
UNIT 4 TOWARDS HUMAN UNITY

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To understand our search for human unity.
- To see Aurobindo's vision of our common spiritual destiny.
- To open the students to the possibility of humans living together.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Aurobindo's mature ideas on human unity are found in his famous book, "The Idea of Human Unity" and "The Life Divine." For our purpose we use the reflections of the Canadian-Iranian philosopher, Ramin Jehanbegaloo, the winner of 2009 UN Peace Prize. According to Jehanbegaloo, Aurobindo truly believed throughout his life that such a spiritual unity would not be possible unless it is preceded by a general change in humankind's consciousness.

Nevertheless, he made it clear in the last chapter of his book *The Life Divine* that the spiritual transformation of humanity had nothing to do with religion. "There is the possibility in the swing back from a mechanistic idea of life and society the human mind may seek refuge in a return to the religious idea and a society governed or sanctioned by religion. But organized religion, though it can provide a means of inner uplift for the individual and preserve in it or behind it a way for his opening to spiritual experience, has not changed human life and society; it could not do so because, in governing society, it had to compromise with the lower parts of life and could not insist on the inner change of the whole being; it could insist only on a creedal adherence, a formal acceptance of its ethical standards and a conformity to institution, ceremony and ritual...A total spiritual direction given to the whole life and the

whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself..." (Ghose 1949) In fact, Aurobindo summed up the nature of Man in the ideal of a united human society (Jehanbegaloo 2006).

So in this unit we trace the human journey to unity, as developed by Sri Aurobindo. Then we study its contemporary relevance and the real need for such a collective destiny.

4.2 UNITY THROUGH YOGA

This unity, according to Sri Aurobindo, cannot take place unless Man's vital and mental nature was uplifted by a spiritual Supernature. Therefore, if true human unity is to be achieved Man needs "to pursue its upward evolution towards the finding of expression of the Divine... taking full advantage of the free development and gains of all individuals and nations and groupings of men, to work towards the day when mankind may be really and not ideally one family..." In other words, the Divine descends into Cosmic being, while Man ascends through the medium of a Supermind towards the Divine. Therefore, there is a double movement at work here. Man is eternally seeking the ultimate Reality, which Aurobindo calls *Saccidananda* using the Vedantic vocabulary. "*Saccidananda*", asserts Sri Aurobindo, "is the unknown" (Jehanbegaloo 2006). Reality is *sat*, *cit* and *ananda*, which Aurobindo translates by the three concepts of pure existence, conscious force and the delight of existence. The goal is "the flowering of the Divine in collective humanity." The ideal, says Aurobindo, is the free unity of mankind. "Today", writes Aurobindo in his book *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "the ideal of human unity is more or less vaguely making its way to the forefront of our consciousness...(It) is evidently a part of Nature's eventual scheme and must come about" (Ghose 50).

For Aurobindo the evolutionary process of human unity is possible not through rationality, but through Yogic experience. The way which leads to the life divine is "integral yoga." This is why Aurobindo thinks that every man is a Yogi, but not a conscious one. Those who have become conscious of this process through the Yogic experience can help the others. The simple reason to this is that, "All mankind is one in nature... Nothing which any individual race or nation can triumphantly realize ...has any permanent value except in so far as it adds something for this human march."

That is to say, Sri Aurobindo was against the old idea of separation of politics from religion and partly because to him nationalism was a spiritual process. "Nationalism is not a mere political program", wrote Aurobindo in his daily paper entitled *Bande Mataram*, "nationalism is a religion that has come from God; nationalism is a creed which you shall have to live.... If you are going to be a nationalist, if you are going to assent to this religion of nationalism, you must do it in the religious spirit. You must remember that you are the instruments of God... Then there will be a blessing on our work and this great nation will rise again and become once more what it was in the days of spiritual greatness. You are the instruments of God to save the light, to save the spirit of India from lasting obscurity and abasement..." For that he found yoga and other spiritual practices crucial.

