CHAPTER – XI

THE RELEVANCE OF SRI AUROBINDO TODAY

Sri Aurobindo was one of those illustrious leaders who moulded the destiny of our nation at a crucial time in its history. The contribution he made to the development of modern Indian political and philosophical thought will always be cherished by a grateful nation. He has been rightly described as a poet of Patriotism, the prophet of nationalism and a lover of humanity. Sri Aurobindo believed in evolution and according to him the goal of creation was the unfolding of consciousness. His aim was not only individual fulfillment but the salvation of the whole society. His ideal was the solidarity of mankind and the attainment of Life Divine here on this earth. Referring to the conditions of turmoil the world is in today and to the discontent expressed by the young people world over and amidst remarkable degree of material prosperity which have neither brought happiness nor satisfaction to these people, the then President of India Late Sri. Fakruddin Ali Ahmed infers that the world is indeed sick of violence and is thirsting for peace and tranquility and he concludes by saying that the solution to all these problems of today lies in Sri Aurobindo’s ideals. Sri Aurobindo believed that out of this turmoil a new spirit of oneness will take hold of human race. In the new world order Sri Aurobindo envisioned, India has a great role to play. He believed that the spiritual gift of India to humanity would bring about the new age of world unification. He considered India as the repository of the spiritual consciousness and as a guardian of Truth. Sri Aurobindo writes in his famous open letter to my countrymen “our ideal of patriotism proceeds on the basis of love and brotherhood and looks beyond the unity of the nation and envisages the ultimate unity of mankind”. He also affirmed that India has always existed for humanity and not for herself.
Sri. A.L. Dias the then Governor of West Bengal also has made a similar remark by saying “Sri Aurobindo probed into many of the problems which presently confront the contemporary world and offered an integrated view of life, thought and action reconciling the best in the East and the West”.²

According to Sri. N.V. Subbannachar a professor and the author of “Social Psychology – The Integral approach”, the question of relevance relates to the aim of study, its stand point and method. In academic research and in the applied fields, the point of relevance is meaningful in terms of bias, local and temporal immediate needs and the problem solving activity. Therefore something is relevant to the modern times when it can meet its needs and solve its problems. The problem of man today is his spiritual evolution. According to him the relevance of Sri Aurobindo today is two fold

i) Relevance to the life in independent India, that is the consideration and interaction between the modern West and ancient Hindu culture originating from the veda and sustained by the veda through the ages.

ii) Relevance to understanding and solution to the problems the modern west has raised for the future of man”. He further clarifies that Sri Aurobindo’s life and works are the affirmation of the Samskara for spiritual evolution. Sri Aurobindo was the master of Hindu tradition as well as the Western tradition. Only a person of such Yogyata (Adhikara) could critically evaluate the achievements and limitations of the modern West in relation to the Adhyatma vidya (Spiritual evolution) of the Veda.

In the unbroken continuity of the Vedic tradition of spiritual evolution in all aspects and on all levels of life, Sri Aurobindo in
modern times, after the Acharyas; Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa, affirmed the Veda to be the source of knowledge and the method of spiritual evolution. In the process Sri Aurobindo examined not only the Western objections to the Vedic conceptions, but also the western criticisms of the vedic practices for higher development. Having evaluated the western achievements in the right place and in the right measure with their limitations, Sri Aurobindo went beyond them as the leader of spiritual evolution, evolution beyond mind to the Supermind. Sri Aurobindo’s works represent the systematic exposition of Indian psychology of higher evolution in its two fold aspects: Individual as well as social evolution.

In India today, in the name of Secularism the study, evaluation and practice of Vedic method of higher development do not find a place, not even a crucial reference in our educational system. Consequently the Hindus whose duty is to know and practice the law of higher development so as to become the illustrations and the teachers of spiritual knowledge are becoming strangers to their own heritage. More significant is the fact of confusion and distortion of ideas and ideals due to uncritical acceptance of the so called ‘modern’ and uncritical rejection of Hindu ideals and practices. This is liable to cause aberrations, mental disorders, degradation, violent conflicts, alienation and suffering. Doubts and questions of aspiring students are not cleared and answered by the prevalent content and method of education. The author thus concludes by saying only Sri Aurobindo’s works would clear doubts and answer questions concerning spiritual evolution in the modern times. In the Hindu tradition only the practitioner can become a teacher. Sri Aurobindo, the yogi demonstrated and taught the way of Supramental evolution, the path of the Veda. The error of modern knowledge are corrected and its limitations are out grown by means of higher evolution. Thus Sri Aurobindo’s work is absolutely relevant to our life in India today.
Sri Aurobindo in fact belongs to the whole world, but as he himself used to say, one does not directly belong to the world as a whole, but one does so indirectly through one's family, community and country. Unless we know our true identity, the true human identity, we do not know our proper place, proper station and destination in this world.

