BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

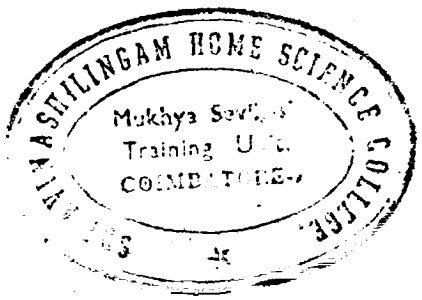
THE CULTURE OF INDIA

AS ENVISAGED BY

SRI AUROBINDO

BY

C. C. DUTT



1964

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

CHAUPATTY, BOMBAY

1st Edition, May 1960
2nd Edition, September 1964

Price Rs. 2.50, Sh. 4/6 or $ 1.10
Rupee Price (Outside India) Rs. 3.00

PRINTED IN INDIA

By P. A. Raman at *Inland Printers*, Victoria Mills Building, 55 Gamdevi Road, Bombay 7, and Published by S. Ramakrishnan, Executive Secretary, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 7.

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulsions of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 2.50.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages : Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit :

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities ; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order ; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are

progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata,* summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita,* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata* : "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard

to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita,* which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD,
NEW DELHI :
3rd October 1951.

K. M. MUNSHI

FOREWORD

The vast, profound and comprehensive subject of Indian culture has come in for treatment by various scholars of India and Europe. While the conservative mind of India stuck to the forms and institutions that had grown up during her long past, most of her so-called progressive moderns stuck to her Western exponents whose rationalistic bias blinded them, as much as the form-ridden Indians, to the spiritual roots of her culture which mere intellect fails to see.

This is one of the reasons why Indian culture has not only been misunderstood but vilified in a manner that carries its own condemnation. One such vituperative attack came from an English critic, Sir William Archer. Sri Aurobindo took up the challenge and in a series of articles* in his monthly philosophical review *Arya* (1918-21) refuted the charges, point by point, vindicating with irresistible logic that India in her chequered past achieved great things not only in the realm of the Spirit but also of life, and in an opulent measure. His was indeed a luminous and masterly exposition of the whole range of India's creations including her art and literature, religion and philosophy, polity and

* Since published in book form by Sri Aurobindo Ashram under the title *The Foundations of Indian Culture.*

secular sciences. Sir William has thus done the world a signal service—by trying to crucify the Truth he has helped in her resurrection.

The Truth that revealed itself in India is the Truth for the whole world. And the Light that worked in Sri Aurobindo for the perfection of mankind put that ancient Truth in her true splendour and in a modern setting for the modern mind to see, appraise and assimilate.

Besides, what marked out and lent importance to Sri Aurobindo's approach was that it laid bare the spiritual, therefore, the true character of Indian civilisation, its inner aim and intention, its outer mode of expression, its glorious future in which the great past of India would fulfil itself in a still greater measure over her and over the world.

Swami Vivekananda was the first in modern times to declare: "India has a mission in the world to fulfil—the mission of spiritualising the human race." The leaders of the 1905 Swadeshi movement reaffirmed this view. They wanted India to be free and great not for herself alone but for the whole world. Sri Aurobindo, the high-priest of this first phase of India's freedom movement, wrote: "India must have *Swaraj* in order to live for the world, not as a slave for the material and political benefit of a single purse-proud selfish nation, but as a free people for the spiritual and intellectual benefit of the human race.... She is rising to shed the eternal light entrusted to her over the world. She has always existed for humanity and not for herself that she must be great."*

---

* *Bande Mataram*, dated 9-6-1907

This sublime ideal motived the growth of revolutionary nationalism in India, which created in the people the will to freedom and greatness. The subsequent endeavours were but large-scale intensifications of this will which brought about our national freedom. But the perception of India's glorious future came with her awakening to the truth of her great past. India, says Sri Aurobindo, "preserves the Truth that preserves the world." She is indeed the Ancient Mother, a Power of the Infinite Shakti who guides the progressive march of man towards his divine destiny. Sri Aurobindo by revealing this truth has shown that deep in History is implicit a world movement. Naturally, therefore, the cultural evolution of India has a bearing on the spiritual evolution of the human race.

A knowledge of this truth of India's past can help us in understanding her future, and with it the future of humanity. Sri Aurobindo has unravelled this secret enshrined in her soul. He says that it is on this knowledge that the future could be built, a future of which he was certain. "The Sun of India's destiny will rise and fill all India with its light and overflow India and overflow Asia and overflow the world."* For Indians to be worthy of this destiny they must become themselves again by being reborn in their inherent spirituality. In her great days India's spirituality embraced the whole life of man and enriched it in every respect. In its revival today lies the dynamic of a newer world, a vaster creation.

But her Present in which her great Past is working for her greater Future, raises a deeper issue for India. Here is

---

* *Speeches of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 89 (1907-9).

the warning of the Seer, and his pointer, too, to the path of her future greatness. "...by following certain tempting directions she may conceivably become a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organisation of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power-politics with a high degree of success, guarding and extending zealously her gains and her interests, dominating even a large part of the world, but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its Swadharma, losing its soul. Then ancient India and her spirit might disappear altogether and we would have only one more nation like the others, and that would be a real gain neither to the world nor to us.... It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not and will not surely happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there. ...No doubt we will win through, but we must not disguise from ourselves the fact that, after these long years of subjection and its cramping and impairing effects, a great inner as well as outer liberation and change, a vast inner and outer progress is needed if we are to fulfil India's true destiny."*

Towards this inner progress of the race considerable work has been done by Sri Aurobindo himself. His discovery and revelation of the Supramental Light, the Truth-Consciousness, seen by the Vedic Seers as *rita chit,* is an event of epochal importance in the spiritual history of man. He foresaw that the inevitable descent of this light on earth

* Sri Aurobindo's Message to Andhra University, 1948.

would transform the imperfect mental man into a perfect supramental gnostic being, even as mind evolving in life produced the present man. This divinisation of man was implied in the Vedic vision of the Truth which it was Sri Aurobindo's work to translate into action. He says that mind having reached the highest point of its possibilities, the Supermind must now replace it and evolve a higher race.

This is 'the Hour of God', 'the hour of the unexpected', says the Master. And now, in 1956, the Mother categorically declares: "The Manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality."

> "A new Light breaks upon the earth,
> A New World is born.
> All things that were promised are fulfilled."

"The greatest thing that can be, the most marvellous thing since the beginning of creation, the miracle has happened. . . . A new world, yes a completely new world is born and is here." "This is in the subtle physical. In the outer physical there is nothing apparent yet. . . . But the pouring of the Light is constant. . . . The Supermind has got engulfed and has to work itself out."

These divine declarations and assurances from one who worked with Sri Aurobindo as his collaborator, and is now continuing his work, are the only light in a world enveloped in darkness. India, says the Mother, is the Guru of the world. She must wake up to this truth, to the Light that is dawning. This is how it will fulfil itself the Vedic vision,

the vision of *satyam, ritam, brihat,* 'the True, the Right, the Vast', of *daivyam janam,* 'the divine race', the vision that has sustained India's cultural evolution through her long history, of which Sri Aurobindo is the Voice and the realising Force.

Sri Charu Chandra Dutt's love and understanding of his country's history inspired his early patriotic endeavours, and later, his quest for the inmost meaning of the creative expressions of India's soul. When he came into contact with Sri Aurobindo to collaborate in his revolutionary work, this quest in him deepened into a passion and led him to study the major languages of India, the customs and traditions peculiar to each linguistic region. Thus did he equip himself for an objective and over-all view of the cultural scene in India as reflected in her art, literature and life.

When yet later Charu Chandra joined Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and his 'Chief' of the revolutionary days became his spiritual Master, his rededication of himself to his Guru in whom he found a perfect embodiment of ancient Indian Ideals, illumined his consciousness with the light of those ideals. And henceforth whatever Charu Chandra wrote, whether in English or in Bengali, was from this new vision.

The present book is mainly based on Sri Aurobindo's *Arya* sequence on Indian culture mentioned above. In it the author has also made use of Sri Aurobindo's other writings on the same subject. That he has been able to bring to his study a freshness and ease which along with the appropriate historical references he has given enlivens his theme with touches of originality, is due not only to his

mastery of the English language and of the subject, but largely to his 'intimate' relationship with his Master who once said that Charu Chandra was "one of the band of men I used often to appreciate and felt as if they had been my friends and comrades and fellow-warriors in the battle of the ages and would be so for ages more".*

SISIRKUMAR MITRA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM
Pondicherry:
April 4, 1960

* *Purono Katha Upasanghar* (in Bengali) by Charu Chandra Datta, a posthumous publication.

CONTENTS

Part I

INDIAN PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

THE INDIAN SPIRIT

THREE decades ago, Sri Aurobindo wrote in his journal, 'ARYA', a series of brilliant essays in defence of the culture of his country against a stupidly narrow and virulent attack made on it by an English critic of the name of William Archer. These essays have recently been published in book form under the title, 'The Foundations of Indian Culture'. In the following pages we present to the general reader the salient points of the subject in order to prepare him for an intelligent appreciation of Sri Aurobindo's profound and many-sided study. Archer's name has sunk into well-merited oblivion today. The average European, too, has abandoned his erstwhile attitude of self-satisfied complacency, and is able to take a broader view of cultures other than his own. So, no interest attaches any longer to the fulminations of Archer, except in so far as it provided Sri Aurobindo with an excuse to launch forth into a comprehensive and spirited defence of the thought and culture of his people. The defence was undoubtedly vigorous, but it was by no means an exhibition of a swashbuckling spirit. Such a spirit Sri Aurobindo has never displayed. For, apart from the vapourings of the English critic above-named and the well-deserved castigation he received, we find Sri Aurobindo dealing with the organic growth of Indian thought in various directions in his writings on philosophy, literature, politics, sociology and art. In this little book, we shall follow, as far as space permits, the main lines of his elucidation, quoting freely from his works, with or without detailed acknowledgment. We give two short extracts here, at the start, to show the spirit in which Sri Aurobindo has

approached his subject. He has not spared the lash, where necessary, but, even so, he has shown himself to be remarkably clear-sighted in his perception of the strong and weak points of the various cultures of the world. When the "rationalistic critic" declared that India had no spirituality and that she had succeeded in "killing the germs of all sane and virile spirituality", Sri Aurobindo called it "a portentous discovery" and commented on it thus:

> "The calm and compassion of Buddha victorious over suffering, the meditation of the thinker tranced in communion with the Eternal, the rapture of the saint made one by love in the pure heart with the transcendent and universal Love, the will of the *Karmayogin* raised above egoistic desire and passion into the impersonality of the divine and universal will, these things on which India has set the highest value and which have been the supreme endeavour of her greatest spirits, are not sane, are not virile!"

Thus did Sri Aurobindo turn the tables on the un-understanding and arrogant critic. It was not because he was an alien, for we know how sympathetically Sri Aurobindo reviewed Cousins' book, 'The Indian Renaissance'. There was never even a jot of blind partisanship in his attitude towards the other cultures of the world. Here is a frank comparison of Indian culture with that of Greece and Rome:

> "Greece developed to a high degree the intellectual reason and the sense of form and harmonious beauty. Rome founded firmly strength and power and patriotism, and law and order, modern Europe has raised to enormous proportions practical reason, science and efficiency and economic capacity. India developed the spiritual mind working on the other powers of man and exceeding

them, the intuitive reason, the philosophical harmony of the Dharma informed by the religious spirit, the sense of the eternal and the infinite. The future has to go on to a greater and more perfect comprehensive development of these things and to evolve fresh powers. . . ."

We hear it said, even now, that India has degenerated because of too much religion. Sri Aurobindo rejects this view summarily. There is no exact synonym for the word religion in Sanskrit. To the Indian, religion has had a larger and more comprehensive meaning than to the Westerner. "If", says Sri Aurobindo in his 'Renaissance in India', "we give to the word the sense of the following of the spiritual impulse in its fullness and define spirituality as the attempt to know and live in the highest self, the divine, and to raise life in all its parts to the divinest possible values, then it is evident that there was no too much of religion, but rather too little of it." In his 'Human Cycle', Sri Aurobindo has made a distinction between religion and religiosity and said that the latter, along with a rigid conventional outlook, has in the past brought about general deterioration. And every time this happened, a higher power intervened and society responded to its call. The right remedy, says Sri Aurobindo, is "not to belittle still further the age-long ideal of India, but to return to its old amplitude and give it a still wider scope, to make it in very truth all the life of the national religion in this high spiritual sense". The pointer is clear. It is no good sneering at "a bullock-cart civilisation", when we are asked to hark back to the Vedas and seek the meaning of the Truth-consciousness of the *rishis*, and it is equally useless to hold up the blind convention and ritualism of a degenerate age as the quintessence of our culture.

