousness can permit various thought-formulations and philosophies and religions and yet maintain the spirit of mutual understanding, synthesis and even comprehensiveness in which contraries can meet and confess to each other their uniqueness, limitations and needs for all and the totality.

Finally, a further great element of Indianness was

the highest aspirations that insisted on reaching social, political, economic and collective perfection that can be measured in terms of togetherness of people, upliftment of all, and widest embrace of the universal brotherhood. We still hear the last hymn of the Rigveda, *samgacchadwam samvadadhvam* and we feel unfailingly that this call of the Veda defines best the Indian identity.

It is remarkable that these essential elements of Indianness have inspired the complex structure of Indian religion and spirituality, Indian philosophy and ethics, Indian sociology and polity, Indian art and literature, — indeed, every aspect of Indian life. In every field of culture great and noble ideals have been erected, and even the practical applications have been quite effective, and even when there have been failures and periods of decline, there have been sudden revivals and creations of new institutions and forms which have not hurt the fundamental continuity.

Indian psychology is profound and its receptivity of external influences has been so sympathetic that by some kind of alchemy of identification the best of the foreign has been received and assimilated. The secret of India's continuity can be traced to the original reservoirs of ancient wisdom, to renew itself, to advance further and create novelties that are not entirely novel.

India is today at a critical stage where external influences are rushing from various directions with great speed, attractiveness and power. It is even feared

that these influences might penetrate so victoriously that they might succeed in wiping out Indianness of India and may bring about a rupture in the continuity of its culture. Some, indeed, believe that India will be greatly profited if these influences succeed, since India will be renewed, it will become modernised and will be able to sit with pride in the company of the modern and developed countries.

But those who understand the depth and the truth of India cannot feel reconciled that this attitude, — particularly, when the progressive and developed countries of the world themselves are increasingly experiencing in their life the strangulating effects of uncontrollable mechanisation, depersonalisation and dehumanisation and are now looking for the liberating wisdom and knowledge which India possesses in its depth, even though in its outer life, it is, in many ways, in a state of degeneration and agony. We have, therefore, to look at this problem very closely so as to dwell upon this very important subject of Indianness and cultural continuity of India.

Let us, first of all, emphasise the fact that as we look deeply into the new consciousness that is fundamentally vibrating among the children and the youth, is manifesting itself through flashes of their amazing talents, genius and dexterity, we find that there is a sound basis to feel confident that the present stage of degeneration in our country can be reversed and remedied. We have, however, to stress that we have to create conditions under which that new

consciousness is allowed to be liberated from the clutches of ignorance and imprisoning modes of social structures and uninspiring ideals that are constantly being bombarded on the minds of the youths. Let us also admit that while recovering the ancient wisdom, we must stress the need for new creation. What has been golden in India's past is so refashioned and chiselled that it can bear the burden of a new quest and a new accomplishment.

The country needs a new polity and a new economy, but not imitative of foreign polity and foreign economy; for our goal will be to uphold all and serve and glorify all the millions of souls of our country. The secret of this upliftment of all is not visible in any current political or economic philosophy or practice. We have to realise that there is something precious in our own national genius that can absorb all that was precious in India's antiquity and in the western modernity and yet develop something fresh and new. We need to develop new philosophies and new forms of critical knowledge; but we do not need to imitate western philosophy and western criticism; we can assimilate all of them, but we have to go still farther, and that can come only when we understand the essential soul of ourselves. Let us at the same time declare that not everything that is foreign is necessarily injurious. The western ideals of progress, — those of liberty, equality and fraternity, — if received rightly and assimilated properly, can ensure the rejuvenation of our individual and collective life. The west can teach us secrets of modern science, and if we can learn these lessons rightly but in accordance

with Indian spirit, we can recover and even refashion our own national intellectual, moral, and spiritual resources and capacity. The message of individual freedom, productivity and prosperity flowing upon us from the West, if received rightly, can help us in developing among us not only the most needed work ethos but also enable us to apply the secrets of the Yoga of works and stimulate a new Yogic research which may lead us out of the bewildering egoistic dynamics of life that has brought us to a great crisis.

Let us, however, not be overwhelmed by a number of those ideas that are coming upon us which imply some kind of economic barbarism. Let us not fall prey to the invasion of vulgar sensuality; and let us not ape those life styles, which are injurious to our body, mind and soul. Our own culture has a great deal to teach us in regard to sacredness of human relationships. India can tell us how stability and dynamism of life can be blended harmoniously; India can also counsel us that the spirit of sacrifice is much greater than the seeking of all that is merely pleasant. Long ago, we were told to chose *shreyas* rather than *preyas*, and this ancient prescription needs to be heard by us with great attention and earnestness. India had discovered long ago how to liberate ourselves from egoism and yet not lose but rather greaten our capacities for dynamic action. We need to receive that knowledge once again and make it active in the present difficult conditions of modern collective life. We do not need to worship selfish self-centredness and narrow competitiveness in self-assertion. India has been constantly teaching that

the world is vast and that everybody has a place in it which one can have, if only takes pains to discover one's own capacities, innernature and soul.

The task is great and difficult, but living in difficult days we have only to accept heavy and onerous responsibilities. Hence, we need not fear but aspire; for during the last hundred years and more much has been done and achieved,—not by the so-called leaders of political and economic life,—but by those who have had the courage to scale once again the ancient heights of the spirit and develop the vision that can look into the far distant future. By the aid of the heritage that we can receive from them, we can confidently move forward. We can reaffirm India's Indianness, we can change, even radically change, and yet we can maintain the cultural continuity without any disabling rupture.

Sri Aurobindo has given an inspiring message for the renascent of India in the following words:

"India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples. And that which must seek now to awake is not an anglicised oriental people, docile pupil of the West and doomed to repeat the cycles of the occident's success and failure, but still the ancient immeasurable Shakti recovering her deepest self, lifting her head higher towards the supreme source of light and strength and turning to discover the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma."¹

¹ Sri Aurobindo: *The Foundation of Indian Culture*, Volume 14, Centenary Edition, p. 381



Indian Culture: Past, Present and Future

The history of India would remain enigmatic, particularly, the remarkable phenomenon of the continuity of Indian culture through the millennia would remain a mystery, if we do not take into account the role that spirituality has played not only in determining the direction of her philosophical and cultural effort but also in replenishing the springs of creativity at every crucial hour in the long and often weary journey. It is true that spirituality has played a role in every civilisation and that no culture can claim a monopoly for spirituality. And yet, it can safely be affirmed that the unique greatness and continuity of Indian culture can be traced to her unparalleled experimentation, discovery and achievement in the vast field of spirituality.

Indian culture has recognised spirituality not only as the supreme occupation of Man but also as his all-integrating occupation. Similarly, the entire spectrum of Indian culture,—its religion, ethics, philosophy, literature, art, architecture, dance, music, and even its polity and social and economic organisation,—all these have been constantly influenced and moulded by the inspiring force of a multisided spirituality.

The distinctive character of Indian spirituality is its conscious and deliberate insistence on direct experience. It affirms that deep within the heart and high above the mind there is accessible to our consciousness a realm of truths, powers and ecstasies that we can, by methodised effort of Yoga,¹ realise in the direct experience, can even hold permanently, and express in varying degrees through our instruments the mind, life and body. This affirmation has conditioned the entire development of religion in India and has introduced in the body of religion the recognition that direct experience of the spirit is far superior to dogma, belief and ritualism, and that dogmatic religion can and must ultimately be surpassed by experiential spirituality.

Consequently, the history of Indian spirituality and religion shows a remarkable spirit of research, of an increasing subtlety, plasticity, sounding of depths, extension of seeking. There have been systems of specialisation and also conflicting claims and counterclaims, but the supervening tendency has been to combine, assimilate, harmonise and synthesise. In the past, there have been at least four great stages of synthesis, represented by the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita and the Tantra. And, in modern times, we are

¹Yoga is a comprehensive system of concentration, passive and dynamic, leading to a living contact, union and identity with realities or Reality underlying the universe, with appropriate consequences in our nature and action, individual and cosmic. In recent times, Yoga is often misrepresented to be identical with Hathayoga, a system of physical and subtle exercises, which is only a specialisation, and a dispensable one, of the real and comprehensive system.

passing through the fifth stage, represented by a new synthesis, which is in the making.

It is impossible to describe Indian spirituality and religion by any exclusive label. Even in its advanced forms, it cannot be described as monotheism or monism or pantheism or nihilism or transcendentalism, although each one of these is present in it in some subtle or pronounced way. Even the spiritual truths behind the primitive forms such as those of animism, spiritism, fetishism and totemism have been allowed to play a role in its complex totality, although their external forms have been discouraged and are not valid or applicable to those who lead an inner mental and spiritual life. It is this complexity that bewilders the foreign student when he tries to define Indian spirituality and religion in terms and under criteria that are not born of the Indian experiment. But things become easier once it is grasped that the fundamental point of reference is not the outward form of a given belief and practice but the spirit behind and the justifying spiritual experience.