Sri Aurobindo practiced a very comprehensive philosophy of life, the like of which has not been heard in this continent in the last five centuries or so. His doctrine of 'Poornadvaithavada' or integral monism is absolutely a new world-view. It is a transmutated form of all values, cultural, political, aesthetic, ethical, developed over the centuries in this part of the world and yet not addressed to this part of the world alone. This philosophy of life and society is meant for all people living now and for the people yet to be born.

Sri Aurobindo physically lived in this society and inwardly he belonged to the world of humanity as a whole. His personality and writings express whatever best that is in the heritage of Indian culture. Because of his Western education, intimate acquaintance with the modern scientific and technological development of the western world, he could assimilate it within the identity of the Indian culture. He brought out the elements of harmony and integration of the East and the West, which could bring about a fundamental change in the outlook of common man.

Analysing the different aspects of Indian culture Sri Aurobindo has clearly shown that it is not spiritual in a very narrow sense. According to him negation of the life of senses is bound to adversely affect the pursuit of life of spirit. The integral man should not be exclusively transcendental, otherworldly and metaphysical. He must concern himself with the political and social aspect of life. The
spiritual life is not a narrow life nor purely a private life. It is comprehensive, integral, harmonious comprising all possible aspects of life. True spiritual life always concerns itself with all other being and their lives. Spiritual life integrates the individual, collective and the whole of mankind. Sri Aurobindo also affirms that unless man exceeds himself and exceeds the confines of his private life and identifies himself practically and otherwise with the life of rest of the society, a nation cannot grow. His idea of a nation is also highly meaningful and relevant. To him the nation is not on abstract thing. The Nation is a real living and throbbing unity. Nation like a man has a soul. As human souls through their development can come in communion with other human souls and form a community of souls, similarly nations can co-operate, develop and form a larger unity. By an organic analogy Sri Aurobindo makes his point of Nationalism very clear. If man identifies himself with his body he is wrong. Man is essentially a growing mental being, a growing God, a spiritual entity. Like-wise Nation is also a spiritual entity, when people take the outer form and material means of a nation as its true identity, they commit a grate error. This leads to Nazism or Fascism. This is a distorted form of Nationalism. This distortion probably led many Western scholars to think that there is something inherently wrong in nationalism. But when man realizes himself, he perceives God within and therewith all other men as integral part of a spiritual whole, and similarly when he looks into the soul of nation to discover its true identity and begins to consider it as a spiritual entity; this perception facilitates the narrowing of the differences between nations and finally results in a larger unity of mankind. Man rightly understood is an abridged society, society in an enlarged man. Man, society and humanity are three graded aspects of one and the same dynamic spiritual reality. Spiritual does not necessarily mean something abstract, metaphysical and transcendental. Sri Aurobindo developed
a very promising view of life. He rejected pessimism. Although the night is darkest before the dawn, he assures that the dawn is inevitable. He is a man of great vision. We should be worthy of his vision of tomorrow. He was not an abstract theoretician. He acted according to his vision and in the light of his spiritual realization. Since many of us are very intellectual and materialistic in our outlook, it might be rather difficult to understand Sri Aurobindo's ideas and ideals. Therefore many intellectuals often express that Sri Aurobindo's ideas are too lofty to be understood by the common man unless they are suitably explained by competent people. Better understanding of Sri Aurobindo, would enable us to tackle many of the small and big problems of contemporary society.¹

However it is quite heartening that his social philosophy is gradually gaining acceptance among thinkers in the field. His study and perception that the society is steadily moving into a stage preparing for a classless and strifeless living based on the truths of harmony, love and unity is being envisaged at different levels. So too is his confident anticipation of the world nations moving in the direction of a cohesive and yet supple world union is approaching fulfillment in diverse ways, despite some appearances to the contrary. Sri Aurobindo's teachings have spread into a dynamic movement. The center of education at Pondicherry has come to be recognized as a valuable project of research into education for life, and talent from different parts of the world is involved in it. A world union International was started in 1958, for propagating and working for Sri Aurobindo's Ideal of Human Unity on a spiritual basis. A further step in the expansion of the movement was taken in 1968 with the founding of Auroville, the city of dawn. It is a project with worldwide membership seeking to evolve a pattern of collective living that could form a model for the new world in the making, combining individual freedom with collective responsibility, governance proceeding from a
consciousness that is essentially spiritual. Auroville is to develop into a universal township organized around the Ideal of Human unity and perfection of consciousness.

A number of centers for study, spiritual practice and orientation of life on the lines of teachings of Sri Aurobindo have been started all over the country and abroad. Courses in Aurobindo's philosophy have been prescribed in some universities at post graduate level. Sri Aurobindo chairs have been founded in certain universities to focus attention on his contribution to the renaissance of India and the progress of world thought.⁵