The present is a particularly suitable time for an honest study of Indian culture. We must keep before our eyes the

true ideal of India—of India, be it noted, and not local and transient usages indicating the passionate fancy or belief of a few. Tolerance we must cultivate and look at everything from a large point of view, in the critical period through which we are passing. Circumstances, and largely, our own sins of commission and omission, have brought about a partition of India politically—what Sri Aurobindo has called "a fissured freedom." Our solemn duty is to prevent this temporary partition from making us forget that the country is one and indivisible in every way. To do this, we must be fully alive to a sense of cultural unity every second of our life. We must realise deep in our being that the culture of India is not only one and indivisible, but that it has flowed in an uninterrupted stream from the earliest dawn of her history. But this sense, this realisation, has to proceed from the widest integral vision. India has never led an isolated life, whatever narrow-minded critics may say. She has, in the past, freely given and freely taken. That is where her greatness lay. She knew long ago the secret of the evolution of life on our planet. To show this, apart from significant hints in the Upanishad, there is a specific statement in Susruta's great book on medical science. There are good reasons to think that this discovery of ancient India travelled to Greece and was later on enunciated anew by Aristotle and Empidocles. But India never made a fuss about this. On the contrary, when she, in her theatres, adopted the drop curtain of Greece, she acknowledged the gift by calling it *Yavanika,* the Greek curtain. When she accepted certain astronomical data from her Western sister, she embodied them in a book called 'Romaka Siddhanta'—The Conclusions of the Romakas. India gave her numerals and her decimal system of notation to the Arabs and through them to the West. Europe knows these numerals as Arabic numerals, but the Arabs called the system, the Indian

system. India has nowhere even mentioned it in her vast literature. An Indian savant, Vidyapati, gave certain animal stories to the Arabs of Baghdad, which they translated into Arabic as the "Tales of Vidpai or Pilpai". In time, these stories were reshaped by Aesop in Greek and rendered into French verse in the Seventeenth Century by Lafontaine. They had already been translated into Persian as "Anwar-i-Suhaili." All this is to be considered with the significant fact that India never bragged about this contribution of hers to the folklore of the world. The same may be said of the Buddhist Jataka stories which have enriched the literature of so many peoples. Further on, we may have to go over some of this ground again. It is enough to say here,—"Such was the mentality of our people in the days of their greatness."

India's power of assimilation, too, has always been remarkable. Even at a much later period when political predominance had passed into alien hands, she showed remarkable receptivity, a great aptitude for harmonising apparently discrepant things. The broad-minded spiritual outlook of Persian poet-saints like Hafiz and Rumi powerfully influenced the thoughts of Indian devotees in the Afghan and Moghul periods of Indian history. The first line of an old song in Bengali ascribed to the poet Dasurai reads like a line from Rumi,—"Khodatala,... Thou who art in a temple, thou who art in a mosque". As we shall afterwards see, the happy blending of the Saracenic and the Hindu styles of building produced such beautiful structures as the Taj Mahal of Agra and the Ibrahim Roza of Bijapur. All this will be set forth in greater detail later on. Let it suffice here to state that the all-round evolution of Indian culture has been a continuous process to which every epoch has made its own contribution, but that all these various contributions have been fused into an integral whole. We have just referred

to India's power of assimilation. We shall see, anon, that this power is largely based on her spiritual vision, a vision that is all-embracing, that can take in in one sweep the infinite diversity of divine manifestation on earth, saying reverently and lovingly: "Verily, all this is the Lord."

If we analyse the dark periods of her history, we shall find that her very failures have proceeded from a misunderstanding, a misconstruction of this great *mantram*. It should be remembered that the highest state of static communion with the Divine is outwardly not unlike the inert motionlessness of the inconscient. Very often the ununderstanding mind mistakes the one for the other, especially a mind that is itself enamoured of restless activity. India has held up both action and inaction as ideals, has applauded both non-violence and violence for a righteous cause, has approved of animal sacrifice and has denounced it, has recommended abandonment of life and works and has urged man to unattached action. Such is the thought of India; it has brought forward apparently irreconcilable ideals only to harmonise them and transcend them. Herein lies its true greatness; obviously such a culture cannot be wedded to any set dogmas. When we find that thousands and thousands of Hindus visit reverently the shrine at Pirano or the *dargah* of Nizamuddin Aulia or the tomb of Lal Shahbaz, we understand what is meant by the catholicity of Indian culture,—more specially so when we remember that, in the first-named shrine, a Syed and a Brahmin recite the Kalma together three times daily. The spirit that urged Dara to get the Gita translated into Persian in the 17th century is not dead yet, for, even as late as 1912, we found a Moslem divine in Sind translating the Gita into Urdu.

THE INDIAN CONCEPTION OF LIFE

In religious thought, as much as in art and politics and literature, India has pursued her own line of development as we shall now proceed to show. One thing we must realise at the start. "The Indian conception of life", says Sri Aurobindo, "starts from a deeper centre and moves on less external life (than in the West). The peculiarity of the Indian eye of thought is that it sees or searches everywhere for the Spirit * * * Its idea of the world, of Nature, of existence is not physical, but psychological and spiritual". Every form, every act, every thought on the terrestrial plane has behind it the conscious force and the conscious will of the Divine. This conception of the ancient scriptures, reiterated by Sri Aurobindo, has to be firmly seized by us before we can hope to understand the soul of Indian culture. This idea is quite different from the modern European idea, different from the Christian idea of life as presented by the West today. To find anything similar in Europe to the trend of Indian thought, we have to hark back to the age of Pythagoras and Plato. The whole history of the Middle Ages in that continent was a long-drawn struggle between the Oriental outlook on life represented by the Church and the oncoming rush of rationalism as represented by the Renaissance. There is room in the world for both points of view. Contemplation and action are not irreconcilable opposities, as Vedantic thought has explained to India, over and over again. They find their harmony in action without attachment, in enjoyment without desire. Looked at from this truly Indian point of view, it is easy enough to understand why Krishna said again and again to Arjuna in the Gita:— "Gird up your loins, pick up your weapons and engage in the fight * * * Action is superior to inaction." The average Westerner, to whom bustling activity is the very sauce of

life, naturally turns up his nose when he is face to face with the world-shunning asceticism of the East. That at certain periods, in certain groups, there was a confusion made in India between *sannyasa* (abandonment of life and works) and *tyaga* (renunciation of desire and egoistic attachment) cannot be denied. But whenever this confusion appeared on a large scale, a great Teacher descended to explain to men the distinction between action for the satisfaction of one's desire—which was reprehensible, and action for the Divine without attachment—which was commendable. The mandate of the Upanishad is:—

"Verily wish to live out thy hundred years' span of life doing works in the world."

Sri Aurobindo says: "To get to the real meaning of the Indian idea of life, we must go back to its best times and look, not at this or that school of philosophy or at some side of it, but at the totality of the ancient philosophical thinking, religion, literature, art, society." The value of this idea depends on the graded planes which lie between man's normal earthly life and the perfection that he aims at. Without a knowledge of this gradation man, when called upon to choose between the Spiritual and the Material, is liable to rush to the acceptance of one to the utter exclusion of the other. The narrow ascetic denies the Material World, while the matter-of-fact Materialist denies the Spirit, forgetful of the fact that the true Truth includes and transcends both. It is due to this ignorance that the purblind Western critic exaggerates and overstresses the other-worldliness of Indian philosophy. The pivot of the Indian conception of life is a spiritual evolution. "Every life", says Sri Aurobindo, "is a step which he (man) can take backward or forward; by his action, his will in life, by the thought and knowledge that governs it, he determines what he is yet to

be." Indian culture did not denude or impoverish life, but rather it urged man to make his terrestrial life full and opulent, to fill it in with colour and beauty and enjoyment. The heroic side of this idea "is stamped in strong relief over the epic and the classical literature." To have gone over this vast literature and the works relating to politics and economics and sociology without being struck with their wealth and height and wideness is unimaginable; in Sri Aurobindo's words, "one must have read without eyes to see or without a mind to understand."

The *Dharmashastras,* codes which regulated man's individual and social life, are elaborate. The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya is as great a book on sociology and economics as the world has ever seen. *Sukra-niti* has laid down principles and laws governing such widely different subjects as art and architecture, town-planning and administrative organisation. It is idle to contend that the ancient Hindu spent his time running after a Will-o'-the-wisp. As Sri Aurobindo notes, "But all this was only foundation and preparation for that highest thing by whose presence human life is exalted beyond itself into something spiritual and divine." Our religion and philosophy were filled with indications of the path leading us ultimately to a state of high immortal freedom, but the path lay through a life of strenuous work controlled and uplifted by the Sacred Codes or *Dharmashastras.* The idea was clear in the Indian mind that "the spirit in the world assumes hundreds of forms, follows many tendencies, gives many shapes to his play or *lila,* and all are part of the mass of necessary experience; each has its justification, its law, its reason of being, its utility." It is thus that our ancestors visualised life, the perfect individual in a perfect society—"a figure of ascent, in spirals or circles, which has to be filled in with knowledge and action and experience."

THE AIM OF INDIAN CULTURE

In order to understand fully what Indian culture has aimed at, it is necessary to realise that *Dharma,* the law of human life, has various stages. It evolves and develops the individual according to his level of spiritual and ethical ascension. "All men cannot follow in all things one common and invariable rule of action. * * * The man of knowledge, the man of power, the production and acquisition man, the priest, scholar, poet, artist, ruler, fighter, trader, tiller of the soil, craftsman, labourer, servant cannot all have the same training, be shaped in the same pattern, follow the same way of living or be all put under the same tables of the law." Again, since the rule and training and result differ with the type of the man and the type of the function, it is clear that the goal of the old social system was a harmony of *Artha, Kama* and *Dharma.* But the self-perfecting process raised his life beyond this level to the supernal height of spiritual freedom, *Moksha.* Otherwise, the picture remains incomplete.

This being so, can we call the Indian social and religious ideal devoid of the ethical content? It would be foolish to do so. True, there is in it no rigid table of commandments such as was given unto Moses by Jehovah. The Western ethicist, enamoured of such a cut-and-dry table, forgets that it has, as a matter of fact, been honoured more often in the breach than in the observance. Our actual standard of morality is, at least, as high as that of the Commandments of Moses, but it "admits stages of progress and tries to moralise as much as possible those who are not yet capable of the highest ethical being." Looking at Hindu literature in general, we find therein an almost tyrannical insistence on a high ethical standard. Every idea of what is morally

right has been entertained, emphasized and put in an imperative form,—truth, honour, loyalty, courage, love, compassion and benevolence, all the elements of a right human life; they are stressed as the very essence of *Dharma*. But it must be remembered that beyond the idea of *Dharma* there is always the idea of the Infinite. The conception of the Infinite is the major chord of life according to the sages of old. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "Spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it."

The Western critic is always harping on the note that the Indian's whole outlook is other-worldly and that he has ever neglected the affairs of this world in a vain pursuit of celestial bliss. This attitude obviously proceeds from a lopsided intellect which cannot understand how the Indian regards every aspect of life from the spiritual point of view. Everything that an Indian is called upon to do in life is intricately interwoven with his religion, religion in the highest and truest sense. Behind every act of his there is, implicitly, if not explicitly, a dedication to the Lord of all action. The spiritual tendency of the Indian, says Sri Aurobindo, "does not shoot upward only to the abstract, the hidden and the intangible; it casts its rays downward and outward to embrace the multiplicities of thought and the richness of life."

This is how we have to study our past: "The age of the Spirit that we know as the epoch of Vedic and Vedantic realisation was followed by the second great age, that of the intellect,—centuries of heroic action and social construction side by side with the flowering out of the intellect in so many directions. The six great schools of philosophy took their rise in this fruitful period along with most wonderful

refinements of scholarship, art, science, letters, politics and sociology. During the next period, the post-classical, we see 'a lifting up of the whole lower life and an impressing upon it of the values of the spirit.' This was the sense of the Puranic and Tantric systems and the religions of Bhakti. Later Vaishnavism, the last fine flower of the Indian spirit, was in its essence the taking up of the aesthetic, emotional and sensuous being into the service of the spiritual." Two movements of degeneration succeeded these brilliant periods. First, there was a decline of vital energy and a fading out of the joy of life. But even in this deterioration, there was much that was still gorgeous and the fall into extreme inertia was very brief. Secondly, intellectual activity rapidly ceased, the free pursuit of science and art drew to a close.

Mind became petrified and society hung on mechanically to forms that were no longer understood. Conventionalism became the ruling tendency. Spirituality remained but burnt only "in intense jets and in a dispersed action which replaced the old magnificent synthesis." The narrow pursuit of some truths at the cost of neglect of the others became the order of the day. The old genius of adaptation, assimilation and progress was gone. Something undoubtedly remained and remains in the heart of the race but outside was all smoke and confusion. This was the state of Indian culture when it came face to face with the vital and masterful civilisation of Europe. What happened is lucidly described by Sri Aurobindo in his 'Renaissance in India' and 'Bankim-Dayanand-Tilak.'

In the older life of India, too, there had been passing periods of degeneration and sterility, but the spirit of the race called up by an incarnate Divine picked up the trail again and advanced towards an ever-new synthesis. The

eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, however, found our culture in a state of well-nigh hopeless torpor and disintegration. It was the true Dark Age for India. After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, an interregnum ensued in the political world, and a sordid scramble for power entirely occupied the minds of men. In this struggle, there was but little that recalled India's glorious past. A very few notable exceptions, scattered far and wide, there undoubtedly were—a brilliant poet like Bharatchandra in Bengal, a statesman like Mahadji Shinde, a pure-hearted dashing soldier like Bapu Gokhale in Poona—but it was a century of ambitious and unscrupulous adventurers, more or less successful, who held the arena. The great battles of this epoch—Plassey, Panipat and Wandewash—Assaye, Argaum and Seringapatam—were all fought for petty self-interest and had nothing to do with the high ideal of *Dharma* that Krishna had held up before Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra. But even then the spirit of India was not dead. It was but dormant, ready to burst forth in a new glory at the bidding of Providence. The century that followed this dark period was indeed marvellous. It gave us a long line of spiritual teachers from Raja Rammohan and Dayanand to Sri Aurobindo, and a galaxy of intellectual giants and outstanding men of action. I need hardly mention the names of Tagore, Tata, Bankim Chatterji, Iqbal, J. C. Bose, P. C. Ray, Raman and Bhabha, and a host of others. This kind of upheaval would have been impossible if the spirit of India were not lying in seed form, below the surface, during the period of barrenness. If we have not yet been able to usher in the Age of Supernal Truth, we have at least walked out of the Slough of Despond and resumed our journey upward with enthusiasm. There is one thing, however, which should be made clear. So far, we have laid stress on India's spiritual

her culture in the past was by no means restricted to her religious sense and a potent psychic tendency. These things were certainly there to a remarkable extent, but her pre-eminence in the field of knowledge and action were quite as great. She has no reason to fear comparison with any other country. Sri Aurobindo says in eloquent language: "For three thousand years at least, * * * she has been creating abundantly and incessantly, lavishly, with an inexhaustible many-sidedness, republics and kingdoms and empires, philosophies and cosmogonies and sciences and creeds and arts and poems and all kinds of monuments, palaces and temples and public works, communities and societies and religious orders, laws and codes and rituals, physical sciences, psychic sciences, systems of Yoga, systems of politics and administration, arts spiritual, arts worldly, trades, industries, fine crafts,—the list is endless and in each item there is almost a plethora of activity."