Indian scriptures and records abound with the statements and descriptions of varieties of spiritual experience. But there are three central spiritual experiences in terms of which all these varieties can be readily understood. The first is that of the individual in a state of complete detachment from all movement, dynamism and activity. In this state, the individual finds himself in an utter passivity and inactivity, but also of a complete luminosity and discrimination

between himself as an eternal witness (*sākshin*), free from the sense of ego and the activities of Nature in the universe. This experience is the basis of the *Sāmkhya* philosophy. The second experience is that of the eternal and infinite Reality above Space and Time in which all that we call individuality and universality are completely silenced and sublated, and the experiencing consciousness discovers itself to be That Reality (*tat sat*), one, without the second (*ekam eva advitiyam*), entirely silent and immobile, the Pure Being, so ineffable that even to describe it as Being is to violate its sheer transcendence. This experience has given rise to the philosophy of Advaita (non-dualism), in particular that only the Brahman is real, and the world is an illusion. The third experience is that in which the individual and cosmos are found to be free expressions of the Supreme Reality (*Purushottama*) which, although above Space and Time, determines Space and Time and all activities through various intermediary expressions of itself. This experience and some variations of it form the basis of various theistic philosophies of India. These theistic philosophies are those of qualified monism (*vishishtadvaita* philosophy), integral monism (*poornadvaita*) and dualistic philosophy (*dvaita* philosophy). Each of these experiences, when permanently established, gives liberation (*moksha*), and it is this which has in India been regarded as a high consummation of man's destiny upon earth. But, more importantly, the ancient ideal as given by the Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita, was to achieve an integrality of all these experiences, to combine utter Silence with effective Action, to be liberated from ego and yet at the

same time to be a free living centre (*jivanmukta*) of luminous action that would aid the progressive unity of mankind (*lokasangraha*).

This integral ideal was to be realised in its integrality not only by a few exceptional individuals but also by an increasing number of people, groups, collectivities, even on massive scale, through a long and conscious preparation and training. This great and difficult task was pursued with an increasing unfolding of its aim through the ages, and it has passed through two main stages, while a third has taken initial steps and promises to be the destiny of India's future.

The early Vedic was the first stage; the Purano-Tantric was the second stage.² In the former, an attempt was made to approach the mass-mind through the physical mind of man and make it familiar with the Godhead in the universe through the symbol of the sacrificial fire (*yajña*). In the latter, deeper approaches of man's inner mind and life to the Divine in the universe were attempted through the development of great religious movements, philosophies,³ many-sided epic literature (particularly Ramayana and Mahabharata),

² The date of the Vedic age is controversial, but according to a conservative hypothesis, its origins are dated 2000 B.C. The Purano-Tantric age can be regarded to have extended from 600 B.C. to 800 A.D.

³ Particularly, the six systems, Nyāya, Vaisheshika, Sāṃkhya, Pūrva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa and their numerous interpretations and commentaries. These six systems are Vedic systems of philosophy. There developed also Buddhism and Jainism and their numerous philosophical systems which did not accept the authority of the Vedas. Similarly, Cārvāka philosophy, the philosophy of materialism, which also developed during this period, was entirely anti-Vedic.

systems of Puranas and Tantras,⁴ and even through art and science. An enlarged secular turn was given, and this was balanced by deepening of the intensities of psycho-religious experience. New tendencies and mystic forms of disciplines attempted to seize not only the soul and the intellect, but the emotions, the senses, the vital and the aesthetic nature of man and turn them into stuff of the spiritual life. But this great effort and achievement covered all the time between the Vedic age and the decline of Buddhism. Vaishnavism and Shaivism flourished during this period, and although there were during this period conflicts of religions and claims of superiority of one system of religion or Yoga over other systems of religion or Yoga, there was fundamentally a large Catholicism and a spirit of assimilation and even of synthesis. Christianity came to India early in the first century A.D. and there came also several other influences, all of which were welcomed and given a place in the large and developing field of the Indian Religion. All this rich growth gave rise to a further development through the third stage. But it was arrested as it synchronised with a period of general exhaustion, and, in the eighteenth century, which can be regarded as the period of dense obscurity, the work that had begun seemed almost lost.

The aim of this third stage was to approach not only the inner mind and life of man, but to approach his

⁴ There are 18 Puranas. Each Purana has five parts: (1) Creation of the World, (2) Destruction and recreation of the world, (3) Reigns and periods of Manus, (4) Genealogy of Gods, and (5) Dynasties of solar and lunar kings.

Tantras are called Agamas. We do not know the exact number of Agamas, but it is estimated that there are 64 of them.

whole mental, psychical and physical living, his totality of being and activity, and to turn it into a first beginning of at least a generalised spiritual life. Philosophers and saints such as Sri Chaitanya (1485-1533) and others of 15th and 16th centuries belong to this stage. There was also during this period a remarkable attempt to combine Vedanta and Islam or of establishing lasting communal harmony. In particular, the work of Guru Nanak (1469-1538) and of the subsequent Sikh Khalsa movement was astonishingly original and novel. The speciality of this third stage was an intense outburst and fresh creativity, not a revivalism, but based upon a deep assimilation of the past, a new effort and a new formulation. But the time was not yet ripe, and India had to pass through a period of an eclipse, almost total and disastrous.

Happily, the 19th century witnessed a great awakening and a new spiritual impulse pregnant with a power to fulfil the mission of the work that had started in the third stage. Great and flaming pioneers appeared, Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), Swami Vivekananda (1862 -1902), — to name just a few of them, — and through their work the entire country was electrified not only spiritually but even socially and politically. India became renascent, and there began to develop a capacity for a new synthesis, not only of the threads of Indian culture but also of world culture. Nationalism came to be proclaimed as the new spirituality and this nationalism was right from the beginning international in its spirit

and sweep. Not an escape from life, but acceptance of life, integration of life and transformation of life by an integral spirituality—this ideal came to be felt and expressed in various ways and through various activities of the renascent India.

Gradually, it has become evident that this new movement has to do not merely with India but fundamentally with the essential problem of Man and his future evolution. It is becoming clearer that Man is a field of interaction between Matter and Spirit, that this interaction has reached a point of criticality, and that this criticality demands a new knowledge, an integral knowledge of Matter and Spirit.

This is the task which Free India has begun to perceive as central to her real fulfilment. It is significant that we have in India a most comprehensive statement of this task in the luminous writings of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), who has been described by Romain Rolland as "the completest synthesis of the East and the West." Sri Aurobindo has declared that man is a transitional being, that his destiny is to be the spiritual superman, and that the present hour is the hour of his evolutionary crisis in which his entire life, his very body, must undergo an integral spiritual transformation, not indeed by an escape into some far-off heaven, but here, in this physical earth itself, by a victorious union of Spirit and Matter. This, he has declared, is not an issue of an individual but of collectivity, not an issue of Indian spirituality and culture, but of the entire world's upward aspiration and fulfilment.

It must be noted that in this task of universal importance, India, the East, has received from the West a collaboration of incalculable magnitude and value. For it is from France that *The Mother* (Madame Mira Alfassa [1878-1973]) came to Sri Aurobindo and made India her permanent home in order to collaborate with him and to fulfil this task of integral transformation. The work that she has done is not yet sufficiently known, but as we study the great account of Her work in "*Mother's Agenda*", we find in her the highest heights that Indian spirituality has reached, and we feel that the near future is bound to show the revolutionary effects of her work for humanity, for its lasting unity and harmony, and for its transmutation into super-humanity.

Indeed, the renascent spirituality of India opens up new vistas of experience and research. It transcends the boundaries of dogma and exclusive claims of Truth. It is not opposed to any religion, but points to a way to a synthesis and integrality of spiritual experience in the light of which the truth behind each religion is understood and permitted to grow to its fullness and to meet in harmony with all the others. The important thing is to turn the human mentality, vitality and physicality to the realm of spiritual experiences and to transform the human mould by an ever-widening light of the Spirit. In this perception, even scepticism, agnosticism and atheism have a meaning and value as an indispensable stage for a certain line of mental development. But here, too, the dogma and denial behind the doubt and atheism have to be surpassed,

and whether by rigorous methods of philosophy and science or by a deeper plunge into deeper experiences, a way can be opened to transcend the dogmatic refusal to seek and to discover. It is in this direction that we seem to reach a point where a fruitful synthesis of science and spirituality can be effectuated.

The renascent spirituality is all-embracing and is deeply committed to undertake all activities of human life and to transform them. It has begun to influence literature and art and music, education and physical culture. Even social and economic and political fields are being taken up, not indeed to cast them once again into some rigid formula of a religious dogma but rather to liberate them and to inundate them with a spiritual light and motive and to restructure them by a gradual evolution so that they may breathe widely and freely the progressive harmonies of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Thus is it that the old forms of society, casteism and all the rest, are being broken and there is a fresh search for new forms, plastic and flexible, to permit the highest possible perfectibility of the individual and the collectivity to blossom spontaneously and perpetually. In the ultimate analysis, it is through such a vast and potent change in the social milieu that the total man can be uplifted to his next stage of evolutionary mutation.