4.3 THE SPECIAL ROLE OF INDIA

Aurobindo based his demand for Indian independence on the Romantic idea of the nation-soul. In his early writings, he talked about the "soul of India" and in his speeches and writings in 1907-1908, he defined nationalism as a civic religion. In another speech he went

further and equated Indian nationalism with the *sanatana dharma*. Yet, Aurobindo was not interested in perpetuating Hinduism as a sectarian religion. What he was interested in was “a new synthesis of religious thought and experience, a new religious world-life from intolerance, yet full of faith and fervour, accepting all forms of religion because it has an unshakable faith in the One.”

However, for Aurobindo this new synthesis had to go hand in hand with the inalienable right of nations to independence, simply because being ruled by foreigners was an unjust and unnatural condition. “Political freedom”, Aurobindo declared in 1907, “is the life breath of a nation: to attempt social reform, educational reform, industrial expansion, the moral improvement of race, without aiming first and foremost at political freedom is the very height of ignorance and futility.” In fact, from his early writings Aurobindo was keen to see India play a leading role in the progress of the world. This was because he saw the great stage of human progress as a moral and spiritual one and he believed that India had a lot to teach Europe at these levels.

Aurobindo considered Europe as “parcelled out in nations,” but in his view India was an old civilization (Jehanbegaloo 2006). India, according to Aurobindo, had a special place in Asia. Thus, “Asia”, from his point of view, “was the custodian of world’s peace of mind, the physician of the maladies which Europe generates. She is commissioned to rise from time to time from her ages of self-communion, self-sufficiency, self-absorption and rule the world for a season...when the restless spirit of Europe has added a new phase of discovery to the evolution of the science of material life, has regulated politics, re-based society, remodelled law, rediscovered science, the spirit of Asia, calm, contemplative, self-possessed, takes possession of Europe’s discovery and corrects its exaggeration, its aberrations by intuition; her spiritual light alone can turn the world.”

According to our author, Asia has always initiated, what Europe completed. The strength of Europe is in details, the strength of Asia is in synthesis. It is therefore the task of Asia to take up the work of human evolution, “when Europe comes to a standstill and loses itself in a clash of vain speculations, barren experiments and helpless struggles to escape from the consequences of her own mistakes. Such a time has now come in world’s history.”

Sri Aurobindo was a true believer in a dialogue of cultures. Therefore he was not in favour of India remaining isolated from the rest of the world, but he was against a blind imitation of the West. As a matter of fact, India’s blind imitation of the Western society was not only a mistake for India, but also for the whole world. “If India follows in the footsteps of Europe”, wrote Aurobindo, “accepts her political ideals, social system, economic principles, she will be overcome with the same maladies” as the Europeans.

Aurobindo was convinced that if India wants to survive as an independent state it had to be conscious about its spiritual force and its diversity. Indian unity would be achieved because of Indian diversity. “Diversity”, proclaimed Sri Aurobindo, “is as necessary as unity to our true completeness.” However, Aurobindo considered unity and uniformity as the law of life. Even though he considered the world union as the ultimate goal, he saw the nation as a “necessary unit” and an “indestructible” force. For him there was a limit to nationalism and India has to teach this lesson to the rest of the world.

4.4 PROGRESS OF CIVILISATION THROUGH SUPERMIND

Further, according to Aurobindo, the progress of the civilization depended on its advance towards human unity. "The perfect society", affirmed Aurobindo, "will be that which most entirely favours the perfection of the individual; the perfection of the individual will be incomplete if it does not help him towards the perfect state of the social aggregate to which he belongs and eventually to that of the largest possible human aggregate, the whole of a united humanity." Aurobindo saw the perfection of the individual as a widening and a heightening in human and cosmic development. This heightening results in the integration of all levels of life and the achievement of unity by the mind.

As such salvation for Aurobindo does not have a purely religious meaning. It is a rebirth of Man as a supramental being. "Man", writes Aurobindo. "is a transitional being; he is not final. For in man and high beyond him ascend the radiant degrees that climb to a divine supermanhood. There lies our destiny and the liberating key to our aspiring but troubled and limited mundane existence...Supermind is superman; a Gnostic supermanhood is the next distinct and triumphant evolutionary step to be reached by earthly nature." In other words, the Supermind helps Man to achieve integral realization of his personality and of ultimate reality.