One of the powers of the ancient spirit of India was a strong intellectuality—massive in principle and curious in detail. Those who have studied Dr. P. C. Ray's 'Hindu Chemistry' know the extent of chemical research in the past. That explosives were known and used in offensive and defensive warfare is obvious from the fact that *Sukraniti* mentions one of the Ministers in the old State as being in charge of explosives. That the use of *vimanas* or air-vehicles was not altogether chimerical, would appear from an old Jaina book (about twenty centuries old) which mentions and describes a simple form of the mercury turbine as the most suitable engine for these machines. We could also ask if the *Shataghni Nalikas*—tubes that killed a hundred men at a time—mentioned in the Ramayana were only a form of superior mangonels or whether they used to be charged with explosives which threw out heavy missiles. The

discoveries of Hindu medical science were also marvellous. Without going into any details, it can be mentioned here that the ancient chemist found out how, by a subtle process, metallic gold could be turned into salts. They also discovered how the properties of a certain chemical compound varied in accordance with the method by which it had been formed and did not depend merely on its chemical formula. They knew also that the meat of various animals differed in quality and utility to man regardless of their chemical composition. It is also well known that the Ayurvedic doctors were physicians as well as surgeons, and that they had invented many intricate instruments which have become obsolete with time. Their well-known medicine—*Makaradhwaja*—by itself is a potent tonic and has, as such, been manufactured on a large scale in Germany. But this *Makaradhwaja* prepared mechanically without the observance of due precautions has been found to be totally useless for the cure of specific diseases when mixed in suitable media—such as ginger juice as a carminative, betel leaf juice for anaemia, musk as a stimulant etc., etc. About eighty such media or *anupânas* are mentioned.

We shall restrain our ardour and not elaborate the point further. The ancient Hindu extended his researches into so many different branches of physical science! In fact, he organised and classified as far as he could all that he observed and discovered. *Rajayoga* and *Hathayoga* with their elaborate and strict methods are cases in point. Marksmanship has been reduced to an exact science. Control of breath and voice production were well-regulated courses of exercise. It is only want of space that prevents our entering upon even a short consideration of the science of Indian music. It is marvellous in its precision and its roots go deep down into the supra-physical. We shall give here a longish

extract from Sri Aurobindo's writings to indicate the wonderful vitality and the rich intellectuality of old India, without which her mere spiritual tendencies would not have carried her very far. Sri Aurobindo says: "The mere mass of the intellectual production during the period from Asoka well into the Mahomedan epoch is something truly prodigious as can be seen at once if one studies the account which recent scholarship gives of it, and we must remember that that scholarship as yet only deals with a fraction of what is * * * extant and what is extant is only a small percentage of what was once written and known. There is no historical parallel for such an intellectual labour and activity before the invention of printing and the facilities of modern science; yet all that mass of research and production and curiosity of detail was accomplished without these facilities and with no better record than the memory and for an aid the perishable palm-leaf. Nor was all this colossal literature confined to philosophy and theology, religion and yoga, logic and rhetoric and grammar and linguistics, poetry and drama, medicine and astronomy and the sciences; it embraced all life, politics and society, all the arts from painting to dancing, all the sixty-four accomplishments, everything then known that could be useful to life or interesting to the mind, even, for instance, to such practical side minutiae as the breeding and training of horses and elephants." Each subject had its science and technique and suitable terminology. For the reader who is curious, we would mention that there is extant in a big library in Calcutta a treatise on the art of stealing—*Chaurya Shastram* —even theft reduced to an art! Old India did not throttle her life or stifle her intellect. That is why her spirituality rose to such great heights. Sri Aurobindo truly says: "It is when the race has lived most richly and thought most profoundly that spirituality finds its heights and its depths and

its constant and many-sided fruition." If India had the Veda, she had also the *Ayurveda* and the *Dhanurveda.* If she had her *Arthashastra* (Economics), she had also her *Kama Shastra* (Eugenics) and the *Shilpa Shastra* (Fine Arts). It is when the race lost its vitality and its intellect became petrified, that she reached the bottom of the line of decline.

As we have said again and again, the seed of spirituality remained underground and showed itself principally in emotional outbursts. But this was not enough to keep India alive politically and economically. Slowly she lost her great virtue of plasticity. For thirty centuries she had responded freely to her environments and developed her institutions in accordance with the demands of evolution. Now with the loss of vitality, she entrenched herself passively behind blind conventions and a series of meaningless rites and ceremonies, and sat dreaming of her past glories. Sri Aurobindo has made it amply clear in his 'Ideal of Human Unity' that under such conditions, when a nation cannot make urgent and timely changes in its institutions, Nature comes forward to play her master card and brings about foreign domination. This is what happened to us. The *Brahmin* and the *Kshatriya* had ceased to exercise their hereditary functions, but instead of retiring gracefully from their respective positions, they clung tenaciously to their rights and privileges and clogged the wheel of general progress. A powerful foreign nation had to step in and help on the course of evolution. In the West, the Cleric and the Knight had retired willingly or unwillingly from their hereditary rank and left the field to the general body of citizens. There the internal struggle has now reduced itself to a straight fight between the *Vaisya* and the *Sudra* who have taken on the new names of Capital and Labour. How the struggle will end, we do not know, but in India a great deal of cruel shaking is yet

necessary to eliminate hereditary rights and vested interests. If these things are not adjusted or if they continue their pernicious influence below the surface, Nature will not fail to apply her drastic remedies again—all this we must bear in mind when we speak of being true to our own culture.

Fidelity to the spirit of India does not imply rattling the dead bones of institutions which have survived their utility. Of the caste system, Sri Aurobindo has said a great deal in his writings. Nowhere has he defended hereditary castes and he has proved to the hilt that it is only in the fourth or conventional stage of social development that this rigid division has come into existence. In the Gita, as my readers are bound to recollect, Sri Krishna said: "I created the four-fold order on the basis of *guna* and *karma*—Quality and Action." The gradation of quality and action was there and Sri Krishna gave it his recognition. But nowhere has he said that it was dependent on birth. Likewise, the present-day division of society into a number of petty castes was unknown in the old days. Some of these—like the smith, the carpenter, the barber, and the launderer—are obviously groups of men following the same occupation. But why a carpenter should not marry a barber's daughter or a smith the daughter of a wheelwright are points that Sri Krishna was not called upon to discuss. Manu's fantastic theory about the rise of some of these new castes we can bypass while considering the evolution of Indian culture. The reader probably remembers what Manu said about some of these latter-day castes—when a *Kshatriya* married a *Sudra* woman, their offsping were grouped together as chariot-driver; when a *Brahmin* married a *Vaisya* girl, their progeny were *vaidyas* who followed the medical profession; but when a mean *Sudra* was reckless enough to marry a *Brahmin* girl, their children became *chandalas*, or Pariahs.

And so on. Our object in mentioning these ridiculous things, here, is to warn the reader not to go into ecstasies over every petty phase of our life in a degenerate age. And, if in our new born exuberance, we proceed to give legislative or executive sanction to these little mistakes of a decadent age, we shall do infinite harm to the cause of India's progress. Swami Vivekananda used to call this species of religious enthusiasm "religion of dont-touchism", and if we do not shirk telling the whole truth, we must admit that there are men of apparent education and culture in our midst who have not yet been able to come out of the morass of ignorance and superstition that characterised our dark age. Still, such men are few. Even in our most decadent periọd, there was within us a latent vigour, a dormant vitality which saved the nation from the dire fate that had overtaken Egypt, Babylon and old Persia. The sudden and crude impact of the Western aggression— often brutal and unprincipled—opened our eyes. Sri Aurobindo says: "This crude impact * * * put the reviving Indian spirit face to face with novel conditions and ideals and the urgent necessity of understanding, assimilating and conquering them. * * * Out of this awakening vision and impulse, the Indian renaissance is arising."

THE INDIAN RENAISSANCE

We know that the renascent spirit led our educated countrymen along two widely divergent paths. One group of them, mostly dwellers of Calcutta and Bombay, rushed forward madly to Europeanise themselves, inside, and outside. Another, whom we associate generally with Poona and Benares and Madras, proclaimed in a loud voice that India would entrench herself behind her ramparts of orthodoxy against the onslaught of an alien civilisation. As a

very smart American of the late nineteenth century put it, both these types were determined to eject the foreigner, but one wanted to fight him clad in loin cloth with cudgel in hand, while the other wished to go out hatted and booted and shoot the alien down with his own Martini rifle. Ultimately, the two types dwindled down considerably in importance and the leadership of thought passed into the hands of men like Bankim and Tagore, Sraddhanand and Lajpatrai, Tilak and Ranade, and Titans in the spiritual field like Dayananda, Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, not to speak of a whole host of lesser men. India, during the half century that has gone by, has been learning to look into her own past in order to get an inspiration as to the building up of her future. Sri Aurobindo describes how she has passed through three successive stages of development. The first stage was principally imitative, when she misunderstood even her own ancient culture. Then came a stage of reaction, when she threw the ferment of the new ideas into her old culture in order to get a proper perspective. Finally, she turned her look upon her past with the new perspective and sought a new light, "and therefore, novel potentialities of creation and evolution." The task before the leaders of thought was to shake off the cramping effect of a long period of irrational conventionalism. Still the driving force in the new age is bound to be spiritual, as it has always been in the past. The influence that Europe brought to bear on India in the nineteenth century was aggressively rational and anti-religious. India met in the name of the spirit—not the spirit of a decadent age that shirked life and action, but an urge instinct with the spirit of creation. It was bound to be so. Sri Aurobindo says: "The instinct of the Indian mind was that, if a reconstruction of ideas and of society was to be attempted, it must start from a spiritual basis and take from the first a religious motive and form." But

the cultural urge behind was also intensely national. It restated the ancient Vedic and Vedantic lore and thus drove forward what was originally a protestant and reforming movement "along the curve of the national tradition and temper." We need not go deeper into the character of Indian renaissance, as our business is more to trace the evolution of our culture in the past than to indicate its future course. Sri Aurobindo mentions the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the orthodox revivalism and the Neo-Vaishnavic tendency in Bengal as disclosing the true character of the new movement—a restatement of the past, combined with an intellectual outlook derived from the West.

Regarding the rise and fall of civilisations, Sir Aurobindo has said that all great cultures pass through three stages—a stage of large and loose formation, then a stage in which forms and rhythms are fixed, and finally, a stage of decay. If, at this last stage, it cannot remould itself, a period of slow decay sets in or, if it comes to a clash with a newer and a more vigorous culture, it dies a rapid death. But if it can shake off its limitations and renovate its ideas, if it gives a new scope to its spirit, then there is a resuscitation, a re-birth. The old culture of India, face to face with the undoubtedly vigorous culture of Islam, after the first inevitable clashes, entered upon a larger synthesis and gave newer and newer forms of life and thought to her people—both Hindu and Muslim. It did not swallow Islamic culture, nor did Islam swallow it. The violent clashes, which characterised the first impact, gradually gave place to an understanding, a mutual toleration and finally to a definite co-operation. The two streams of civilisation mingled their waters and there emerged a newer, wider and more powerful current of national Indian culture which enriched life and thought in all directions, and excited the admiration of

the world. It charmed all visitors to this country in the Mughal period, men of widely differing interests like Roe and Bernier, Tavernier and Manucci, as much as it had charmed Hiouen Tsang and Megasthenes in the olden days. This opulent stream of culture retained its full force through many political vicissitudes till it reached a stage of stagnancy and decay in the eighteenth century. But this period of futility did not, as we have seen already, last long. India made up her mind "to step out boldly and meet the new forces and enter upon a fresh lease of life and experience." But we are by no means out of the wood yet. No nation can be, with falsity and arrogance rampant all over the world. Still, let the assurance of Sri Aurobindo cheer us up: "Today we are in the midst of a violent crisis, which began by the threat of a death and destruction of the culture, but is now uplifted by the strong hope of a great revival, transmutation and renascence." Two things are essential for the fulfilment of this hope. One is that we must not delude ourselves; we must be absolutely true to our professions. The second is that we must understand the essential spirit of Indian culture.