It is in this context that India needs to view the various social and political upheavals of the recent times. These upheavals have their own genesis in so far as that nature wants the human being to resolve by

finding out deeper resources which have hitherto been ignored and ill-explored. Contemporary humanity has reached a point where two conflicting ideals have to be harmonised, the ideal of individual perfection and the ideal of collective perfection. This conflict has presented itself throughout the history both of India and the rest of the world from time to time and different answers have been given at different epochs according to the needs and circumstances and possibilities of circumstances. In early times, the individual was subordinated to the collectivity; in due course of time, the individual began to gain some freedom against the demands of the collectivity; but it is only in recent times, particularly after the European Renaissance, that individualism has gained a great predominance; but even then, with the rise of collectivistic philosophy, the ideal of individual perfection had to suffer a great setback. With the collapse of the Communist regime in USSR, however, the pendulum has swung back again in favour of individualism. In India, the balance between the ideal of the perfection of the individual and the perfection of the collectivity was sought to be achieved by means of a profound sociological and psychological understanding of human development. A great stress was laid on the needs of the welfare of the collectivity, and the individual was required to subordinate himself through the system of duties towards the members of the family or of the joint family, to the guild and to the community, the state and the country, and even the humanity at large and to universal dharma. At the same time, the demands of individual perfection were sought to be met by erecting the ideal of the *Shreshtha* or of the

Arya; facility for integral education for all those aimed at perfection were amply provided for, and the system provided for the realisation of the individual's perfection, if he qualified himself for it by undertaking the life of renunciation, *sannyasa*. However, in due course, the system of these obligations broke down, and the subordination of the individual to collectivity became more and more prominent. During the last thousand years, various invasions, battles and the subjugation of the country under the heavy hand of foreign rulers crippled not only the ideal of individual perfection but even that of collective perfection. The weakening of the ideal of the individual and the collective perfection became severest under the British rule, and it is only recently that there has been some beginning, after the attainment of independence, of an uneasy and uncertain groping to gain freedom for the individual and collectivity. But, again, under the choice that India made for the road of socialism or socialistic pattern of society, the individual came to be subordinated, and in spite of the recent orientations towards liberalisation, it is difficult to say how this liberalisation will go beyond the economic sphere so that the real purposes of the ideal of individual perfection and the ideal of collective perfection can come to their own and affirm themselves powerfully. In the West, too, where individual freedom which flourished under the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, which were pronounced powerfully by the French Revolution, came under a great constraint because of the powerful rise of Nazism and Communism, and even though the latter have now

fallen to a great extent, and the ideal of individual freedom has come to be reaffirmed, it is mostly being advocated in the economic field, and that, too, in the services of the system that is being sought to be perfected for the life of standardisation, mechanisation and of a comfortable search and satisfaction of appetites for pleasure and egoistic domination.

What is happening in the West is bound to have a great impact upon India, and the central problem of India is whether India wants to become a province of western culture and whether, even while assimilating the best that the West has to offer, it can find from great resources of culture which are available in its heritage, a new solution of the harmony of the individual perfection and the collective perfection, and whether it can give that solution as a gift to the world which also needs it, and which will suffer if that solution is not made available to it.

But while dealing with this problem, India will have to resolve four important questions, namely, those related to (1) the conflict of religions, (2) the conflict of religion and science, (3) the conflict between science and philosophy, and (4) the conflict between asceticism and materialism.

It is evident that the conflict of religions cannot be resolved at the level of dogmas. For dogmas are themselves unquestionable, and if the unquestionables are in conflict, there can be no issue and no answer. It is only if we go behind the dogmas, as Indian religion has

always attempted to do, in search of the living experience which are at the core of various religions, that there can be a hope of the resolution of the conflict. Not, therefore, the synthesis of religions, but the synthesis of spiritual experiences seems to be the answer. It is significant that in modern India, we have today—as fully exemplified in Sri Aurobindo—a puissant and irresistible drive towards the synthesis of spiritual experiences.

The conflict of religions and science can be resolved only if science expands itself into an inquiry of the 'invisible' actuality, and if religion enlarges itself and transforms itself into an impartial open search of the verifiable and repeatable spiritual experience. Here, again, there are signs in modern India which promise a new orientation initiated by scientists like Jagadish Chandra Bose. This orientation, however, needs to be pursued much more rigorously than has been done during the last several decades. We have achieved much in the field of science, but we have still not related science to spirituality, and we have not yet seen how science itself can be enriched by the knowledge that spirituality can deliver.

The conflict between science and philosophy has grown in the modern intellectual world and the credentials of philosophy have been severely questioned. The modern Indian philosopher, sympathetic to the Indian philosophical traditions, attempts to reconstruct the Indian philosophy in the light of the modern trends of philosophical and

scientific thought, but he finds himself in the grip of a most acute conflict and difficulty. There has, however, been one special element in Indian philosophy which promises to be a great aid in a possible resolution of the difficulty. For Indian philosophy has not really been merely speculative. This is not to say that speculation has been absent. There is, we might say, even a profusion of it; the pure reason has been at full play and has been allowed to arrive at its own independent conclusions, and it can even be said that Indian metaphysics has been as powerful as any metaphysical systems in the world. But, still, Indian philosophy has been primarily a *darshan*, a vision based upon spiritual experience and channelised into a metaphysical system by means of intellectual processes of reasoning. Even when intellectual speculations have been free both in regard to the premises and conclusions, still the conclusions have never been accepted as authentic unless they have been found verifiable in spiritual experience or confirmed by the records of spiritual experience, *shruti*. In other words, Indian philosophy has always recognised the claim of experience to be superior to that of mere intellectual reasoning, and it is interesting to note that the entire trend of modern inquiry seems to turn back to the primacy and superiority of experience over mere speculation and 'fictions' of reasoning. It is then in the recovery of this Indianness of Indian philosophy that the future conflict of science and philosophy may be resolved in India, and this might probably benefit the entire movement of the world-thought.

But the conflict between asceticism and materialism will still remain to be resolved. And this is perhaps the most difficult issue concerning modern India in its search of the new future. It is true that the economic, social and political necessities of our modern life have imposed the necessity of a robust dynamism which is remote from the tenets of asceticism, but still the spirit of asceticism has been so deeply ingrained since the last two thousand years that at every turn we feel confronted with the ideas of the illusoriness of the world and of the escape of life as the very meaning of life. The present Indian scene is, therefore, divided and torn between the invasion of materialism and the persistent whisper and call of the gospel of the renunciation of world and life. This conflict can be resolved only if it is discovered that Spirit is not the negation of Matter, but that Matter itself is an expression of the Spirit, and that Spirit is unfolding itself gradually in Matter so that there would be a total spiritual transformation of material life, here itself, *ih eva*, in this earthly Earth. There is no need to renounce Matter in order to embrace the Spirit. Indeed, all life is an evolving expression of the Spirit, and therefore, a truly spiritual culture embraces all life and transforms it into spiritual terms. A spiritual manifestation in the physical life would be the only possible and acceptable solution to this conflict between asceticism and materialism. And it is in this direction that India needs to move forward and fashion itself for the new future and for the new role that it has to play in the comity of nations.

If we are to ask ourselves what specific things we should do, we may refer to a brief statement of Sri Aurobindo in which three important tasks have been identified. He has said:

“The recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its splendour, depth and fullness is its first, most essential work; the flowing of this spirituality into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge is the second; an original dealing with modern problems in the light of Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society is the third and most difficult. Its success on these three lines will be the measure of its help to the future of humanity.”⁵

Let us hope that we shall become aware of the implications of these tasks and rededicate ourselves in carrying them out in the service of Mother India.

⁵ Sri Aurobindo: *The Foundation of Indian Culture*, Volume 14, Centenary Edition, p.409



Ancient Indian Wisdom and Contemporary Challenges

What are the critical problems of today? And what could be relevance of ancient Indian wisdom in resolving our predicaments when the modern knowledge appears to have been so advanced? Since the last two centuries, humanity has taken a serious turn, and in its worst manifestation, two devastating wars have stormed the entire earth, and in its best manifestation, global aspiration to unite the peoples of the world has taken a concrete form. On its worst side, the survival of humanity on the earth has come under severest attack; on its best side, it has come to be realised that a new consciousness must seize humanity and change human nature so radically that the spirit of oneness and unity not only reigns as an idea and an aspiration but becomes embodied in human life like its living breath.

A significant fact is that the age of the Reason, which began and flourished in the West since the Renaissance and which has spread all over the world in varying degrees of preponderance, is now going to close. The questions which it had raised but failed to answer are now looming large before humanity with imperative pressure. What is truth and whether comprehensive

truth can be known and known with certainty were the questions with which the Age of Reason began, and they have now come to be answered only in terms of probability and scepticism. The hope built up by the Reason that humanity can be so rationally governed that liberty, equality and fraternity can be actualised in the life of humanity has now been demonstrably proved to be unrealisable, since rationality is unable to provide equality, even at the minimum level, without strangulating freedom, and fraternity does not find even an elbow room when Reason goes on constructing mechanising and dehumanising edifices. And yet it is not possible to remain reconciled with the failures of the powers of Reason and to forget the dreams of freedom, unity and brotherhood. The soul of humanity cries out to look for the means by which the ideals of progress can be actualised as urgently as possible.