The Supermind is, according to Aurobindo, the supreme truth-consciousness. It is the infinite principle of knowledge. It is the necessary link between the existence, consciousness and bliss (*Saccidananda*) and the phenomenal worlds of life and mind. As long as the mind is separated from the Supermind it perceives only the particular and not the universal. That is to say, "the mind cannot possess the infinite...it can only lie blissfully helpless under the luminous shadow of the Real cast down on it from planes of existence beyond its reach." The Supermind, therefore, can bring a big spiritual change in the nature of Man making possible the new integral personality.

Agreeing that realization of non-duality is the purpose of life, Sri Aurobindo holds that each unique individual has a singular path to realization of integral non-dualism. For this reason, he insists that daily action is itself the means of realization. Just as one practises yoga for the purpose of developing one's inner spirituality, so participation in worldly experience is of the same importance. This is true because, as Aurobindo insists, "All life is yoga." In other words, the integral yoga prepares the conditions for the descent of Supermind. The yogi realizes himself through the cosmos and through the social life (Jehanbegaloo 2006).

This is why Aurobindo believes that the process of evolution has a purpose, which is advancing ineluctably toward the realization of the Life Divine here on Earth. Sri Aurobindo elaborated his educational ideas in relation with his ideals of human unity and "travel towards divine perfection". For him, the goal of education was the study of the human mind, because he considered the mind as the principal instrument of knowledge. Thus the aim of education, according to Aurobindo is: "the building of the powers of the human mind and spirit, it is the formation or... the evoking of knowledge and will and the power to use knowledge, character, culture..." For Aurobindo, Man has to be transformed and spiritualized through the educational practice.

This process begins with self-knowledge which is self-mastery and it brings ultimately the transformation of Man into a spiritual being. The major task in education is to awaken the aspiration for the divine in the body and in the mind. However, Sri Aurobindo puts the weight of education on the supramental and the discovery of the psychic being. In his book *The Human Cycle*, he affirms "The true secret whether with child, or man, is to help him find his deeper self, the real psychic entity within. That, if we ever give it a chance to come

forward, and still more, if we call it into the foreground as ‘the leader of the march set in our front’, will itself take up most of the business of education out of our hands and develop the capacity of the psychological being towards a realization of potentialities.” Likewise, Aurobindo’s integral yoga contends that the union with the Divine Supermind is also possible through a complete cooperation with the cosmic creative power. “Yoga”, asserts Aurobindo, “is the exchange of an egoistic for a universal or cosmic consciousness lifted towards or informed by the super-cosmic, transcendent Unnamable who is the source and support of all things.” Yoga and education are one and the same process through which spirituality emerges in mind. That is why to Sri Aurobindo the eternal truths of ancient wisdom had an appeal. Spirituality unlike religion does not lay excessive stress on dogmas. “A total spiritual direction given to the whole life and whole nature can alone lift humanity beyond itself”, writes Aurobindo in his book *The Life Divine*. For it is true that, according to Aurobindo, without the higher spirit, the lower mind cannot be spiritualized (Ghose 1950).

4.5 ENLIGHTENED AWARENESS OF THE SPIRITUAL UNITY

As a spiritual and practical mystic, Aurobindo puts a lot of emphasis on the transcendent aspect of Man. For Aurobindo the only answer to the crisis in the human world is an enlightened awareness of the spiritual unity of our existence through which a sustainable world unity can be achieved. “The truth of the Spirit”, wrote Aurobindo, “may step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible happiness and perfection.” According to Sri Aurobindo, the perfection is yet to come, because Man has not constituted yet the final step in his evolutionary process. The goal of spiritual progress, therefore, ought to be creation of spiritual human being and spiritual communities.