THE FOUR STAGES OF LIFE

It is no good boosting our individual or communal or local or temporal predilections as expressions of our national culture. We must realise the thread of unity that runs through the rich diversity of its manifestation. For this purpose, we have to begin from the earliest Vedic and Vedantic period, proceed therefrom to the later period of the Shastras, the Classic writings and sciences and philosophies, and then come right down to the period of decadence. With an integral and comprehensive vision we have to see the whole course of evolution, as a gradually unfolding pano-

rama. We must not, for instance, judge the ancient four-fold order by its later development, its gross meaningless parody—a water-tight hereditary caste system. Ancient India hit upon the four-fold order of society and the four stages or *ashramas* of our life as the means for determining the life of the individual in the life of the group. Of the four *varnas* we have spoken a good deal already. The economic aspect of this division was but a part of it; its ethical and spiritual contents were very much wider and more important. The builders of society, says Sri Aurobindo, "started with the idea of the intellectual, ethical and spiritual growth of the individual as the principal need of humanity, society as its necessary framework * * * A secure place had to be found for him in the community from which he could serve these relations, maintain and pay all his debt to society and proceed to his self-development with the best possible help from the communal life." Birth was one of the tests, but by no means even the principal one at the commencement. Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, "I have created the four-fold order of *varna* according to *guna* and *karma*"—that is to say, in accordance with capacity, temperament and nature. Sri Aurobindo sketches the aims of the founders of society in the form of an imaginary address. Thus, "This is only the substructure of a pressing importance indeed, but still not the last and greatest thing; when you have paid your debt to society, filled well and admirably your place in its life, helped its maintenance and continuity and taken from it your legitimate and desired satisfactions, there still remains the greatest thing of all, your own self, the inner you, the soul which is a portion of or one with the eternal and universal being. This you have to find. This you have to find, and from the place I have provided for you in life and by this training you can find; for, to each *varna* I have supplied its highest ideal of manhood, the highest way of which

your nature is capable. By directing your life and nature in its * * *Swadharma* * * you can grow into the ideal universal *Dharma*.....That is the greater real object before you.....When you have done that, you are free. You have gone beyond all the *Dharmas;* then you are a universal soul, one with all existence." In this way, the whole system of society based on the *varnas* was made a means for the attainment of the highest spiritual freedom. But this was not all. The individual was not left wholly to his own unaided initiative. A framework, a gradation for his life was also provided. Individual life was divided into four successive stages,—the life of the student, the life of the householder, the life of the recluse who dwelt in the forest and lastly, the life of the super-social man. By the training that was thus given in these four *ashramas,* the Aryan man was prepared for the four great objects of his life—*Artha, Kama, Dharma* and *Moksha*—his mundane needs and interests, his desires, his ethical and religious ideals, and his spiritual liberation. The course of preparation for the ultimate destiny can be described thus:—

After his strenuous training as a student in suitable surroundings, a man entered upon the householder's state, there to work out the knowledge he had gained, to satisfy his natural being and pay his debt to society. Thus, after serving *Artha* and *Kama,* the two first stages, he retired from the turmoil of the world and commenced in the peaceful environment of a religious colony to work out within himself the truth of the spirit in a broad freedom from the stricter social bonds. Of this third state of life in the woodland, we have a graphic description in the great epics. After a lifetime of strenuous activity in the world, men and women sought the congenial atmosphere of a quiet *ashrama,* there to spend their days in worship and pious studies, sacri-

fices and holy recitations,—when those that were equipped for it imparted to the rising generations a knowledge of the spiritual Truth. In the fourth stage, the individual shook off his remaining bonds and roamed about the world, staff in hand, in spiritual detachment and in communion with the Supreme Spirit. These gradations may not have been always observed very strictly, but they can be taken as a scheme which visualised the full course of the human spirit and which could be taken advantage of by each one according to his development in this birth.

On such firm basis did the civilisation of India grow to its full height. In Sri Aurobindo's eloquent language, "So founded, so trained, the ancient Indian race grew to astounding heights of culture and civilisation, lived with a noble, well-founded, ample and vigorous order and freedom, developed a great literature, sciences, arts, crafts, industries, rose to high ideals of knowledge and culture, arduous greatness and heroism, * * * discovered the profoundest truths of self and the world."

SANATANA DHARMA: THE ETERNAL RELIGION

No doubt, as Indian civilisation grew richer and more complete, it lost much of the simplicity of its earlier days; intuition waned as the intellect towered high; a greater emphasis was laid on scientific system and method and, as a result thereof, society grew more stereotyped and mechanical. The spirit of harmony of an earlier period was lost; *Artha* and *Kama* were thrust to the background and *Dharma* tended to assume such a rigid form that it hampered the realisation of spiritual freedom, *Moksha*. Still, even when decay set in definitely, the old spiritual aim, the ancient tradition remained to sweeten and humanise life and

gave a great support to the impulse of regeneration when it set in.

In the light of this development of spiritual thought, we have to understand the Hindu idea of the eternal religion, the *Sanatana Dharma*. This understanding is essential for a proper grasp of the nature of our culture. Yet this is where the foreigner often goes wrong. He does not realise that Hinduism "set to itself no sectarian limits, but was only a continuously enlarging tradition of the Godward endeavour of the human spirit," and complains that there is no Hindu religion, but only a social system, and a bundle of inconsistent religious beliefs and institutions. This kind of criticism proceeds from an initial difference in outlook between the Indian and the average Westerner. "To the Indian mind, dogma is the least important part of religion, the religious spirit matters, not the dogma; but to the western mind a fixed intellectual belief is the most important part of a cult, its core of meaning, the thing that distinguishes it and makes it either a false or a true religion." It looks upon intellectual truth as the highest verity and appraises religion accordingly. The Indian takes all religions as true in their own way and degree, considers them as so many different paths to the one Brahman—an outlook that has found expression in the verse of the Gita. "In whatever way men approach God, in that way they receive their seeking." This broad view of religion has facilitated the work of spiritual synthesis in India all along, all apparent diversity in worship and religious seeking found a reconciliation here in the realisation of the Supreme Truth. Sri Aurobindo rightly observes: "Where else could the lofty, austere and difficult teaching of a Buddha have seized so rapidly on the popular mind or the songs of a Tukaram, a Kabir, the Sikh gurus, the chants of the Tamil Saints with

their fervid devotion but also their profound philosophy found so speedy an echo and formed a popular religious literature? This strong permeation and readiness of the mind of a whole nation to turn to the highest realities is the sign and fruit of an age-long, a real and still living supremely spiritual culture."

No doubt there have been in the course of India's long history periods of acute religious differences, even outbreaks of violence and tyranny, but they have never assumed the magnitude of the religious persecutions and religious wars in the West. In India, there was always behind them the higher spiritual perception which never forsook the minds of the masses. A new cult, a new order, a new yogic path had never to face actual hostility in this country. A priest here, a pundit there with his narrow outlook probably criticised the new thought for a little while, but could exert no real influence on the good-natured tolerance of the common people. They had a good word for every preacher who, in their eyes, was a messenger of *Dharma* – *Dharma* in a very large sense. Even the atheist and the agnostic found no serious obstacle to his propaganda. Indian civilisation probably never developed the idea of political and social freedom such as formed the basis of a state like Athens, but, says Sri Aurobindo, "freedom of thought and spiritual liberty have always been among its constant traditions." But side by side with this spiritual freedom, a spiritual order was also provided for in a variety of ways. There is not room enough here to go into details; we shall just indicate a few of these ways:—the recognition of certain scriptures, all open to expansion and development by interpretation,—the tradition of the family or the class, *Kuladharma*,—the religious authority of the Brahmin as scholar and priest,—a line of *Gurus* or spiritual teachers. This last-mentioned

class was well exemplified by the succession of *Vaishnava* saints and teachers like Ramanuja, Madhwa, Chaitanya, Vallabhacharya and others, by the line of Sikh gurus from Nanak to Govind Singh and the Buddhist *Sanghas* and councils. Still spiritual order has never overridden spiritual freedom in this country and the Indian has never had to suffer anything like the tyranny of the ecclesiastical orders and hierarchies of Christian Europe. Sri Aurobindo sums the point up thus: "The freedom of religious thought and experience, the provision of a flexible framework and means of a stable and powerful evolution have given to Indian civilisation its marvellous wealth of many-sided philosophies, great scriptures and profound religious works, religions which approach God from every side of his infinite being, Yogas, systems of psycho-spiritual discipline and self-finding. . . . a firm structure capable of bearing a large tolerance and assimilative spirit, a vivacity, intensity, multitudinousness of experience, a freedom from the unnatural European divorce between knowledge and religion." An atmosphere of disbelief and scepticism for a whole century was unable to shake materially these roots of spiritual knowledge in India. No doubt Indian society was disturbed for a while by the vigorous assault made on it, in a moment of depression and lassitude, by the efficient civilisation of the West, but it has revived and is preparing for a great new life and a marked advance in the infinities of spiritual experience.

ONE GOD AND THE MANY GODS

Face to face with what appears to him to be an intricate polytheism, the European critic is unable to comprehend and is unwilling to admit that the religion of the Hindu rests on the bed-rock of belief in the One Supreme Godhead. When the Hindu asserts that this Supreme Being can be

approached and worshipped through any of his innumerable aspects, the critic from the West, in his bewilderment, calls him a polytheist or pantheist, never a monotheist. We can, in fact, admit that Hindu worship does not "end with a colourless monism or a transcendental theism." But that does not mean that the Hindu is either a polytheist or a pantheist. Polytheist he cannot be, for, though he is a worshipper of many gods, he knows that the gods are forms and names, powers and personalities of the One without a second; nor can he be called a pantheist with any reason, for, though he worships God as the All, he knows that beyond the Universal, there is always the supracosmic eternity of the Divine Being. When the Indian mind distributes its worship among many gods, it looks the whole time beyond this diversity to their integral one-ness. Vaishnavism and Shaivism strongly emphasize the personality of God and His human relations, but even these cults are not based wholly and exclusively on this aspect of the Divine. No western definitions can entirely describe Indian religion. In order to get an accurate idea of the effect of India's spiritual culture on the individual and the community we must realise the synthetical character and the unifying vision of that culture. The first idea of the religious mind in this country was to enter into the varied and numberless paths of approach to this One—numberless ways of seeing Him and adoring Him in any one of His many aspects—as Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, Rudra the Destroyer, Durga the bright and beneficent Mother or Kali the dark and dire Divine force. The God of divine Love and the God of divine Power are, according to this idea, one and the same Diety. Then there is the third idea, probably the strongest "that not only through aspects of the universal spirit and all inner and outer Nature can the Divine be approached, but each individual object and being is in its spiritual being intimate-

ly one with the one divine existence." In each individual there is the Divine and each one has to find Him there. Sri Aurobindo's words, "The supreme truth of all divisions is a secret unity" are identical with the description of the Divine as "the undivided one appearing as the divided many." These three ideas, says Sri Aurobindo, govern the Indian religious mind and the seeing of them is its whole seeing.

THE OUTER AND THE INNER LIFE IN VEDIC RELIGION

In tracing the path of spiritual culture in India, we have to start from the earliest Vedic ideal. The spirit of Indian religion has been the same throughout its vigorous period, though it has, as an evolutionary necessity, changed in form from epoch to epoch, in obedience to the pressure of the environment. It was recognised even in the earliest times that man lived between two worlds, the outward and the inward, and that the majority "put the whole emphasis of life on the outward, live very strongly in that and very little in the inner existence." This outer life is either grossly physical and vital, or more subtly intellectual, ethical and aesthetic. But in either case, it is a life of ignorance and is not guided by the knowledge of the Spirit. Man has to rise from the outward ignorant life to the inward life of enlightenment in the course of his spiritual progress. He has not, however, to discard the ordinary external life of the world, but to rise through it to the higher plane of existence in the Divine. Renunciation of life and works has been held up as an ideal by certain schools of thought, pre-eminently by the orthodox Christian church. In India, too, we have had advocates of asceticism who called upon their followers to quit this world of Illusion and plunge into the

principle of the pure Brahman. But the general trend of Indian thought has been what the Gita has put forward in clear unmistakable words—The doing of works in this world, without attachment and for the Divine, is higher than an ascetic abandonment of life and action. There are many verses of a like import in Vedantic literature. The extreme *mayavadi* has, no doubt, sought to explain them away. We shall briefly refer to such commentaries later on. But the standpoint of the Veda is perfectly clear. There is no escapism there. The Vedic sage does not disown life; he does not discard action. "The Vedic religion", says the Master, "took this natural sense and feeling of the physical man and the conceptions to which they gave birth, and it sought to lead him through them to the psychical and spiritual truths of his own being and the being of the cosmos. The devotee was allowed to worship and propitiate the gods in his way and to offer physical sacrifices when he felt called upon to do so." He was, in the language of the Gita, an *artharthi* or *arthi*, i.e. a devotee who adored the god-head for the fulfilment of his desire or for divine help, even though he was not as yet a *jijnasu* or *jnani*, i.e. a seeker of the Divine in his truth or a knower of the true Divine. Even though his notions were crude, the idea of the necessity of a sacrificial rite in his mind was an obscure expression of the first law of his being—the law of give-and-take between the individual and the cosmic gods, so clearly stressed in the Gita.