At the root of all this, it is becoming clearer that we are not only at the turning point of a century or a millennium but at the turning point of a mutation of the human species. Man is a product of evolution, — so has modern science declared; and having reached the acme of experimentation with the highest faculty of Reason, which distinguishes the human species from all other species, will not man press forward to a new step of evolution? Self-exceeding is the very nature of man, — so has modern science concluded; will then man give up his distinctiveness and succumb to the limitations of gospels that counsel contentment within our imprisoning deficiencies? Great philosophers of evolution that have flourished during the last two

centuries have declared that the *élan vital* will not cease to produce new varieties of human and superhuman species or the urge inherent in Space and Time is preparing the birth of Deity or God in the making or drive of ingression of higher powers of consciousness will continue to liberate corresponding powers imprisoned in man. Flying on the wings of speculation of leading philosophers like Bergson, Alexander and Whitehead, we also see scientists releasing tremendous packets of energies from the atom and grappling with the biological cell to release from it secrets of immortality; and we begin to wonder whether while striving to put our foot on the Moon and to fly to Jupiter, we are not being called upon to return to ourselves, — to something within our inmost being to find answers to the questions, which must be answered. The quest to find these answers has no more remained a pastime or a luxury of an idealist; asphyxiated by the narrow grooves in which we are required to be imprisoned, our call is a call of an imperative necessity.

There appear to be three alternatives before humanity today. The first possibility is to gravitate downwards towards the organisation of life that would keep humanity stagnant within the narrow circle of the satisfaction of animal wants, vital, desires and mental fashions supported by powerful means of communication and transmission and structures or super-structures built and sustained by ever-increasing processes of mechanisation. This possibility seems to be asserting itself more and more powerfully, since instruments like those of television and arts of music

and cinema are producing incalculable impact on vital desires of increasing segments of humanity.

The second possibility is for the humanity to arrive at a better but not ideal organisation of life sustained by increasing circling of the powers of the Reason, somehow adjusted with demands of ethics and religion, accommodated by various compromises, which can easily be bombarded by the greater inrush of the downward pull of the gravitational pull of the powers of Unreason. This is the possibility towards which enlightened but not illumined leaders of humanity are striving to actualise, hoping that such a possibility will not only be actualised but will also sustain itself over a long period of time to come.

The third possibility is contained in the increasing realisation that neither of these two possibilities is worthy of the higher destiny of humanity or any one of them would or should eventually succeed. It envisages the rise of a new aspiration and a new awakening; it perceives that a great psychological revolution will break out that will push humanity beyond its borders of limitations and open up the gates of spiritual and supramental future. This possibility is still not widely understood or shared, but the speed with which humanity is rushing forward or downward will create the power of necessity to be liberated from the imprisoning walls where life-giving oxygen will be found suddenly depleted. It is when this situation will begin to be felt that with increasing pressure humanity will turn to a new quest.

From this brief review of the whole situation, we can formulate the following questions:

When the best possibilities confront the worst possibilities, what are the means by which the triumph of the best possibilities can be secured?

If it is a part of the nature of the human being to continuously cross the limitations of nature, is there evidence that the limitations that confront us even at the borders of our highest possible achievements can be crossed? In other words, do we have any assured knowledge of those faculties and powers, which, when developed, give us a basis for the future evolution of the human being that would open up the path for a better world order?

Do we have any body of knowledge with the aids of which we can build a path leading us from the present critical condition of the world towards a better and smoother progress ensuring the needed perfectibility of the individual and collective life?

It will be seen that these questions are interrelated and demand a vast and strenuous effort of research. Fortunately, the supreme help that we can get in this task of research is the body of writings of Sri Aurobindo, who has left for us a synthetic body of knowledge that includes the best possible articulation of the sum total of humanity's quest from the most ancient times to the present day. With his vast mastery over some of the important Indian and international

languages as also over the vast range of the relevant disciplines of knowledge, he has presented comprehensively the result of his studies of Indian and Western culture, social and political development of humanity, scholarly exegesis of the Veda, Upanishads, and the Gita as also of the religious, scientific and other secular literature that has bearing on the problems of human evolution and its future; he has given us basic clues to be found in the ancient Indian wisdom and in the theistic religious traditions and in the recovered sense of Buddhism, as also in the revelations of the modern knowledge to those answers which we need so urgently and imperatively. In fact, his writings have opened up the lines on which we can fruitfully pursue our question.

Speaking of the ancient Indian wisdom, Sri Aurobindo has said that the recovery of the knowledge contained in the Veda, Upanishads and in the Bhagavadgita is of capital importance and that this recovery should aim at utmost fullness and amplitude. He has further underlined that this research should be accompanied by the development of new philosophical, scientific and critical knowledge in such a way that that ancient knowledge gets fully channelised and utilised for the building up of the new knowledge that is required for breaking the boundaries of the present evolutionary moulds, which are imprisoning humanity into stagnancy or downward gravitation or else into horizontal but vain efforts at amelioration. He also suggested that a supreme effort will be required, particularly on the part of India, to

build up a spiritualised society that would synthesise the best of the East and the West and which would undertake an original handling of our contemporary problems.

In a memorable passage, Sri Aurobindo has stated:

“India has the key to the knowledge and conscious application of the ideal; what was dark to her before in its application, she can now, with a new light, illumine; what was wrong and wry in her old methods she can now rectify; the fences which she created to protect the outer growth of the spiritual ideal and which afterwards became barriers to its expansion and farther application, she can now break down and give her spirit a freer field and an ampler flight: she can, if she will, give a new and decisive turn to the problems over which all mankind is labouring and stumbling, for the clue to their solutions is there in her ancient knowledge.”¹

The Veda is, as Sri Aurobindo has explained, a book of knowledge,—not a collection of primitive aspirations and prayers of superstitious barbarians, as many modern commentators have attempted to portray it. It contains “truth of a science the modern world does not at all possess.” Sri Aurobindo also discovered in the Vedic hymns the knowledge of the supermind, which he had arrived at independently in his own Yogic research and realisations, and in his great

¹ Sri Aurobindo: *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, Centenary Edition, Vol.14, p.433.

book, "*The Secret of the Veda*", Sri Aurobindo has described in detail the victory that the Rishis had attained in breaking limitations of human consciousness so as to create a sound foundation for the surpassing of the limits, — a task which humanity needs today to undertake in order to solve its critical problems. When towards the end of the Rigveda, the future task of humanity is described, in brief but powerful words, "*manurbhava janaya daivyam janam*": (Be first the mental being in its perfection and then generate the divine being), it has behind it a vast body of experimentation with those faculties of inspiration, revelation, intuition and supramental discrimination that begin to operate when Reason is surpassed and faculties of true knowledge and comprehensive knowledge begin to operate. Crossing through the symbolism of *Sarasvati, Ila, Sarama and Daksha*, Sri Aurobindo has shown how Vedic Rishis had mastered the operations of suprarational faculties so that when we read of them now at a time when we are obliged to transcend the limitations of the Reason, we can move on the right path with an assured body of knowledge, and we may not fall into those irrational and exaggerated claims that often dilute and mislead those who, without necessary ripeness and without perfecting the powers of the Reason, try to enter into the untrodden paths that lie beyond the borders of the Reason.

There is one faculty according to the Vedic knowledge, which can be singled out as the best aid that can facilitate our entrance into the higher realms of true and comprehensive knowledge. That faculty,

intelligent mind, is described in various aspects of its operation,— *dhi, medha, mati, smriti, buddhi, manas, chitta, hrit, prajna*.

As Sri Aurobindo points out:

“In man as he is at present developed, the intelligent mind is the most important psychological faculty and it is with a view to the development of the intelligent mind to its highest purity and capacity that the hymns of the Veda are written.”²

From this point of view, it can be said that the Veda is a science of the mind and the supermind, which lays down effective technologies by which man can carefully be trained, perfected and transported into the operations of the supermind.

The entire discipline of the Veda is an elaborate methodised effort in which various human powers can be intertwined, purified and developed, and they are symbolised under specific and discernible symbols of *Agni, Indra, Usha, Pushan, Surya, Savitri, Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman, Bhaga, Soma, Brihaspati*, and many others in a systematic manner. And in the hymns relating to the *Rihbus*, we have a summary of the entire process of perfection, which can be repeated in human beings. It is fortunate that humanity has this great treasure available to it precisely at the moment when the knowledge contained in it is needed.

There are, according to the Vedas, Upanishads, and

²Sri Aurobindo: *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, Centenary Edition, Vol. 11, p. 443.

the Gita, three important powers by the combined application of which, humanity can bring about the triumph of the favourable possibilities in their battle against the unfavourable. The first of them is the power of what may be called a king-idea or the seven-headed Thought or the power of the seven-rayed Thinker, *saptaguh*. Is it merely a legend when we are told that one can rise into higher plane of swar and rise also into the highest plane of Truth, symbolised by the Sun? A famous hymn of the Rigveda declares the passage from darkness to the supreme light, when it states: "*ud vayam tamasas pari swar pashyanta uttaram; devam devatra suryam aganma jyotir uttamam.*" (We, in our ascent, crossed over darkness and perceived the superior light of the realm of intermediate knowledge; and then the aspirants of the cosmic powers ascended still upwards and arrived at the abode of the sunlight, which is the light of the supreme knowledge.) Again, is it a mere legend when the Chhandogya Upanishad refers to this verse when it is said that Krishna, son of Devaki, attained to supreme knowledge, when Ghora, his teacher, pronounced to him that one Word, contained in that verse. In one sentence, the Veda declares that mere crossing the darkness is not enough, mere attainment of the intermediate light is not enough, but one must rise to the source of the supreme knowledge, the rays of which are multiple and constitute a vast complex multiplicity.