In fact our author’s concept of human unity is not based on rational norms. It is not aimed at creating a more rational Man. Aurobindo’s goal is mainly aimed at achieving an enlightened spiritualized community. This spiritualized community would not have nation-states fighting with each other, because in such a community men are not egoistic and look beyond their self-interests. Similarly Aurobindo defines human unity as “the attempt of human mind and life to grow out of national idea and form and even in a way to destroy it, in the interest of larger synthesis of mankind.” For Sri Aurobindo the idea of “unity in diversity” would provide a solid basis for a durable synthesis of mankind. Because of this, he saw a common destiny and a common hope for both the East and the West. “East and West”, he wrote in 1949, “have the same human nature, a common human destiny, the same aspiration after a greater perfection, the same seeking after something higher than itself, something towards which inwardly and outwardly we move.

Yet the unity of mankind, according to our author (Ghose 1950), is evidently a part of nature's eventual scheme and must come about. Only it must be under other conditions and with safeguards which will keep the race intact in the roots of its vitality, richly diverse in its oneness.

4.6 INTEGRAL APPROACH TOWARDS HUMAN UNITY

An integral approach is possible and necessary towards our progress towards human unity. The evolution of a universal consciousness in the life of each individual would facilitate the emergence of a world unity. The emergence of a real cosmic consciousness willing a unity not only in the individual members of the human organism

through a transformation of their nature itself but also in the institutions of the individual is a radical necessity. Thus the universal problem of unity is an individual problem. The individual must transcend his mentality and his mechanical rationality and his vital rationality. At the stage of the human evolution the mind dominated the lower physical and vital, and the physical and vital are geared up to its demands and thus each human individual has a mental soul so to speak (Varadachari 2011). But thanks to the preoccupations of its energies with the environment it had become restricted and is in fact ignorant. The social organisations of these individuals are at the same level. The mental life of the individual is on one side a practical mind with restricted aims of survival in the body and of the body, and an abstract mind which seeks to know the general order and structure of the environment and act on it on the basis of laws discovered by it through observation. Practically the universals of its discovery are partial truths and pragmatically valuable.

The organism of the individual must undergo a further evolution. In fact, a new force of being must be made active in the human individual, not the abstract universal or general will of the human society based on sentiment and gregarious feeling or vital love, but on a real Cosmic Intelligence, discovery of the Cosmic Self or Supermind and its action within each individual would transform the organic vital and psychical unity into a spiritual or supramental-psychical, vital and physical unity (Varadachari 2011).

4.7 CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Vasudhaiva kudumbakam, so proclaimed the ancient Indians: the world is one family. The ideal of human unity, which was already present at the dawn of civilisation, has never appeared so close to realisation, but paradoxically the closer we come to it, the more it seems to elude us. It is as if at the onset of the 21st century the need for human unity has never been so great, and yet quite often this very unity, seen as inevitable, is perceived as somewhat threatening (Auroville 2011) and even non-desirable.

We speak of globalisation, and in the same breath we deplore the dangers of uniformity. We speak of democracy as a universal ideal and of the progress of all nations towards it as irreversible, and yet at the same time this democratic model is perceived as a system imposed by some nations on others. We are facing environmental problems which threaten the very survival of our planet. We are aware of 'global warming' and a decrease in the finite resources of the planet, and we know that in order to tackle these common problems the individual nation-state is not an adequate institution anymore. But the very concept of a supra-national body is perceived as a possible infringement on the sovereignty of the nation-state, won in numerous cases after many decades - or longer - of collective struggle and pain (Auroville 2011).

Erasure of cultures

We claim that today's world is a global village, because technological progress has made our earth very small, and news can instantly reach every inhabitant of the earth through the highroad of information. But there is the fear that this global village culture may erase the diverse cultures ("mini narratives") of the earth; indeed it is argued that there is already an immense drive towards uniformity of life habits and uniformity of knowledge, which is not healthy.

Economic front

At the economic front, the much-talked-about liberalisation process is seen by many as an attempt to impose everywhere a capitalist model only suited to some countries, and to spread everywhere a culture of consumerism. So some critics ask: A computer for everyone and bread for only one quarter of the world population; is this the goal towards which we are advancing?

Science

In the 19th century, intellectuals saw the progress of science as the great factor which would lead to the unification of mankind, since science was a thing common to all men in its conclusions and was international in its very nature; but we know now that science can be misused, and is being misused, to discover more and more means of destruction. We have lost faith in science as a panacea for all evils, but what is there to replace it?