THE GODS: THEIR PHYSICAL AND PSYCHICAL ASPECTS

But the external side of the Vedic religion did not stop at this notion of the natural physical mind. The *rishis* gave a psychical function, as well, to the gods by proclaiming

them to be the divine guardians of a higher Truth and Right and Law. The *rishis* spoke also of the necessity of living according to this Truth and Law, and of the possibility thereby of rising to the abode of Immortality. No doubt, the average mental man understood these ideas in their external sense, but they developed his ethical understanding and gave him his first turn towards his psychical being. The profounder mysteries were reserved for the initiate, for him who was prepared to comprehend them and act up to them. The secret of the *mantras*, the inner import of the symbols, were lost in the course of some centuries and had to be rediscovered at a later age by the sages of the Upanishads. Still, as we have observed before, there was no break in the uninterrupted progress towards the summit. As Sri Aurobindo remarks significantly, "Only by penetrating into the esoteric sense of this worship can we understand the full flowering of the Vedic religion in the Upanishads and in the later evolution of India's spirituality. It is all there in the seed, preshadowed or even prefigured in the verses of the early seers, and the persistent notion which, through every change, ascribed the foundation of all our culture to the *rishis*, whatever its fabulous forms and mythical ascriptions, reflects the fact of a true initiation and unbroken continuity." The gods of the Vedas were, in their outer character, powers of cosmic nature, but on the psychospiritual, and even on the intuitive mental plane, they represent certain specific aspects of the One Supreme Godhead. Yet, each god, apart from his special function, is one with the others and holds in himself the universal divinity; each god is all the other gods.

THE ESOTERIC SENSE OF THE VEDA: HOW IT WAS LOST

We have to see, now, how far the teaching of the Veda influenced the inner life of man. Man lives in the world subject to falsehood and ignorance and death. In order to attain the status of immortality, he has to turn towards the highest Truth and rise beyond the limitations not only of his physical and vital, but also of his mental and psychical being, and climb on to the abode of the supernal verity. "On these ideas, the Vedic sages", says Sri Aurobindo, "built up a psychological and psychic discipline which led beyond itself to the highest spirituality and which contains the whole seed of later Indian Yoga. And they open into and already contain the most characteristic ideas of Indian spirituality, the one existence who manifests the individual and the universal from his supracosmic being." Thus was the great beginning made and it came to its crowning achievements in the Upanishads—called Vedanta, the end-of-Veda. These scriptures are the supreme result of the Vedic discipline and experience. As we have noted already, the mysteries and the symbols of the Veda became, after a while, a closed book to all but the elect. The vast majority of people were satisfied with the esoteric aspect of the sacrificial rites. A small body, however, of the Brahmin and Kshatriya castes, trained in the Vedic system of education, unwilling to accept the outer meaning of the *yajnas*, began to seek for the highest revelations. In course of time, this seeking spread to people of the lower strata; so much so, that a man like Satyakama Jabali, an illegitimate son of a servant girl, sought and achieved the highest experiences and attained to the knowledge of the One Brahman. "The work", says Sri Aurobindo, "that was done in this period became the bedrock of Indian spirituality

in later ages and from it gush still the life-giving waters of a perennial inspiration." For, when the mysteries of the Veda finally lost their significance and passed into obscurity, the old balance of culture between the elect few and the general body of half-crude natural men was not sufficient as a basis of spiritual progress; a definite evolutionary necessity arose of a more and more generalised intellectual, ethical and aesthetic advance of the race. Many countries of the old world passed through a similar critical phase of evolution. In the West, in spite of Pythagoreanism and Neo-Platonism, in spite of the great spiritual upheaval of Christianity, civilisation assumed a rational, secular and materialistic trend. But, in India, the spiritual tendency of the race was saved from "collapse by the immense effort of the age of the Upanishads which took up the Vedic truth into its highest and most simple expression of intuition and experience, but yet in a form which could lend itself to intellectual and philosophic statement and appreciation." The result was an upbuilding of a great many-sided culture guided and penetrated by the power of spirituality.

THE POST-VEDIC STAGE OF INDIAN CIVILISATION

The next stage of Indian civilisation amply exemplified this. It was an epoch marked by "the rise of the great philosophies, a vast epic literature, a vigorous and complex society, the beginnings of art and science, the formation of large kingdoms and empires and manifold formative activities of all kinds, great systems of living and thinking." There was an outburst of rational intelligence working under high pressure to make man's life on earth broad and full and efficient. Philosophy proceeded to analyse and examine what had been attained in the former age by

intuition and spiritual experience. Still the result was ultimately a realisation, an admission, that spiritual experience was a greater thing than rational inference. Epic poetry of the period was full of strong and free criticism of life in the light of ethical reason, "but the background is a constant religious sense and assent to the spiritual truths which remained the basis of the culture and suffused with their higher light secular thought and action." Art dwelt much on life, but its whole tone is coloured by a suggestion of the spiritual and the infinite. The life of *Kama* and *Artha* is developed considerably, but there is always a reference to *Dharma,* and it never loses sight of spiritual freedom as the highest aim of life. When, at a later period life assumed a still greater secular tendency, and man worked at science and politics and sociology in a still more practical fashion, he did not, even then, lose sight of the psycho-spiritual aspect of existence. "Every excess of emphasis on the splendour and richness, the powers and pleasures of life", Sri Aurobindo points out, "has its recoil and is balanced by a corresponding potent stress on spiritual asceticism as the higher way." The two trends are seen side by side counteracting each other, balancing each other, preserving as it were, as much as possible, the essential spirit of harmony.

Indian religion, thus evolving, kept up its contact with its Vedic source, but changed considerably its outer figure and its mental formulation. Only once in its evolutionary history, a serious break appeared imminent when Buddhism seemed to reject any spiritual continuity with the Vedic religion, but the rejection was more apparent than real and the crisis was tided over safely. Buddhism had many ideas in common with Vedantism and it has

several points of intimate alliance with one of the six great schools of Indian philosophy. So, the upshot was that Indian religion, absorbing all that it could of Buddhism, rejected its exclusive positions and preserved the full line of its Vedic continuity.

During the period that followed, the prominent Vedic deities slowly faded out. New rites and ceremonies came into vogue, new ideas emerged out of the original seed-thoughts, the old gods, after having lost their true meaning hung on for a time, but were ultimately dispossessed by the great Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Still, there was no question of any decay of religion in all this change. Sri Aurobindo says that there was in this Purano-tantrik age "a farther widening and furthering of psychic and spiritual experience." Whatever the European critic or the Indian reformer may say, this new stage in religious evolution was far from being a degradation of the earlier religion, but rather an effort, largely successful, to raise the level of the popular mind to a higher and deeper range of spiritual experience. The adverse criticism has mostly proceeded from an ignorance of the real sense of this new worship. No doubt, a great deal of the psychic knowledge of the Vedic sages was absent, but at the same time much new knowledge was also being developed. After all, it is the essential significance and aim of this development and the intrinsic value of its forms and symbols that we have to see. One important thing we must not lose sight of. To the great majority of the devotees, the Vedic gods were deities presiding over the outward life of the physical cosmos, while the Trinity of the Puranas had an entirely psycho-religious and spiritual meaning, and its more external significance, such as creation, preservation and destruction, was merely its

dependent fringe. The idea developed rapidly that the Trinity was a triune form of the One Supreme and that the Shaktis represented the One Energy of the highest divine Being. Likewise, the idea of the Divinity in man and the conception of divine incarnations on the earth took possession of the popular mind. "The whole of this Purano-Tantrik system", says Sri Aurobindo, "if looked at in its totality and real significance and with an intelligent understanding of its forms, is an endeavour to raise man from a basis of generalised psycho-religious experience through knowledge, works and love to a supreme spiritual experience and spiritual status." It is, however, pointed out that man has to climb still higher to attain his spiritual goal. The stages traversed already make the further ascent inevitable. The three successive stages have been marked thus: "The first stage makes possible the preparation of the natural external man for spirituality; the second takes up his outward life into a deeper mental and psychical living and brings him more directly into contact with the spirit and divinity within him; the third should render him capable of taking up his whole mental, psychical, physical living into a first beginning at least of a generalised spiritual life." Sri Aurobindo says that this endeavour has already manifested itself in India in her latest philosophies and in the teachings of her Saints and *bhaktas* and *yogis*. It has not made very much headway, because it has synchronised with a period of general cultural decline, but at the same time it has helped to prepare the ground for the future. If Indian religious culture is to survive, it is in this direction and not in a revival of the Puranic system that evolution must turn.

RECAPITULATION

We are now in a position to grasp the true governing idea of Indian religion and culture and to realise the import of its historic evolution. To get a right view of the civilisation of this country, we must keep to the central and living things in it and not be carried away by accidents and details. We have considered the division into four *varnas* and seen how that division changed its character from age to age and ultimately became stereotyped and conventional. We have seen how the development of individual life proceeded along four definite stages (*ashramas*). We have also noticed how man's works in life were actuated by four distinct motions—desire, interest, duty (social and religious) and liberation. Sri Aurobindo has indicated the inter-dependence between *Varnashrama* and the four urges,—*Kama, Artha, Dharma, Moksha.*

India in her progress through the centuries, has followed her own characteristic lines, the three stages whereof have been briefly indicated. The West has pursued its own path. Whether its more recent turn towards the inner Truth is a "relapse to barbarism or the high natural outcome of its own increasing and ripened culture" is for itself to decide. What is important for us to note is "that the progressive growth of man into self, into God, into spiritual existence by the development of our natural into our divine being is for Indian thinking the significance of life and the aim of human existence." Indian culture has worked along two co-ordinated and mutually helpful lines. It has firstly striven to turn the widening life of the individual and the group from the natural to the spiritual. Secondly, it has tried to keep that high aim before the mind and to bring all earthly action under its elevating influence. "That gave",

says Sri Aurobindo, "its tone and turn to his (the individual's) thought and action and produced the subtler sensitiveness to the spiritual appeal and the greater readiness to turn to the spiritual effort which are even now distinguishing marks of the Indian temperament. That readiness is, in fact, what we mean by the spirituality of the Indian people."

THREE PRINCIPAL TYPES OF INDIVIDUALS

Unlike most other religious systems, Indian religion has admitted the peculiar element of distinction between votary and votary based on his personal capacity—*adhikara.* It lays down that all men are not equally fit to receive the highest Truth of God and man, and to ascend the topmost peaks of divine experience. There are three principal types of votaries corresponding to the three gunas—*tamas, rajas,* and *sattwa*—and akin to the classification of *Sadhakas,* mentioned by the Tantrik teachers—the animal, the heroic and the divine.

It can be easily seen that these types correspond to the three stages of the growing human consciousness. The classification is easy enough to understand. For the first, the *tamasic* or the *rajaso-tamasic,* was recommended the observance of rites and ceremonies, outward rules and injunctions, attractive symbols and pageants. The second type, *rajasic* or *sattwo-rajasic,* started with these things but got behind them to the hidden psychical truths and rational conceptions, to the aesthetic and ethical values. From the second stage, man rises through the philosophic, psycho-spiritual, higher aesthetic and higher ethico-religious seeking to the *sattwic* type, to the highest stage of spiritual evolution, which opens to him the portals of the Light,

Power and Bliss of the Supreme Spirit. But these divisions are not unbridgeable. In the complex human nature distinctions can always be surpassed. For the man who feels the call there is always a way of escape. "The call itself is", Sri Aurobindo says, "a sign of election." He has only to find the way and the guide. The conception of the *Ishta-devata,* the chosen object of adoration, is also peculiar to Indian religion. The individual may according to his own nature and his capacity of spiritual intelligence choose his own deity, and his choice is absolutely unfettered. The individual has likewise complete freedom to elect his *Ishta-guru,* his own spiritual preceptor, who may not even belong to his own community. Obedience to the family preceptor, worship of the family deity, observance of family custom, these are of importance to man as a social being. His *Ishta-guru* and *Ishta-devata* are his own cherished spiritual possessions and belong to a more developed stage of consciousness. All over India, there are famous Muslim shrines where innumerable Hindu devotees offer regular worship. A large number of Muslim holy men have been revered as gurus by Hindus throughout the last few centuries. These are all instances of the spiritual freedom of the individual in India. Islam, in spite of its being an assertive and dogmatic religion, has allowed its followers in India a great deal of latitude in the matter of personal devotion. This is the result as much of Persian Sufism as of the broad-mindedness of the Hindu Bhaktas.

THE APPLICATION OF INDIAN RELIGION TO LIFE

We have next to see how this carefully graded and complex system of religion in India was tacked on to the general culture of life. The most difficult and delicate part of the life of a civilised people is that which relates

to thought and reason. This was never lost sight of in India. "The business of the ancient rishis was not only to know God, but to know the world and life and to reduce it by knowledge to a thing well understood and mastered, with which the reason and will of man could deal on assured lines and on a safe basis of wise method and order. The ripe result of this method was the *Shastra,–Shastra,* in the old sense of any systematised teaching and science. A high scientific and philosophic spirit pervaded it all. *Dharmashastra* for social organisation, *Dhanurveda* for archery, *Ayurveda* for medicine, *Arthashastra* for economics, *Shilpashastra* for art, *Geetashastra* for music and so on, right down to *Chauryashastra* for scientific burglary. A scientific spirit of enquiry was carried by the old Indian culture into all activities. The minutest and the most colossal things were examined with equal attention–placed, organised and rigidly regulated. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "the attempt was to reduce each to a theoretical and practical order founded on detailed observation, just generalisation, full experience, intuitive, logical and experimental analysis and synthesis, in order to enable man to know always with a just fruitfulness for life and to act with the security of right knowledge." We shall see later on, in connection with Indian art, how thorough and logical, as well as intuitive was the ancient Indian method of enquiry. Yet a man like Archer could see in Indian culture nothing but a lazy lack of precision, coupled with great gullibility. The ancient rishi did not cut up life into small bits. He looked upon all knowledge as one, and believed that it all led up by degrees to the highest knowledge. On this knowledge was based the whole right practice of life, the *Dharma.* In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "Each man, class, kind, species and each activitity of soul, life, mind, body, has its *Dharma.* The individual must live

according to the law of his nature harmonised with the law of his social type and class, for the nation, and in a higher reach of his being,—for humanity."