And when Vishwamitra, the great Rishi speaks of the necessity of uniting our intellect with that sunlight up to such a degree that the intellect not only

contemplates the supreme knowledge but is also directed by it, — we have only a summary statement of the methodised effort that is needed for the discipline of the intellect before it can act in the light of true knowledge and in the light of comprehensive knowledge. King-ideas are born of that comprehensive knowledge.

The second power, which is celebrated in the Veda is the power of the master-act, which is inspired by the highest knowledge and executed by the highest will. A master-act is an expression of inextinguishable fire of aspiration, Agni, and as it is described in the very first hymn of the Rigveda, that fire of aspiration is *kavi kratu*, — Seer-will, the substance of which is *satyascitravastamah*, the collectivity of the highest inspirations that express multiple aspects of the Truth. Action that is inspired by the fire of aspiration has still to pass through mental consciousness, and that consciousness, even when not confined to the surface and even when enlarged into greater widenesses needs to be disciplined by the power of Will, and this disciplined will can be made truth-bearing only when it becomes Goodwill. We find, therefore, in Yajurveda, which can be looked upon as the science of the knowledge of action and its right methodology, the famous hymn where mental consciousness is described in detail, and each of its powers is proposed to be united with Goodwill, *shivasankalpa*.

At a higher level, master-action is manifested only when it begins to burn with self-giving, which in the

Vedic language, is called *yajna*.

In the Bhagavadgita, we have a most explicit statement of the assured knowledge that governs perfection of action, of *yajna* – the knowledge, which could deliver Arjuna, the greatest protagonist of action but gripped by a crisis in which dilemmas of action, inaction and wrong action confronted him and disabled him so completely that he was led to think of escaping from action altogether. We of the modern humanity are facing today a similar crisis, and each one of us is facing similar dilemmas in regard to action, and therefore, that ancient knowledge expounded with incomparable mastery is directly relevant. For each one of us is called upon to recognise what is favourable and what is unfavourable to the future of humanity, and moreover we need to make a difficult choice that can be arrived at by the certainty about the rightness of the needed action. In the ultimate analysis, the master-act that is needed needs to be based upon heroism of the fire of the will, guided by the certainty of knowledge and strengthened by goodwill that would denude us of all our self-conceit, selfishness, and egoism.

The third power is connected with the knowledge of our inmost being and its real origin and its adherence to the support on which our inmost being is rooted. At its highest, it manifests as utter self-giving, adoration and prayer. And here, too, the Veda, the Upanishads and the Gita give us the profoundest message “Know Thyself”, which has been perceived as the fundamental need, if we are to relate ourselves properly with the

world and with all that may be beyond ourselves and the world.

An important message of the ancient wisdom in regard to self-knowledge is that of bondage and liberation and immortality—a knowledge that is so secret and so precious that in order to be qualified even to enter into the portals of that knowledge, what is needed is, as the Kathopanishad clearly indicates, not only utter sincerity but such an earnestness that the seeker is prepared to surmount the highest possible temptations of pleasure, wealth, fame, and all that is normally considered by human beings as desirable, *preyas*. And yet, it is in the Veda, the Upanishads, the Gita and other records of ancient Indian wisdom that we find non-dogmatic accounts of explorations and a systematic body of repeatable and verifiable knowledge pertaining to this theme. The intricate knowledge of the concept of Purusha in its various poises at the levels of body, life, mind and beyond, both in its dynamic and static aspects, and its relationship with still more difficult concepts of the *jiva*, and *atman* or Brahman is considered to be useful if the individual is to be liberated and is to be prepared for perfection. It is on the basis of this knowledge that, according to the ancient Indian wisdom, the harmony between the individual and the collectivity can be created and perfected. Examples of great Rishis and personalities like Rama and Krishna, Mahavira and Buddha and a number of Siddhas illustrate what profundities of knowledge are required if we are not only to repeat what was achieved in the past but also if we are to

the ancient wisdom of India is to be underlined, we should not be blind to the need of exploring other systems of wisdom and even new knowledge. Ancient Indian wisdom has always counselled us to rise higher and higher and to be always more and more luminous, unfettered by the past and any dogmas or preconceived beliefs. In India, we speak of the Aryan spirit, and the Aryan spirit is not something narrow or communal or racial, but the spirit of the free man that wants to labour and work with wisdom and with one supreme motive of *loka sangrah*, the motive of preserving and creating solidarity and unity of the people.

recreate, with new knowledge, the perfect relationship between the individual and the collectivity, —perfection in which the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity are reconciled with the perfections of the power of wisdom, heroism, harmony and skills in works, to which reference is made in the famous Purusha Sukta of the Rigveda. When the Rigveda closes with the call to join together and to commune together in harmony,—*samgacchadhvam samvadadhvam*, the vision that has been placed before us is that of the perfectibility of the collective life.

In sum, it can be said that the ancient fund of knowledge that India possesses, which even Indians have largely lost or forgotten, needs to be explored with fresh eyes and with scientific rigour as also with unfailing powers of experimentation, so that the challenges that humanity faces today can be met effectively. It will be obvious that a mighty effort is required and we need to be awakened from the facile and soporific gospels that give us false assurances that humanity will somehow muddle through its difficulties and arrive at normal and happy routine of life. Considering the nature of challenges and the issues that have been raised by these challenges, we have to realise that our crisis is an unprecedented crisis and that even ordinary people like ourselves have to share some mightiest efforts in order to surmount our present predicaments and various threats that are directly relevant to the issues of our survival and fulfilment.

We may hasten to add that while the importance of

Indian Culture and Its Message

The exact dates of the antiquity of Indian history are difficult to determine, but the earliest records of this history are surprisingly available to us with almost the same precision as they were composed in those ancient times. And these records are voluminous and consist of four anthologies or collections. Their generic name is Veda, which literally means "Book of Knowledge". These four Vedas are: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. This is not an occasion to dwell upon the contents of these anthologies, but if we want to give a quintessential idea, it can be summed up by stating that it insists on the quest for the truth and for the comprehensive truth; it declares that the truth is discoverable, that discovery of that truth gives meaning to human life and that human life becomes truly purposive when truth is practiced in all circumstances of life, even though it may mean battles with untruth, falsehood, and ignorance.

This message goes farther and lays down that the first task of the human being is to become truly human. This, however, is only a transitional stage, since the ultimate destiny is to transcend all the limitations of untruth, bondage, incompetence and suffering. To rise from the human to the divine is, according to the Veda,

the highest endeavour and it must be pursued, not arbitrarily or occasionally, but whole-heartedly and with the rigour of scientific discovery and invention that build knowledge upon knowledge. In one short sentence in Sanskrit, Veda declares: "*manurbhava, janaya daivyam janam*"—become first the mental being and then become the divine being.

This is the message for the individual. The Veda also presents a collective ideal and enjoins upon all who want to listen to this message that they should strive to march together, to commune among themselves in harmony and arrive at a common mind and common understanding. Collective unity and collective harmony form, according to the Veda, the goal that humanity must endeavour to achieve.

History of India can best be understood, in its internal psychological aspects, as a great human effort to follow these two ideals of individual and collective perfection.

Consequently, a concept that grew up and upheld the march of Indian culture was that of Dharma which is mistranslated as religion. For Dharma really means the law of ascent, and it has three applications: perennial and for all; temporal for nations and smaller collectivities; and variable for each individual. Perennial law of ascent is determined by descent of the ideal of eternal perfection. This is called, in Sanskrit, *Sanatana Dharma*, since it is unchanging and it exercises relentless pressure of immortal reality. But there is also

the law of the ascent determined by the aspiration of nationalities, collectivities and individuals. This law is temporal and variable. It varies according to the stages of free growth of aspiration. In Sanskrit it is called *Rashtra Dharma* and *Swadharma*. A subtle and complex relationship between that perennial and these temporal and variable movements has been the secret of the ethical and spiritual content of Indian culture. And it has been the underlying cause of the continuity of that culture, which historians have found to be astonishing and perplexing.

Broadly speaking, Indian culture has passed through three important stages, and now we are entering into the fourth stage. The first stage covers a long story from an indeterminable antiquity to 600 B.C., during which a balanced structure of society and human life was constructed under the ideals presented in the Veda. In the ancient Upanishads and in ever-living epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, we have glimpses of that society and its ideals, its heroism and its law of harmony and dharma. This was the stage when the people of India, covering the entire land from the Northern Himalayas to the Southern Indian Ocean, created one common culture.

The second period covers a long period, roughly, from 600 B.C. to 800 A.D., during which Buddhism arose, and, while the old still continued to live and even develop, new elements came to occupy the Indian experimentation. Great experiments were conducted in democracy and democratic monarchy, and the first

imperial kingdom of India under the leadership of Chandragupta Maurya and his teacher and prime minister, Chanakya, came to be built up under the shock of the invasion of Alexander, the Great. Hinduism and Buddhism clashed and clasped each other, resulting in confusion and yet enrichment, impelling wider understanding and mutual assimilation. There came about hardening of certain institutions coupled with opulence and richness; Indian spirituality inspired and supported art, architecture, sculpture, literature, philosophy and various sciences and arts to such a degree that there was nothing in the cultural domains which was not attempted and was not brought up to a high level of achievement.