Aurobindo was certain that the ideal of human unity will emerge also because of sciences. “Still the ideal, having once made its way to the front of thought, must certainly be attempted, and this ideal of human unity is likely to figure largely among the determining forces of the future; for the intellectual and material circumstances of the age have prepared and almost impose it, especially the scientific discoveries which have made our earth so small that its vastest kingdoms seem now no more than the provinces of a single country” (Ghose 1950).

Biggest obstacle

We know that egoism is the biggest obstacle to a life of harmony and peace on earth, but after so many centuries of civilisation no amount of religious preaching or moral teaching has been able to convince the ego to forego its claims, as to speak to him of fraternity is to speak to him of something fundamentally contrary to his nature (Auroville 2011).

4.8 NEED FOR REAL UNITY TODAY

From the above considerations, it appears that although we are moving somewhat reluctantly towards a kind of unification, this is not a process likely to solve the many acute problems of the earth. Nor will the envisaged unity answer the deeper needs and aspirations of the human being. In fact, we have begun to understand that if we want to preserve the freedom for man to develop and grow in all liberty, this unity cannot be built through mechanical means. It cannot be achieved as long as man does not recognise a real unity between man and man; it cannot be arrived at through social and mechanical devices; and “we have even started to realise that if its aim is not to bring about a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind, this unity is hardly desirable” (Auroville 2011).

Man will be surpassed

Precisely here comes the relevance of Sri Aurobindo’s experiences. It becomes therefore urgent to realise what this unity is towards which we feel pushed in spite of ourselves. Man is a transitional being, claimed Sri Aurobindo shortly after the First World War. He held that evolution continues and man will be surpassed. Not only did Sri Aurobindo foresee the next step in the evolution of man, but he told us how to participate in it. Instead of remaining a passive spectator in a painful and incomprehensible process, he urges us to consciously

collaborate in our own evolution and break free of our seemingly inextricable bonds (Auroville 2011).

Using inner means

But for this, we have to reverse our mental process, said Sri Aurobindo, and instead of using external means, we have to turn inward, because without a change in man's nature no real changes in the external circumstances are likely to take place. The only way we can move towards unity is to progressively realise that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality in which we are all one, not only realise it mentally but discover it in ourselves and live this knowledge. The secret of unity is within, said Sri Aurobindo; the secret of brotherhood is within. "There is no unity except by the soul, there is no real brotherhood except in the soul and by the soul. Only when we live from the soul and not from the ego will a real unity reign on earth" (Auroville 2011).

Connecting with the new consciousness

This 'spiritual age of humanity' then will represent a transformation in the nature of man as momentous as the appearance of the thinking mind on earth. In the same way as for millennia the mind was the centre of our life, so, in the new age opening for humanity, or 'supra-mental' age, the soul will become the centre of all life and activities. A new stage in the evolution of man has already begun; a new consciousness, higher than the mind, a truth-consciousness, as Sri Aurobindo said, in which the dualities, hesitations and limitations of the mind and the greed and blindness of the ego will no longer exist, has already started to appear, and all the upheavals and convulsions that are at present so painfully tearing our earth are the outward signs of this evolutionary crisis. This new consciousness is already at work in the atmosphere of the earth: "we can connect with it, we can call it in ourselves, we can use it to transform our entire nature and consequently the world in which we live" (Auroville 2011). That is the challenge we are faced with.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Do you agree with the possibility of unity of all?

2) What is the need for unity today?

4.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied the human search for a common unity, without which we are doomed. For this a spiritual basis is a must. Even in our post-modern world, where many people speak of not one human story, the spiritual quest of Aurobindo is relevant. Such a quest gives meaning to our collective evolutionary journey.

4.10 KEY WORDS

Saccidananda or **Satchidananda** or **Sat-cit-ananda**: a compound of three Sanskrit words, *sat*, *cit*, and *ananda* meaning existence, consciousness, and bliss. It refers to the Ultimate in philosophy.

Vasudhaiva kudumbakam: is a Sanskrit phrase that means that the whole world is one single family.

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