This outlook is in perfect consonance with the conception of the four *varnas*, the four *ashramas* and the four urges of man, that we have already dealt with. All aspects of the *Dharma* were linked up in an ascending unity. But a religious sanction, a reminder of the gods and planes beyond, an ultimate divine transcendence was put behind all *Dharma* and Ethics. The system of Indian culture was never narrow and did not in any way discourage the aesthetic and even the hedonistic urge. "Poetry, the drama, song, dance, music, the greater and lesser arts were placed under the sanction of the rishis and were made instruments of the spirit's culture." A very high synthetic ideal indeed! So much so that the "Ramayana" and the "Mahabharata" were considered not only as *Itihasas* but also *Dharma-shastras*. Referring to Vaishnava religion, a cult of love and beauty, where even the desires and images of the sensuous life were by its vision turned into figures of a divine soul-experience, Sri Aurobindo remarks, "Few religions have gone so far as this immense catholicity or carried the whole nature so high in its large puissant and many-sided approach to the spiritual and the infinite." The social, political and economic life of man was also taken up in earnest in this large comprehensive culture. Great *Shastras* relating to man's activity along these lines were built up and even his most externally vital life was placed under the control of the rishis and the gods and linked up at every point with the religious idea. Through the idea of Yuga-dharma, spirit of the age, a way was left open for slow progressive changes in the social law. As to the spiritual liberty of the individual, we have shown already

how it was provided for by the wearing of the ochre garb, which was taken as a sort of notice by him to society that he was placing himself outside the pale of social discipline, and under a larger and nobler discipline of the ideal side of *Dharma* and a still wider freedom of the spiritual life. The application of the Indian ideals to man's many-sided life became an ascending stair-case which led him steadily and harmoniously to a spiritual life, a divine life, up at the top. There were thus created a *yoga* of knowledge, a *yoga* of works and a *yoga* of love and devotion—suitable particularly for the thinking man, the dynamic man and the emotional man respectively. Critics of the Archer type find it easy to say glibly that the idea underlying Indian culture is fantastic and ephemeral. Such critics need not be taken seriously, as they deliberately close their eyes to things they do not want to see. The severe castigation that Archer has received at Sri Aurobindo's hands is sufficient for the time. We shall only say this that these poor people are not always deliberately blind. Entrenched behind their prejudices, intoxicated with their vital success, they miss the whole aim of Indian civilisation, they do not understand how there can be a spiritual side of things mundane. Sri Aurobindo says, "Our critic is never tired of harping on India's misfortunes, and he attributes them all to the incurable badness of our civilisation, the total absence of a true and sound culture." Now, misfortune does not prove the absence of culture any more than good fortune proves the presence thereof. Greece and Italy have both been incompetent and unfortunate, and yet where would European culture have been without these two countries? There is no call for us to go at length into Archeric fulminations. But there is one statement of his which we would notice in passing. He said in his book that Europe was trying to get out of her

barbarism while India was stagnating in her deficiencies. The history of Europe (we include America therein) during the last four decades does not indicate any improvement in her temperament since the days of the St. Bartholomew Massacre, the Sicilian Vespers or the inhuman atrocities in Ireland. As to India stagnating in her deficiencies, there is good reason to say that India of today is suffering very much more for her insensate imitation of European ideas and methods than for her sticking to her own old ways. She has got to get out of her inferiority complex, her slave mentality and learn to look back with respect on all that the past centuries have built up for her. What is the use of stagnating in the smug, self-satisfied philistinism that she has learnt from nineteenth century England!

Modern Europe has immensely developed practical reason, science and efficiency. India developed man's spiritual mind working on his other faculties and exceeding them. In future, we have to strive after an even more perfectly harmonious development of all our activities and to evolve fresh powers. We shall gain nothing by passing hasty judgments on the culture of others. Our duty is to go ahead with a sturdy faith in our own future—a future true to the past in spirit, but ever creating new forms. It is our business to find out the truth of our own culture and determine what is there in it that has saved it from the fate which has overtaken so many ancient civilisations—Egypt and Babylon and Assyria and Persia, not to speak of Atlantis. We must not in judging the value of a civilisation be carried away by its mere professions, but find out what it has actually achieved. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, we have to "strike a balance, to see things in the whole, to observe whither we are tending and use a large secular

vision; otherwise it would be difficult to keep an unfailing faith in the destinies of the race."

There is no doubt that life in ancient and mediaeval India was not, by any means, lacking in any of the things which make human existence fruitful and interesting. On the contrary, it was marvellously colourful. Sri Aurobindo has characterised Archer's contention that "whatever India has achieved in life and creation and action has been done in spite of the governing ideas of her culture" as unsound, unnatural and grotesque. Sri Aurobindo's own conclusion on this point is emphatic—"India's best achievements in thought, art, literature, society were the logical outcome of her religious, philosophical culture." Whatever judgment one may pass on India's ideas and institutions, it has got to be admitted that she has lived greatly during the centuries gone by. On this point there is the independent testimony of a whole host of discriminating foreigners from many lands—Hiouen Tsang, Fa Hian, Megasthenes, Alberuni, Ibn Batuta, Bernier, Tavernier, Manucci Abbé Dubois, Comte De Boigne &c. We can well ask an honest critic of our history,—In what field has India failed to achieve fame, where has she failed in her attempt to create on a large scale? We need not take our stand on India's undoubted contribution to world-thought in metaphysics and spiritual philosophy. Her life has indeed been most wonderfully many-sided. Says Sri Aurobindo, "Life in its largest sense is the great web of our internal and external action, the play of *Shakti*, the play of *Karma*, it is religion and philosophy and thought and science and poetry and art, drama and song and dance and play, politics and society, industry and commerce and trade, adventure and travel, war and peace, conflict and unity, victory and defeat and aspiration and vicissitudes, the thoughts, emotions,

words, deeds, joys and sorrows which make up the existence of man." India has not been merely or even principally a land of metaphysical speculations, nor a pantomimic stage of strange hues and fancies, but as much a home of solid realities, of unshaken resolutions and doughty deeds, as any other centre of civilisation. We have already stressed several times the many-sided richness and depth of her achievements. She has dreamt great dreams for the race, but, what is more, she has striven hard to make her dreams real. Her wide cultural contacts with many other nations are well-known. There is no room, here, to go into what has been designated as India's cultural conquests. Some few things have already been referred to. We have also mentioned above that India has taken freely from other countries in the past and assimilated what she has taken. The following extract from Sri Aurobindo's writings aptly sums up the many-sided character of India's past life:—

"India has not only had the long roll of her great saints, sages, thinkers, religious founders, poets, creators, scientists, scholars, legists, she has had her great rulers, administrators, soldiers, conquerors, heroes, men with the strong active will, the mind that plans and the seeing force that builds. She has warred and ruled, traded and colonised and spread her civilisation, built polities and organised communities and societies, done all that makes the outward activity of great peoples".

Part II

INDIAN SOCIETY AND POLITICS

SOCIO-POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

WE SHALL now go into India's past history and show in some detail how her sages and statesmen strove to organise her social and political life and sought to harmonise individual life with the life of the group. For it is incumbent on all civilised peoples to tackle and solve this problem. But each country has, in the past, pursued its own method, the method most consonant with the nature and temperament of its people. Rome in the days of her glory lived most in her warriors and rulers, statesmen and jurists. Greece dwelt in the setting of her city states and sought to excel in her intellectual and aesthetic pursuit. In India, on the other hand, an uninterrupted chain of saints and spiritual teachers has aspired to lead her people on the path of fulfilment—from the ancient *rishis* and Buddha and Mahavira to Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Nanak, Ramdas and Tukaram, and from them on to Ramakrishna. Dayanand, Vivekananda and, let us add, now that he is no longer present in the flesh, Sri Aurobindo. These were the repositories of the secret of secrets in Indian humanity, but they selected for the carrying out of their worldly ideals a splendid array of fighters and statesmen and rulers—such as Chandragupta and Chanakya, Ashoka and Lalitaditya, Harsha and Pulakeshi, Parantaka of the Chola Mandala, Krishnaraya of Vijayanagar, the Gupta emperors, the Pala emperors and last but by no means the least, Shiva Chhatrapati. A few lines from Sri Aurobindo's writings would give a sufficiently clear idea of the achievements of our ancestors in the field of politics. "In ancient India there was the life of republics, oligarchies, democracies, small kingdoms of which no detail of history

now survives, afterwards the long effort at empire-building, the colonisation of Ceylon and the Archipelago, the vivid struggles that attended the rise and decline of the Pathan and Moghul dynasties, the Hindu struggle for survival in the south, the wonderful record of Rajput heroism and the great upheaval of national life in Maharashtra penetrating to the lowest strata of society, the remarkable episode of the Sikh Khalsa." It should be noted here that the modern renaissance in India, so called, is merely a repetition of what has occurred, again and again, throughout her history. The civilisation of India never until its last phase of atrophy showed an inability to respond to its environments. Never were there any customs and manners rigid and unchangeable except, again, at the lowest point of decadence. Widow remarriages, inter-caste marriages, undertaking of sea voyages and many similar things were permitted or forbidden according to the need of the hour. There is another trait of our culture which we should remember—"In ancient India, though the higher classes led and had the lion's share of the force and wealth of life, the people too lived, and until much later times, intensely though on a lesser scale and with a more diffused and less concentrated force. Their religious life was more intense than that of any other country; they drank in with remarkable facility the thoughts of the philosophers and the influence of the saints". This trait explains the phenomenal response made by the Maratha peasants, not only to the devotional chants of Tukaram, but also to the call of the nation-builders, Ramdas and Shivaji. It also accounts for the rally of the Jat peasants of the Punjab round Guru Nanak and their response, when necessity arose, to the war drum of Guru Govind and the Khalsa. Behind all such apparently political upheavals there was the urge of the spirit. The belief of all from top to bottom, that Udaipur belonged to

Eklinga Mahadeva, or that the Travancore Kingdom was the property of the deity Padmanabha, were only particular instances of a more or less general faith.

THE GOAL OF UNITY

As is clear from all that we have said so far, Archer is an out-and-out uncompromising vilifier of Indian culture. He has not been able to see any good points in it at all. But we may very well suspect his *bona fides.* It cannot be that a man of education, even a one-sided education, should fail to realise simple axiomatic truths. We feel sure that this critic's apparent lack of understanding was not honest. The motive behind his (now forgotten) book was to convince his countrymen that Indians were not fit for political freedom, that they had never shown any ability to govern themselves honestly, effectively and in a progressive spirit. Miss Mayo wrote her book, "Mother India," with a similar motive. Both Archer and Mayo have found their repose in oblivion and India has earned her freedom. There is no call for us to defend our culture. But it is imperative that we should ourselves have a clear idea of what our ancestors had achieved for themselves and for humanity. A long period of political dependency has so affected our mentality that our action for the time being is apt to be jerky. But we cannot afford to commit blunders at this very critical stage of our history. Let us firmly realise that India's political freedom has been brought about by Providence for a definite object, that it is only the spirit of the Indian nation that can save the world. This is our mission; else the mere creation of a new political unit would be meaningless. This has been pointed out by Sri Aurobindo in unmistakable language. Indian unity has been the goal of our political and social evolution right through history. In one name or

another, in one form or another, it was well-nigh achieved more than once. It may suit the feather-headed critic to declaim that India has ever been a conglomeration of thousands of little warring states and tribes. But if the Olympic games can be said to be a manifestation of Greek unity, surely the constant daily repetition of the names of the seven great rivers of Ind and the periodic visits paid by pious Hindus to the temples flung far and wide over the country—from Kedarnath in the northern snows to Kanya Kumari at the southernmost point of the peninsula, from Dwarka on the western sea to Puri on the Bay of Bengal are symbolic of essential unity in the Indian consciousness from very olden times. It is this consciousness of a significant stream of culture, largely spiritual in its nature, that can alone help us to build up a bright future in the resplendent light of our past, to establish a resuscitated Aryabhoomi that would, by God's grace, lead to safety the tottering top-heavy world of today.

About our old ideals Sri Aurobindo remarks in a general way—"The ideals that governed the spirit and body of Indian society were of the highest kind, its social order secured the inexpugnable basic stability, the strong life force that worked in it was creative of an extraordinary energy, richness and interest, and the life organised remarkable in its opulence, variety in unity, beauty, productiveness, movement. All the records of Indian history, art and literature bear evidence to a cultural life of this character." And enough remains even in our days of decadence to remind us, however faintly, of our past glory. But in appraising old Indian civilisation we have to be careful about the tests we apply. In his 'Human Cycle', Sri Aurobindo has hinted that to the ordinary European, the Asiatic is an uncivilised person because he does not wear

the European garb and does not converse in a European tongue. Of course we know that things are much better today. Still we have to go ahead a great deal yet. For the test applied even now by the western critic and his native admirer today is: how near to the European is an oriental custom or an oriental institution or a work of oriental art or a dish of oriental cookery,—the nearer it is to the European, the more acceptable it is as a manifestation of culture! There have been many musicians for instance in the last half century, who have set to common European tunes—parodies of the *Rule Britannia* or the *Marseillaise* or even of a street song like *Funiculi Funicula*—solemn national or religious anthems. The reason is always the same. People like these have lost touch with their own ideals and are engaged in a servile imitation of an alien culture. The paintings of Ravi Varma, the political constitution of India once drawn up by Sapru in close imitation of the British Constitution, numerous schools and colleges on the European model, are all instances of the same complex. One wonders if we have been able to shake off this mentality even today. A very ludicrous example may be cited. If we find Indian house-wives of today neglecting the beautiful and elaborate art of cookery evolved by their grandmothers and wasting their time in turning out imitations, more or less crude, of Western roasts and chops and puddings, we can but feel sad. Coomaraswamy once remarked that he did not stand for an India politically free, where no classical *dhrupads* were sung, where people had forgotten the art of weaving shawls and brocades and muslims (we can add on a lower scale, where a luscious *rasagolla* or *sandesh*, a feather-weight *phulka*, a delicious *pillao* or a fragrant *halwa* is unknown, for these are all objects of art that the nation has taken centuries to evolve). Throwing away one's inherited

culture is too heavy a price to pay for political freedom. Man craves for freedom only to be able to develop his individual and group existence to the fullest extent without being hampered in any way. The key note of the Indian mind has always been spirituality. Sri Aurobindo says, "The master-idea that has governed the life, culture, social ideas of the Indian people has been the seeking of man for his true spiritual self and the use of life as a frame and means for that discovery and for man's ascent from the ignorant and natural into the spiritual existence".