A few invasions from the North-West marked the chequered history of Northern India. This was a period of great tide but also from certain points of view a beginning of decline, although of a slow decline. The people of India had lived and created with untiring energy for nearly 4,000 years and had passed through infancy, early manhood and had even reached adulthood. Signs of exhaustion had begun to appear.

And this was followed by the third period during which invasions from North-West became frequent and a new force of Islam entered into India. Two great efforts were made to arrive at a harmony between the old and powerful Indian culture and the religion and power of Islam. These two great efforts, the one started by Guru Nanak and the other started by Akbar,

reaffirmed the Indian tendency of synthesis and harmony. Once again, while this period was marked by political instability for several centuries until Akbar and some of his successors infused stability to a certain extent, it was clear that great leaders like Rana Pratap and Shivaji, through their unyielding spirit and battles were preparing for the reaffirmation of the old Indian values and images that had the power of revival and resurgence. The opulent and prosperous India did not suffer greatly; but in many ways there were serious signs of advancing decline. Sciences, which were developing with tremendous force and vitality, stopped suddenly in the thirteenth century to develop and grow; philosophical inquiry continued but not on original lines; and fresh vigour came to be infused in the country with development of a number of new languages derived from old classical tongues. Excessive religionism and outer ritualism and ceremonies of worship began to cloud the true spiritual motive that had been the inspiring force of the Indian vitality. Tendencies of irreligionism, selfishness and battles for small ends began to multiply. As a result, during the 18th century and early 19th century, there came about a collapse of Indian culture, although not any total disintegration.

The spiritual lamp continued to burn even in the midst of darkness that grew darker when the British triumphed in establishing its rule. By the year 1857, however, the first Battle of Independence heralded the advent of the new age, and Indian spirituality reasserted itself.

India had begun to enter into its fourth stage of development. First of all, the Indian mind was obliged to reconsider its own past in the light of the new situation that was created by the influx of the European science, literature, critical thought and the Christian missionary work. Although the first reaction was that of imitation, there came about also in the next phase a reaffirmation of all that was Indian as also impulsion to fresh creativity in the field of spirituality, literature, poetry and art. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Tagore, on the one hand, and Dayananda, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, on the other, gave a new impetus not only to a new awakening but also to creation of new forms of culture on the basis of the original motive and power of the Indian spirituality.

The political struggle for freedom assumed a powerful figure of nationalism drawing its force of sustenance from the ancient religio-philosophical culture, and the idea of the national freedom came to be seen as an extension of the Indian goal of spiritual freedom. India came to be worshipped by millions of people as an eternal Mother India. Under the inspiring call of worship of Mother India, programmes of *swadeshi*, boycott, passive resistance and national education came to be developed, and the movement which had begun with the dominant minority turned into a mass movement, and India became free in 1947.

We are today passing through a new phase of cultural development that is filled with promise of actual renaissance that will, if properly inspired and

guided, retain the ancient Indian spirituality as its soul but will also create a new body, new currents of life and expression and the powerful mentality capable of highest criticality as also of a new synthesis of the disciplines of knowledge of the East and the West, and of science and spirituality. The life and work of Sri Aurobindo, the foremost philosopher and mystic of our times, illustrate that promise and its progressive fulfilment.

Let us underline that the master-key of India has been its spirituality. This spirituality was not negligent of material development, creative arts and crafts, activities of productivity and prosperity, and robust intellectuality. But at a later stage, India neglected matter, and while it continued to heap the treasures of the spirit, it registered bankruptcy in terms of material prosperity, creative vitality and intellectual capabilities. From this great experience of Indian culture the major lesson that can be learnt is that exclusive pursuit of the spiritual motive is injurious to the highest purposes of culture. This lesson also teaches us not to give up spirituality but to develop greater spirituality, a more balanced and integral spirituality that accepts all life and transforms it for purposes of dynamic perfection.

Indian culture has also underlined certain other important messages that can be derived from her cultural experience. And first among them is the affirmation that the entire humanity is one united family, *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, and in spite of various

divisions or differentiations, rigorous efforts should be made to ensure the realisation of actual human unity.

A second message imparted to us by the Indian ethos is that it is through the unity of humankind that economic problems will ultimately come to be resolved; for so long as there are national rivalries and asymmetrical relations among nations, there will always remain the fear of the outbreak of war, huge expenditure on national defence and public spending on manufacture and sale of weapons of destruction. One united family of the entire humanity alone can ensure lasting peace and consequently lasting prosperity of all the nations, rich or poor, whether advanced or backward.

The third message is that economic stability can rightly be ensured only when there is equitable sharing of production. Ancient Indian culture had built up a system of sharing of the food production as also of other aspects of prosperity, so that the emphasis in social and economic life was centred on providing work for all, suitable to each one's capabilities, interests and needs of the psychological growth, as also leisure to grow inwardly and to enjoy simple but rich life. India had also built up a remarkable structure and system to embody this ideal, and even though that structure and system may be difficult to revive, it may be possible to reaffirm the truths lying behind that structure and system and incorporate them in the new structures and systems that are now being attempted to be built up for the fulfilment of three progressive ideals of our times,

namely, liberty, equality and fraternity.

A fourth message is that while modern idea of democracy has stirred the entire humanity to awaken each individual to develop himself or herself so as to arrive at powers of self-determination, the Indian experience shows that it is only through processes of integral education that higher powers of self-determination can be fostered so as to unite the law of individual development and the law of social development for purposes of individual and collective perfection.

Fifthly, India perceives that humanity today stands arrested because of the imbalance between the structural hugeness and development of technology, on the one hand, and retrogression in the intellectual, ethical and spiritual abilities, on the other. It further perceives that this crisis has reached a point of climax, and it can be resolved not by increasing development of external paraphernalia but by inward perception of the inmost realities and by releasing the moral and spiritual forces.

Finally, the Indian message is that the time has come when a new psychology has to be created among the peoples so that various instruments of power,—political, economic, social, cultural and religious,—are utilised not for division, opposition and domination, but for the generation of unfailing goodwill and sincere collaboration.

We may also add that if India has to be of service to the future of humanity, three tasks have to be accomplished: firstly, the old spiritual knowledge contained in the Veda and the Upanishads has to be recovered in all its splendour, depth, and fullness. For, it is in that knowledge that we have the key to the solution of the contemporary problems of evolutionary crisis, which is at the root of the critical problems of social, political, economic and environmental complexities. The second task is to channelise its ancient spiritual knowledge in new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge. The third task is to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society,—a task which is most difficult and yet which is most urgent and imperative.

For accomplishing these three tasks, we, who belong to India, have to play the role of torchbearers and of standard bearers. India invites all her children to turn to her soul and power and to generate a new dynamo of action that would transform the entire world of confusion and disorder into a new world of clarity of wisdom and ideal order of harmony.



Philosophy of Indianness

An attempt to capture in conceptual grasp the meaning and content of Indianness is to plunge ourselves into the depths of Indian history and to discern those characteristics that are unique to India and which bring us to the understanding of the genius, spirit and soul of India.

Geographically, India's boundaries have often been fluctuating, although the great land between the Himalayas and the Indian ocean gives us a sense of unity of our dwelling, the land of our parents and the land of our birth; it is our sacred soil that we cherish and for which we have a passion of belongingness. But at a deeper level, our inner body is the men and women who compose our nation, and we realise that even our physical geography is a pulsating living power of the national soul that has its own line of development, its own temperament, and its law of being and becoming. We see teeming millions of our nation at work and in an ever-continuing labour, greatly determined and determining environmental motives, a play of economic forces, and a gradual course of institutional evolution. We go deeper and witness those exceptional individuals whose lives and examples have moulded the national thought and character and shaped the

course of events. At a still deeper level, we discover Mother India, Bhārat Mātā, protector and nourisher of her children, inspiring them and helping them in their battle and victory, and leading them to the gradual revelation of her intention and will for her children as also the children of other nations, working for herself and for the world in collaboration with the mother-souls of all the nations in a spirit of collaboration, mutuality and goodwill for the Supreme Good of all.

To understand India is to understand Mother India and to grasp and possess four of her essential powers that have been developing since ages, viz., the power of spirituality, the power of intellectuality, the power of vitality, and the power of skills, — skills of art and craft, and skills of emotional bonds and durable relationships, and skills of fruitful life and harmony.

We must not judge India and derive the concept of Indianness from any superficial study or from the study of India of its latest phase when it began to show signs of exhaustion after having sought and attained and worked and produced incessantly at least for preceding three thousand years. The period of decline has to be admitted, and we have to acknowledge that the decline reached a nadir of setting energy. But that period cannot give us basic clues to the real spirit and soul of India and its expressive power of life, its intellectuality and creativity.