This was the goal of the old Indian sage when he gave a form to his group life. There was nothing mechanical or superficial about it. The synthetic mind of the *rishi* visualised an organisation where there was no clash of interests, where the King, the baron, the merchant, the artisan and the peasant worked in perfect harmony for the good of the individual, the classes and the whole nation. A mere change in the system of government never meant much to the true Indian mind. We have seen already how in the eighteenth century our culture entered upon a period of decadence. The old spirit of Indian unity was also well-nigh lost in the sordid scramble for power that ensued after the death of Aurangzeb. With the rise of the East India Company to paramountcy, our national vitality sank to a very low ebb indeed. The collapse of the Mutiny, fifty years later, brought on a spirit of numb despondency and the leaders of Indian thought appeared to acquiesce in the British rule and devoted themselves to making the best of a bad job. With the help of English friends, they launched forth a mild agitation for a mild sort of self-government. But a perusal of the resolutions passed by the National Congress for over two decades would make it clear that the Indian people were being asked to be satisfied with only a few

crumbs here and there. From the beginning of the New Century, however, it became apparent that the Leviathan was waking up at last and that there was no question of satisfying him with any measured-out doles. All this is recent history and the change from the mendicant politics of the early years to the fearless and vigorous self-assertion of the so-called Swadeshi period is known to all. How this new movement assumed various forms, more or less militant, is also a matter of common knowledge. Swadeshi and Boycott, non-violent non-cooperation, a definite demand for Swaraj, terrorism, armed conflict, the call of "Quit India"—all played their parts. But what we have to grasp firmly is that it was India's spiritual consciousness which suddenly woke up and vivified the will of the nation and gave a directive to its political aspiration and effort. The following passage from Sri Aurobindo's writings is pregnant with meaning:—"It was in religion that the soul of India awoke and triumphed. There were always indications, always great fore-runners, but it was when the flower of the educated youth of Calcutta bowed down at the feet of an illiterate Hindu ascetic, a self-illuminated mystic without a single trace or touch of the alien thought or education upon him that the battle was won." The going forth of Vivekananda, marked out by the Master as the heroic soul destined to take the world between his two hands and change it, was the first visible sign to the world that India was awake not only to survive but to conquer. The Swadeshi and Swaraj movements embodied a stern determination on the part of our people "to be ourselves" in every way. Through Bankim's immortal hymn, 'Bande Mataram', the soul of India spoke in terms that admitted of no doubt as to our meaning. Sri Aurobindo says, "Once that vision has come to a people, there can be no rest, no peace, no further slumber till the temple has been made

ready, the image installed and the sacrifice offered. A great nation which has had that vision can never again bend its neck in subjection to the yoke of a conqueror. * * * The feeling of almost physical delight in the touch of the mother-soil, of the winds that blow from Indian seas, of rivers that stream from Indian hills, in the hearing of Indian speech, music, poetry, in the familiar sights, sound, habits, dress, manners of our Indian life, this is the physical root of that love. The pride in our past, the pain in our present, the passion for the future are its trunk and branches". India has now got her freedom and the spurious political agitation of the Western type that she had undertaken has, let us hope, received its quietus. Providence has granted her liberty because her liberty, unity and greatness have become necessary to the world. But she has yet to work hard to remain true to herself in the midst of so many ideologies trying to lure her from her own proper path of evolution. She has attained freedom in order to fulfil her destiny and not to become a successful mimic. Nor can she accept as a permanent arrangement, the unfortunate fissure that has been thrust on her; it is contrary to the whole spirit of her past history. She has got to be one single strong and truth-conscious unit. Then alone can she fulfil her divine mission.

India's political incompetence is a myth, pure and simple. It is born partly of ignorance and partly of spite. She has always realised that a sound political, economic and social life must form part of a general progress towards perfection—individual perfection in a collectively perfect existence. The ideals that inspired Indian society were of the highest quality, the life that it organised was stable, rich and beautiful. History, art and literature amply testify to this fact. Archer's charge is that India never succeeded

in achieving a free and united political organisation, that her economic system was static and rigid, that her society was caste-ridden and semi-barbaric. A perusal of the *Mahabharata* alone would convince an honest seeker that our civilisation had achieved a very high measure of efficiency in all branches of national life. It is Archer's misfortune that he has not the sense to realise it.

The unification that creates a nation—a true nation—is never a mechanical agglomeration, an arrangement entered into for outward purposes. We are not speaking of India in particular. It is true of all really national existence. A nation is an organic living being with a common body and mind and soul. Like the individual it has its cycle of birth and growth, of youth and old age, and, if the process of decay is not arrested, the cycle ends in death. Many ancient nations have perished thus in the past—like the Egyptians, the Assyrians and the Babylonians. On the other hand, India and China still live and flourish. Indeed, China, today, under a materialistic ideology which lays over-stress on outward economic factors and suppresses the full play of the multi-mooded human mind—contemporary China under Communism is seriously endangering her own historic continuity. But, whatever her future may hold, her past is highly significant and can be compared with India's. There must be some good reason why these two old peoples have lived through so many cataclysms and why, throughout the centuries gone by, in the midst of such dire vicissitudes, they have preserved the thread of their civilization and are still able to give wonderful signs of vitality. Our present concern is with India. With renewed vigour and fresh enthusiasm India is preparing to fulfil herself in the world in the spirit of her age-long culture. The true nature of her polity, Sir Aurobindo says, "can

only be realised if we look at it not as a separate thing, a machinery independent of the rest of the mind and life of the people, but as a part of and in its relation to the organic totality of the social existence."

THE GROWTH OF THE POLITICAL ORGANISATION

The foreign onlooker is often prepared to concede that in the early Vedic period the Indians were a freer and more robust people, but he hastens to add with great joy that this old type rapidly degenerated—socially, under the pressure of a despotic priestly theocracy, and politically under the crushing burden of an absolute autocracy. It will be our business to show that this attitude of men like Archer is largely due to ignorance. He is incapable of seeing the difference between the Lama rule in Tibet and the rule of the Kshatriya King in India advised and guided by his Brahmin spiritual teachers and legists and jurists, men like Vasishta and Manu and Yajnavalkya. He is also unable to differentiate between typical Indian rulers like Dasaratha or Janaka or Pandu on the one hand and typical autocrats like Nebuchadnazzar and Sargon and Hamurabbi and Darius. He cannot see that a ruler like Rama was as much a limited monarch as Charles II or George III of England; the difference is that his power was limited by *Dharma,* and not by an elected chamber of representatives. Sita was banished by Rama to the forest at the bidding of the people, though it pained him bitterly to do so. Likewise, when commanded by his preceptor in the name of *Dharma,* he had to cut off the head of a Sudra ascetic. It was *Dharma,* then, which was the supreme power in the old Hindu state. We shall come back to this anon. Meanwhile let us trace very briefly the growth of the Indian political organisation from its earliest stages.

The very earliest form of this organisation was the tribal system (*kula*), wherein all the free men of the tribe were equal, and exercised the right of regulating the affairs of their group through their elders. These political and social units were at first, and for a good long time, determined by their Kula or descent. But as the clans ceased to be migratory and settled down on the lands they cultivated, they began to describe themselves as people of such and such a locality. The cluster of huts they put up acquired a geographical name. There the dwellers organised themselves into village communities; they met together for regulating their communal life, for arranging communal worship or sacrifices and for conducting their affairs of peace and war. Naturally, for the due performance of all these functions they elected a leader or chief. This chief was at the beginning for several centuries just one of themselves, carrying on his own business or profession in the community. But, with the march of time, this office became hereditary in most places. Under each hereditary ruler were grouped several autonomous villages, with whose internal affairs the ruler hardly ever interfered. In some localities, however, the original village community developed along democratic or oligarchic lines. The names of some of these little republics—such as Kshudraka, Yaudheya, Malavaka, all in the North—still survive. But in all old Indian States there was, as Sri Aurobindo says, "a strong democratic element and even institutions that present a certain analogy to the parliamentary form", but (and this is very important) "these features were of India's own kind and not at all the same thing as modern parliaments and modern democracy".

The simple primitive form of society, that we have touched upon already, was more or less common to all

Indo-European peoples. The later development out of this original form was also, up to a certain stage, much the same in all Aryan communities. But in India, some striking characteristics appeared gradually owing to the peculiar mentality of the Indo-Aryan people; as time went on, these "became prominent characteristics and gave a different stamp to the political, economic and social factors of Indian civilization." The hereditary principle gradually got a firm hold on society. The original division of the tribe into four castes on the basis of *guna* and *Karma*—temperament and occupation— became in time a rigid classification. A priest's son became a priest, a warrior's son a warrior, a merchant's son a merchant, an artisan's or peasant's son an artisan or peasant, and so on; hereditary kingship was established, supported by a caste of fighting barons. But above this monarch and above his warriors, there was another caste, a body of sage priests who performed the ritual and interpreted the *Dharma,* both growing elaborate with the growth of society. From the earliest times, there was in the mind of the Indian people a religious and spiritual tendency which attached great importance to sacrifices and ceremonials. This enabled the Brahmin caste to rise to the top. This caste was carefully trained to function as preceptor and priest, legist and jurist, interpreter of Vedic lore. Some such development took place in other ancient countries too, but it was nowhere so well-marked and well-defined as in India. We have spoken of the four *Varnas* already at some length, and shown clearly wherein, according to Sri Aurobindo, its great importance lay in the path of social evolution. The Brahmin rose to the top because society attached a great deal of importance to ceremonials. The only people who could have matched the Brahmins in intelligence were the Kshatriyas, but they were far too busy for centuries in the work of conquest

and consolidation to bother about religious matters. They left the intellectual field for the time being to the sacerdotal caste. But later on, when the work of administration and defence did not wholly occupy the king and his barons, they turned their attention to the affairs of the spirit and gave them a vigorous and straightforward turn. From the intricate and elaborate sacrifices of the later Vedic period to the direct seeking of the Divine formulated by the Upanishads was undoubtedly a very definite step. The names of Buddha and Krishna and Janaka and a whole host of other *rajanyas* are connected with this stage of spiritual uplift in India. We should note, however, that the Brahmins in India as a class never usurped the kingly powers as in so many other countries. In spite of a legend like that of Parasuram and his determination to exterminate the warrior caste, there is no reason to think that there was ever any widespread struggle for power between these two castes,—nothing like what happened continually in Europe in the middle ages. Sri Aurobindo's words are significant: "But the Brahmins in spite of their ever-increasing and finally predominant authority did not and could not usurp in India the political power. As sacrosanct priests and legists and spiritual preceptors of the monarch and the people, they exercised a very considerable influence, but the real or active political power remained with the king, the Kashatriya aristocracy and the commons".

A most wonderful figure in old India for some time was the *rishi* or sage, a lofty spiritual personality born in any of the four castes but exercising authority over all by his higher experience and knowledge. He gave wise advice to kings and acted sometimes as their *guru;* he evolved new ideas of group life and applied them for the gradual progress of society and the state. In the Indian mind all this

was part of *Dharma*. The *rishi's* function was to put the spiritual stamp on the mind of the nation in an enduring manner. A careful study of the two great epics would provide us with innumerable instances of how the legists and teachers of a later age constantly referred back to the sayings and precepts of these ancient sages. Sri Aurobindo sums up thus the connection between the ancient precepts and the drawing up of the new codes, "Whatever the developments of the Indian socio-political body in later days, this original character still exercised its influence even when all tended at last to become traditionalised and conventionalised instead of moving forward constantly in the steps of a free and living practice."