The British rulers gave to us three words to describe what they understood to be the chief characteristic of India, namely, metaphysics, religion, and the sense of

Maya or illusoriness of the world; and by metaphysics, they meant an abstract and clouded tract of thought; by religion, they meant a system of ceremonies and rituals; and by Maya, they meant dreaminess, unpracticality and inefficiency to deal with life. For a time, Indians submissively echoed their new Western teachers and masters and considered these three words to be the formula of Indianness. The British could hardly understand the spirit of Indian art and dismissed it as something primitive. Fortunately, Europe discovered in due course that Indian art had remarkable power and beauty. But in regard to other domains of life, the British imposed upon India the view that India could hardly be recognised as a civilised country, and, in their ignorance of the true account of Indian history, derided the Indian discovery of the Dharma, belittled the enormous developments of Indian systems of knowledge or Shastras, considered Indian sociology as an unintelligent basis of the rigid and oppressive caste system, and thought of India's political ability as of no significance other than that of series of quarrels resulting in failure to achieve the unity of the country. Their views were imprinted strongly on the subjects that they ruled, and even though much has been discovered by Indians themselves and others to contradict the earlier distorted opinion concerning India, and even though during the Freedom Struggle much was done to recover the sense of India's greatness, there is still unpardonable misunderstanding, among many Indians, of the real meaning of the Indian genius, obliging us to study deeply and formulate to ourselves in clearer terms what we ought to mean by Indianness.

If we study Indian history properly, we shall find that her first period was luminous with the discovery of the Spirit; her second completed the discovery of Dharma; her third period elaborated into detail the first simpler formulation of the Shastra; none was exclusive, the three elements were always present; into the fourth period India had, even while getting exhausted, a kind of rejuvenation with the birth of a number of Indian languages and new religions of Bhakti and submission to Divine Love and Will. We must examine these periods and arrive at our own impartial judgement of India's Indianness.

In broad terms, it can be stated that Indian spirit and Indian temperament have manifested themselves, broadly speaking, on five lines:

1) Integrality, assimilation, and synthesis, based on centrality of spirituality;

2) Development of exuberance of life and robust and meticulous intellectuality so as to support multisided inquiry and questioning, and experimentation of every major line of spirituality, thought, and life activity and tendency to its extreme acuteness, followed by a wide and catholic assimilation and quintessential crystallisation;

3) Development of organisation of life on principle of decentralisation followed by the process towards unity that supports and encourages diversity;

4) Highest worship for knowledge and wisdom, highest admiration for courage and heroism that involve self-sacrifice, and battle for the Right and Justice, intense appreciation for mutuality in

relationship and artistic creativity and generous charity that aims at welfare of all; and

5) Intense labour to manifest a detailed perfection and exuberance of joy of life, as also for system, organisation and restraint that secure equilibrium, balance and graduality of development.

The master-word of Indianness is spirituality, and this word has to be understood in its distinct clarity and fullness. For although the spiritual is associated with religion and morality and refinement of mental or aesthetic sensitivity, it still transcends them all and fulfils them all, and acts as a sovereign and liberating and integrating power. Although India developed a number of religions like a banyan tree and even gave place to religions that came from other countries, it still pointed to a distinct and higher power of spiritual development, which goes beyond belief or dogma and rituals and ceremonies and codes of conduct. It begins with experiential contact with reality or realities that lie above body, life and mind and supports union, growth or waking into a spirit, self, soul by the practices of inner aspiration to know, feel and to be, to enter into a greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe and to be into communion with It and union with It. It culminates not only into a turning and conversion but into a transformation of our whole being and our entire ordinary physical, vital and mental nature. So distinctive is this spirituality of India that its entire domain constitutes the field of experimentation and verifiable and repeatable experiences and realisations and a well-developed discipline that has been

acknowledged increasingly as a Science of Yoga.

Long ago in the remote past, there arose a quest in a small nucleus of people, surrounded by a large population, still in the early conditions of life, in the subcontinent that came to be called Bhāratavarsha and much later India. This quest, which appears to have been extremely arduous and heroic, resulted in a momentous spiritual attainment and victory, the records of which have been called the Veda, the Book of Knowledge. The language of this book is highly symbolic, and even though its meaning is greatly veiled, it allows occasional transparency and even full revelation to those who are enlightened and illumined. During this quest, the leaders, who were called poets or Rishis, had made a number of discoveries, which were repeated and verified and internalised and even transmitted to the initiates, as a result of which there grew up what can be called a Tradition. The knowledge attained was fundamentally spiritual in character, even though it had also many other aspects connected with the knowledge of the physical universe and several other planes of existence, which are clearly described in these ancient records.

The Vedic seers also developed specific methods by which their fund of knowledge can be sustained, enriched and further developed. These methods, in due course, came to be known as Yogic methods, and the Veda can rightly be looked upon as the foundation of Yoga. However, as it often happens, spiritual knowledge and spiritual methods often get clouded

and deteriorated into external ritualism, and this seems to have happened in regard to the Vedic knowledge, as can be seen from the Brahmana literature. Normally, under the excessive weight of ritualism and growing obscurity, the original knowledge would have been eclipsed almost totally, but in India there came about a period of a fresh movement of quest, and the Vedic knowledge was revisited in a constant recurrence of realisation, the records of which are known as Upanishads and they became a perennial reservoir from where numerous fountains sprang up and continue to be rising until today. As a result, the central characteristic of Indianness came to be firmly established, and spirituality can unhesitatingly be seen as the distinguishing speciality of the Indian soul and the defining differentia of Indianness.

The description of the quest that we find in the Upanishads is so living and vibrant that the scenes of the old world live before us and we seem to witness the sages sitting in their groves ready to test and teach the visitor; we witness also princes and learned Brahmins and even great landed nobles going about in search of knowledge, and we see how the soul of India was born and how the highest vistas of the knowledge of the Spirit came to be embodied and expressed in terms, less symbolic and much more accessible to philosophical thought. The Vedic and the Upanishadic spirituality has remained constantly alive in varied degrees, and the Upanishads have particularly been the sufficient fountainhead not only of Indian philosophy and religion, but of all Indian art, poetry and literature.

The Vedic and the Upanishadic quest was that of immortality and of the eternal Truth in its integrality, discoverable on the heights beyond the mind and in the planes described symbolically as those of higher light and highest light, swar and surya respectively. As a Rigvedic rik proclaims:

उद्वयं तमसस्पारि स्वः पश्यन्त उत्तरम् ।
देवं देवत्रा सूर्यमगन्म ज्योतिरुत्तमम् । RV.I.50.10

We perceived the higher light of Swar beyond the darkness, and we arrived at the highest light of the Sun.

And when the Vedic seers spoke of the attainment of immortality, they spoke of their victory while in the physical body. As Parashara points out:

आ ये विश्वा स्वपत्यानि तस्थुः ।
कृण्वानासो अमृतत्वाय गातुम् । ।
महना महद्भिः पृथिवी वि तस्थे ।
माता पुत्रैरदितिर्ध्यासे वेः । । RV.I.72.9.

“The physical being visited by the greatness of the infinite planes above and by the power of the great godheads who reign on those planes breaks its limits, opens out to the Light and is upheld in its new wideness by the infinite Consciousness, mother Aditi, and her sons, the divine Powers the supreme Deva.”¹

It was the search of this victory that we find in the Kathopanishad when Naciketas asks of Yama to reveal

to him the meaning of immortality and the method by which immortality can be won. And it is this immortality to which reference is made in the Brihadaranyka Upanishad in its famous prayer:

असतो मा सद्गमय ।

तमसो मा ज्योर्तिगमय ।

मृत्योर्मा अमृतमगमय । ।

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad I.3.28.

Lead me from the unreal to the Real;
Lead me from darkness to Light;
Lead me from death to Immortality.

And the Vedic seers have laid down that immortality cannot be won except by Truth—Truth that is all-comprehensive and capable of manifestation without disintegration. It is this realisation that led to the powerful formulation of the Mundaka Upanishad: सत्यमेव जयते (It is truth that conquers), and it is significant that these potent words have now become the motto inscribed in the emblem of free India.

Let us first note the fact that the loftiest spiritual experiences are found recorded in the Vedic Samhitas, and it can be said that the spirituality of the Veda and the Upanishads was already synthetic and integral. An exclusive spirituality emphasises and remains confined only to one state of spiritual consciousness,— such as

¹ Sri Aurobindo: *The Secret of the Veda*, Vol. 15, The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, 1998 Edition, pp.199-200.

that of eternal Silence or of eternal Joy, or of dynamic Power, to either divine Personality or to divine Impersonality. It emphasises only one method of approach, such as that of works, knowledge or devotion. But we do not find this kind of exclusiveness in the Veda and in the Upanishads like the Isha, or Kena or Katha or Taaittiriya. The fullness of spiritual life is perceived in the great pronouncement of the Vedic and the Upanishadic Rishis: तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः (by having renounced thou shouldst enjoy) is one of the formulas of the integral spiritual life; and there are several others in the Ishopanishad itself, such as those relating to the Reality that is at once moving and unmoving, that relating to the synthesis of Ignorance and Knowledge, and that relating to birth and non-birth (सम्भूति and असम्भूति). We do not find here the rejection and meaninglessness of life and the world but rather the secret of transcending the limitations of the world and yet embracing with mastery the life and works in the world. The idea that the world and its activities must be renounced was a later development, when India made an experiment of sounding each line of spiritual experience to its farthest point, and chose to look from that farthest point at existence, so as to see what Truth or power it could give. That was the part of the heroic adventure of the Indian spirituality that manifested the spirit of experimentation and even a risky experimentation. There have been from this point of view the birth and growth of a number of exclusive spiritual pursuits, but underlying them there has been the spirit of synthesis and assimilation. It is remarkable that after the period of decline, when India is rising once

again, we find among the leaders of the renascent spiritual India a definitive turn, with a greater richness and fullness, to a new integrality, such as what we find in Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Aurobindo. We have now in our own times the development of spirituality that found itself on the special emphasis on synthesis and dynamic manifestation of the Spirit in life on the earth.

In a larger perspective of the history of the Indian spirituality, we can derive three important lessons that characterise true Indianness; firstly, that spirituality does not flourish on earth in the void; secondly, that spirituality and exuberance of life and robust intellectuality are not opposed to each other, but are rather complementary to each other; and thirdly, that spiritual tendency does not imply inefficiency or incapability to deal with life successfully and fruitfully, but, on the contrary, it can provide the highest basis for perfection of life on the earth.

It has, indeed, been argued that too much religion ruined India, because India made whole life religion or religion the whole life. This is a complete misreading; it is true that India did fall in its period of exhaustion, and it did fail for a certain period of time; but if we study the period of this fall and failure, we shall find that it was because the public life became most irreligious, egoistic, self-seeking, and materialistic that India fell and had to pass through a painful period of slavery and deprivation. But once again, when India rose in the 19th and 20th centuries, the most leading power of reawakening has come from the impulse of dynamic

spirituality and a synthetic spirituality.

To speak only of Indian spirituality is an incomplete and misleading description of Indianness. For before the period of exhaustion, for at least three thousand years, India created abundantly and incessantly, lavishly, with an inexhaustible many-sidedness; it built republics, kingdoms and empires; it constructed philosophies and cosmogonies; it developed sciences and arts and poems; it raised all kinds of monuments, palaces and temples and public works; it organised communities and societies and religious orders, laws and codes and rituals; developed and systematised physical sciences, psychic sciences, systems of Yoga, systems of politics and administration, arts spiritual, arts worldly, trades, industries and fine crafts. We are struck with India's stupendous vitality, her inexhaustible power of life and joy of life, her prolific creativeness.

We have to remember, too, that India expanded even outside its borders; its ships crossed the oceans and the superfluous surplus of its wealth brimmed over Judea and Egypt and Rome. India's colonies spread Indian arts, and epics, and creeds in the Archipelago; Indian religions conquered China and Japan and spread westwards as far as Palestine and Alexandria. In the ancient architecture, sculpture and art, India laboured to fill every rift with ore, occupy every inch with plenty. This was because of the necessity of India's super-abundance of life, of the teeming of the infinite of the Indian soul.

Intellectuality is also an essential part of Indianness. This intellectuality is strong and at once austere and rich, robust and minute, powerful and delicate, massive in principle and curious in detail. It has been rightly said that India has been preeminently the land of the Dharma and the Shastra. India laboured to discover the inner truth and law of each human or cosmic activity, its Dharma, and it went further to apply it and cast it into elaborate form and detailed law of arrangement and rule of life. There appears to be no historical parallel for such an intellectual labour as we find during the period from Ashoka well into the Mohammedan epoch. Prior to the invention of printing and facilities of modern science, India produced colossal literature, which certainly dealt with philosophy and theology, and religion and yoga; but it also dealt with logic and rhetoric and grammar and linguistics; it dealt with poetry and drama; it produced works on medicine and astronomy and other sciences; in the fields of arts, the literature spanned from painting to dancing, of the 64 accomplishments, and all that was known and could be useful to life and interesting to the mind. There is also literature available to us of that period that deals with such practical minutiae as the breeding and training of horses and elephants, each of which had its shastra with its art, its apparatus of technical terms and its copious literature. India's intellectuality can be seen to have been marked by insatiable curiosity, the desire of life to know itself in every detail, and at the same time by a spirit of organisation and scrupulous order, the desire of the mind to tread through life with a harmonised

knowledge and in the right rhythm and measure. Indian mind was powerful, penetrating and scrupulously intelligent, — combined of the rational, ethical, and aesthetic mind at a height of intensity.

As noted earlier, India has a tendency to pursue most opposite extremes to their highest point of climax, but this never resulted in disorder. Even its most hedonistic period offers nothing that at all resembles the unbridled corruption which have a similar tendency that was once produced in Europe. The reason is that the Indian mind is not only spiritual and ethical but intellectual and artistic, and both the rule of the intellect and the rhythm of art are hostile to the spirit of chaos. In every extreme, the Indian spirit seeks for a law in that extreme and its rule, measure and structure in its application. In the ultimate analysis, the Indian mind returns always towards some fusion of the knowledge it has gained and to a resulting harmony and balance in action and in institution. The Greeks had also arrived at balance and rhythm, but they arrived at it by self-imitation; India arrived at balance and rhythm by its sense of intellectual, aesthetic and ethical order and the synthetic impulse of its mind and life.

We stand today at a very important juncture of our history. We have already been able to recover ourselves to some extent, but we still need to understand our inmost soul and its need to express itself in the light of its own law of self-development. India has since ages erected the ideal of universal brotherhood, and this is the moment when the issue of unity of the world has

come to the forefront. It can be said that India can make the most important contribution to the growth and development of internationalism, unity of religions and spiritual disciplines, to the creation of a world union which can emphasise the freedom of each nation and the principle of decentralisation. Realising India's Indianness, India can fulfil its Indianness by embracing the totality of humanity and by regaining her true position among the nations in their world-wide unity.

Sri Aurobindo, speaking of the new awakening and the new impulses of the Indian Renaissance, has placed before us three tasks that India must undertake and fulfil. Let me conclude with the statement of these three tasks in Sri Aurobindo's own words:

The recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its splendour, depth and fullness is its first, most essential work; the flowing of this spirituality into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge is the second; an original dealing with modern problems in the light of Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society is the third and most difficult. Its success on these three lines will be the measure of its help to the future of humanity.²

²Sri Aurobindo: *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, Vol. 14, p. 409, Centenary Edition

Kireet Joshi

Kireet Joshi (b. 1931) studied Philosophy and Law at the Bombay University. He was selected for the I.A.S in 1955, but in 1956 he resigned in order to devote himself to the study and practice of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother at Pondicherry. He taught Philosophy and Psychology at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education at Pondicherry and participated in numerous educational experiments under the direct guidance of The Mother.

In 1976, the Government of India invited him to be Educational Advisor in the Ministry of Education. In 1983, he was appointed Special Secretary to the Government of India and he held the post until 1988. He was Founder Member-Secretary of Indian Council of Philosophical Research from 1981 to 1990. He was also Member-Secretary of Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan from 1987 to 1993 and the Vice-Chairman of the UNESCO Institute of Education, Hamburg, from 1987 to 1989.

From 1999 to 2004, he was the Chairman of Auroville Foundation. From 2000 to 2006, he was Chairman of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research. From 2006 to 2008, he was Editorial Fellow of the Project on History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture.(PHISPC).

Currently, he is Education Advisor to the Chief Minister of Gujarat.

Also by Kireet Joshi

- Education for Character Development
- Education for Tomorrow
- Education at Crossroads
- A National Agenda for Education
- Innovations in Education
- Child, Teacher and Teacher Education
- Landmarks of Hinduism
- The Veda and Indian Culture
- Glimpses of Vedic Literature
- Stories for Youth in search of a Higher Life
- Arjuna's Argument at Kurukshetra and Sri Krishna's Answers
- Philosophy and Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and Other Essays
- A Philosophy of Education for the Contemporary Youth
- A Philosophy of the Role of the Contemporary Teacher
- Philosophy of Evolution for the Contemporary Man
- Sri Aurobindo and Integral Yoga
- Sri Aurobindo and The Mother
- The New Synthesis of Yoga-An Introduction
- Varieties of Yogic Experience and Integral Realisation
- Significance of Indian Yoga-An Overview
- A Pilgrim's Quest for the Highest and the Best
- Synthesis of Yoga in the Veda
- Synthesis of Yoga in the Upanishads

- The Gita and Its Synthesis of Yoga
- Integral Yoga: Major Aims, Processes, Methods and Results
- Integral Yoga of Transformation
- Supermind in the Integral Yoga
- Integral Yoga and Evolutionary Mutation
- Integral Yoga, Evolution and the Next Species

Edited by Kireet Joshi

- The Aim of Life
- The Good Teacher and the Good pupil
- Mystery and Excellence of the Human Body
- Parvati's Tapasya
- Nachiketas
- Taittiriya Upanishad
- Sri Rama
- Sri Krishna in Vrindavan
- Nala and Damayanti
- Episodes from Raghuvamsham of Kalidasa
- The Siege of Troy
- Homer and the Iliad-Sri Aurobindo and Ilion
- Gods and the World
- Socrates
- Crucifixion
- Alexander the Great
- Joan of Arc
- Catherine the Great
- Uniting Men-Jean Monnet
- Arguments for the Existence of God
- Marie Sklodowska Curie

"India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples. And that which must seek now to awake is not an anglicised oriental people, docile pupil of the West and doomed to repeat the cycles of the occident's success and failure, but still the ancient immeasurable Shakti recovering her deepest self, lifting her head higher towards the supreme source of light and strength and turning to discover the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma."

-Sri Aurobindo