MONARCHY IN INDIAN POLITICS

The evolution of the early polity varied in different parts of the land. Ordinarily, the control of the King increased and he developed into a centre, head and unifying factor of the State, growing ever more complex. But for a long time "the strong and enduring vitality of city or regional or confederate republics" held the royal authority in check. The king either remained as the executive head of the republic for a fixed period or disappeared altogether. This came about sometimes naturally and peacefully but sometimes it was brought about by a kind of revolution. There were also instances of alternating monarchical and republican forms of government. In some states, however, the republican form took firm root and lasted over many centuries. Like-wise there were States, where the administration was carried on by an oligarchical senate. It is necessary for the average Indian student of history to know that he need not go either to Athens or to Venice to study government of a State by all the people or by a

few people. India in the past made experiments in many forms of Government, but she laid stress not on its outward form but on its true inward character. It is unfortunate that we have not so far been able to learn very much in detail about the ancient republics and oligarchies, but there is clear evidence that they existed and earned high repute for both civil administration and military organisation. "There is an interesting dictum", says Sri Aurobindo, "of Buddha that so long as the republican institutions were maintained in their purity and vigour, a small state of this kind would remain invincible even by the arms of the powerful and ambitious Magadhan monarchy". The European of the Nineteenth Century cast a spell on the Indian mind and forced it to believe in the political incompetence of old India. The Witanagemot of old England was boosted as a democratic institution and the value of the old Indian city and village assemblies slurred over. But Indian political incompetence is a myth and we have got to remember that the republic states in India were strong and well established in the Sixth Century B.C. and outlasted the brilliant but short life of the city states in Greece. Some of these Indian states, says Sri Aurobindo, "appear to have enjoyed a longer and more settled history of vigorous freedom than republican Rome. They were strong and virile enough to cope with the mighty empires of Chandragupta and Asoka." Still they never developed the aggressive spirit of Rome and remained content to preserve their own free inner life and their independence. After the Macedonian invasion the country felt the need of larger and more powerful states, and these more centralised units assumed a monarchical form, the republican organisations disappeared and are known today, Sri Aurobindo says, "only by the evidence of coins, scattered references and the testimony of Greek

observers and of contemporary political writers and theorists."

But it is necessary to understand the peculiar character of the older monarchies in India. We have to remind the reader of what we have said already, that Indian polity was never "a separate thing, a machinery independent of the rest of the mind and life of the people". It formed a part of the totality of the group existence. As to the king himself, a certain amount of sanctity and dignity was undoubtedly conceded to him as the symbol of divine power and as the repository of the *Dharma,* but he never attained the autocratic and untrammelled authority of, say, Darius or Sargon, Louis XIV or Aurangzeb. The ancient Indian king was certainly a limited or constitutional monarch. His royal authority was not controlled in the Western or modern way. It was *Dharma* which checked his power. He was certainly responsible for good government and, in all questions of peace and war, he exercised supreme power. Still he could never go contrary to the powers of other public authorities and interests—lesser coparceners of his in the work of administration. "His power", says Sri Aurobindo, "was not personal and it was besides hedged in by safeguards against abuse and encroachment." This can only be understood, if we realise that in the ancient Indian polity *Dharma* was a greater sovereign than the king. *Dharma* was the law that organically formed the life of the people. It was an impersonal authority—sacred and abiding in its spirit. There was no rigidity about it. Its actual form changed from time to time to meet the exigencies of the environment. But the change came from within. No autocratic power could interfere. The Brahmins were the exponents of this law, not its creators. Nor could they order at will any alteration

in it, though as a matter of fact, by their position and influence, they could favour or oppose a tendency to change. The king was the guardian of the *Dharma* and, as guardian, its servant. He was bound to see that it was duly observed, but was himself, both as a person and as a king, subject to it as much as anybody else. And this subjection of the monarch to the law was by no means merely theoretical. The whole group life of the people—social, political, ethical and religious was regulated by it. In the political field, this real living *Dharma* was of immense importance, for it deprived the king of the power of direct legislation and restricted him to the passing of administrative decrees. And these decrees too had to be consistent with the express or implied will of the people which found vent in so many popular institutions (*panchayats* and guilds among others) which shared mandatory powers with the monarchs. The king could not interfere with the religious liberties of his people. Each sect, each community, was free to give shape to its own life. There was no state religion and the monarch was not the religious head of his subjects. A king could, no doubt, personally favour a particular creed but, in Sri Aurobindo's words, "he was bound to respect and support in his public office all the recognised religions of the people". There were no doubt occasional instances of state persecution of a community but these were very rare and seldom lasted long. They can be looked upon as cases of passing violation of the *Dharma*. The social life of the people was likewise immune from royal interference. If a king did legislate in social matters, it was in consultation with the people concerned. All social changes proceeded from within, royal authority seldom interfered with the natural evolution of society.

The all-powerful *Dharma* hedged in the royal power even in the sphere of administration. The political principle of "no taxation without representation", so loudly proclaimed in certain countries, had practical application in the ancient Hindu State. Sri Aurobindo says of the king, "His right of taxation was limited in the most important sources of revenue to a fixed percentage as a maximum and in other directions often by the right of the bodies representing the various elements of the community to a voice in the matter and always by the general rule that his right to govern was subject to the satisfaction and goodwill of the people". This was the rule and not merely a pious wish. In the administration of civil and criminal law, the king was the highest tribunal, but here, too, he was bound to see that it was administered by impartial judges and with the advice of wise Brahmin legists. As the Foreign Minister and the Commander-Chief of the forces, however, the King's power was absolute; he was bound to consult nobody.

In such a state, regulated and controlled by the *Dharma,* there was but little room for autocratic vagaries and royal outrages. Still the law-giver provided for the King's disobedience of the mandate of the *Dharma.* Manu, the greatest of the legists, authorised the people not only to depose an unjust and tyrannical monarch, but also, if they liked, to kill "him like a mad dog". This power solemnly bestowed on the subject by a sage of Manu's standing shows clearly that there was no room in the old Indian polity for a belief in the divine right of kings. This right was completely negatived on two well-known occasions related already; once, when Rama, at the bidding of the sage Vashishta, had, much against his will, to cut off the head of a Sudra yogi, the second time, when this monarch

had, at the behest of his subjects, to banish his beloved and innocent queen. In both cases it was the mandate of the *Dharma* that the King obeyed against his will. Sometimes the people forced their ruler to listen to them by a threat to quit the unrighteous kingdom or to fast unto death. Our old literature is full of such instances. More often, however, the Council of Ministers came to the rescue and prevented further trouble by quietly deposing the Monarch. All these things can be understood only if we understand that the sovereign power in the state was the *Dharma*. It can be affirmed without any hesitation that the old Hindu state, thus regulated by the *Dharma*, was both efficient and beneficent. Whether Mr. Archer's admirers, if any, can understand this or not, it is clear that the evolution of group life in India was a peaceful process and had never to invoke the brutal forces of the Spanish inquisition or of organised massacres like St. Bartholomew or of bloody revolutions like that of the Puritans or the Jacobins or the Bolsheviks. Superficial critics of Indian socio-political culture lose sight of the fact that in the long period of India's history empires and civilisations have endured for centuries, infinitely longer than the empires of the Tudors and Stuarts and Hanovers, of the Valois and the Bourbons, of the Hapsburgs and Romanoffs. Let us then see the stages that socio-political development has passed through.

THE STAGES OF SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The first stage was the primitive Aryan community—the system of the clan and the tribe. The second stage was experimental, when various types and structures were tried. In the third stage, the monarchical state was definitely formed, the king coordinating the various elements in the nation. The unit was regional or imperial according

to political necessity. The last was an era of downfall—stagnation inside and imposition of alien system and alien culture from outside. The first three stages were marked by a solidity in the formation and a sound and potent evolution of the life of the people, slow but sure. So solid and stable were the forms evolved that even in the period of decadence, when the structure crumbled at the top, the basis remained sound and intact for a long time. The survival of an institution like the Village *panchayat* right down to the present century shows clearly the solid nature of the basic Indian polity. This conservative stability, far from showing the political incompetence of the Indian people, indicates rather a remarkable political capacity and instinct. It may lead in time to a newer stage of communal living and a spiritual basis of human group life. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "the long stability of its constructions and the greatness of the life they sheltered is certainly no sign of incapacity." The demand has already begun to appear, though vaguely, in the advanced thought of India that the true basis of human society is spiritual. All future socio-political advance is bound to take that direction. The liberty that India has aimed at throughout has been communal rather than individual. The principle underlying polity has ever been an "organically self-determining communal life". Life in accordance with Dharma, liberty in accordance with the God within, such has the ideal been right from the start. Sri Aurobindo describes the primitive group life in India thus: "The whole people living in its villages, mostly on agriculture, formed in the total a single religious, social, military and political body governing itself in its assembly, *samiti*, under the leadership of the king, as yet without any clear separation of functions or class division of labour".

This kind of arrangement suited the primitive pastoral and agricultural life very well. But as life became more many-sided, a more complex socio-political system had to be evolved, with due regard to the basic principle of "a communal self-determined freedom". The system, at once social and religious, economic and political, of the four-fold order arose to meet this need. We have already had a great deal to say about this system. Krishna found it in existence and based on it his famous path of *Karma Yoga* for man. The four orders I created, said he, in accordance with a man's *guna* and *karma*—quality and occupation—and then proceeded to lay down that each should follow his own *Dharma,* even if it brought him destruction, rather than accept the *Dharma* of another. Each caste, each *guna* is an aspect of the Lord and it is through these various aspects that He manifests Himself in creation. There is thus a divine urge behind the acts of each one of these orders, and it is the sum total of these various activities that makes up the whole action of God in the world. The four orders are, therefore, four instruments of the *Dharma,* each fulfilling the law in its own way. They are very much more than mere economic divisions of society. The system passed successively through the Ideal, the Typal and the Conventional stages. The Brahmin sage came from the head of the Divine, the Kshatriya warrior from His arms, the Vaisya merchant from His thighs and the Sudra servant from His feet. In the earliest times, the system was extremely elastic. Vishwamitra, the great *rishi,* was born of Kshatriya parents. Janaka, a Kshatriya by birth, was a sage of sages. Parashuram and Dronacharya, Brahmins born, were fighters as brave and far-famed as any Kshatriya. Buddha and Krishna, both Kshatriyas by birth, received homage as Teachers from all classes. Gradually "the four orders grew into a fixed social hierarchy," caste and the

divisions were based entirely on heredity. That is to say, based in theory. But as a matter of fact, says Sri Aurobindo, "a series of religious movements kept up even in the later days the essential element of the old freedom, brought the highest spiritual knowledge and opportunity to all doors." Even in the days of decline, days of a rigid division, each caste "had attached to it a spiritual life and utility, a certain social dignity, an education, a principle of social and ethical honour and a place of duty and right in the communal body." These ideas of spiritual utility, of social dignity, of right and liability, were clearly marked fifty years ago. In the days that we worked daily in close contact with village communities in Gujarat and Maharashtra, the conception was clear that all these orders were close participants in a common life, each predominating in its own field. Even the Sudra had a clear voice in the affairs of the community. Class rule, class struggle never to any appreciable extent marred the harmony of old Indian group life. If, therefore, we see foreign critics laying undue emphasis on our caste distinction and consequently on our political incapacity, it is entirely due to the critic's ignorance and blind prejudice.

The nature of the old socio-political organisation and its aim are thus summed up by Sri Aurobindo: "The life of the society was regarded not so much as an aim in itself in spite of the necessary specialisation of parts of its system, but in all its parts and the whole as a great framework and training ground for the education of the human mind and soul and its development through the natural to the spiritual existence." The difference between the development of group life in India and in the West is due to the difference in temperament between the Indian and the Westerner. The Indian mind is more intuitively synthetic and flexible, while the mind of the European is more exclusively intel-

lectual and vital. India, therefore, arrived with a greater facility at a wise and stable synthesis of all natural powers and orders, at an organic coordination that had due regard to the free functioning of all the component parts. This system, though it could not ensure immunity from decadence, (for decadence is the fate of all human systems) gave the Indian state a freedom from organic disturbance and disorder, which has been a source of perennial trouble in the States of the West.

CONTROLLING BODIES

In India, at the top of the political edifice, we find three bodies controlling the affairs of the State—the King in Council, the Metropolitan or Civic Assembly and the General Assembly. The Royal Council was composed of the Ministers, known in later history as the *Ashta-Pradhan.* They were drawn from all four orders. The Vaishyas, made up of merchants, artisans, craftsmen and cultivators— preponderated in society and, in consequence, occupied a large proportion of seats in this council. At least, this was the case in the pre-Buddhist state. Later on, when society was reorganised in the period of Hindu revival, the craftsmen, small traders and agriculturists all sank into the mass of the fourth order and there was a corresponding change in the personnel of the royal council. This council, representative of the whole community, exercised supreme executive power with the King's sanction. The King and Council together did the whole work of government through a system of administrative boards. The circle of Ministers effectively prevented the King's power from becoming arbitrary and unfettered. At times, they went even further, as we have hinted at already. Sri Aurobindo says, "The Ministers in Council could and did often proceed to the

deposition of a recalcitrant or an incompetent monarch and replace him by another of his family or by a new dynasty and it was in this way that there came about several of the historic changes, as for example the dynastic revolution from the Mauryas to the Sungas and again the initiation of the Kanwa line of emperors." But we can never fully understand Indian political theories unless we pay due regard to the main principle that *Dharma* was the sovereign authority to which, the king, his Ministers and his people, all owed absolute allegiance. The relative position of the King in Council and the people is summed up thus by Sri Aurobindo, "The obedience owed by the people was due to the law, the *Dharma*, and to the edicts of the King in council only as an administrative means for the service and maintenance of the *Dharma*". But the *Dharma* had to devise a still more effective check on the autocratic tendencies of the monarch. This was done by the two larger assemblies, already mentioned—the Civic (*paura*) Assembly and the General Assembly of the whole community. The first held its sittings in the capital city (or, later on, in several big cities in an empire). In this *Paura Sabha* sat the representatives of various city guilds and caste bodies. These guilds and caste committees were thus organic self-governing constituents of the larger civic body. The monarch and his council had to pay due regard to the wishes of this assembly as well as to those of its component guilds and caste organisations.

What the *Paura* assembly was to the metropolis and the larger cities, the General Assembly was to the whole community, to the country at large. It was made up of the deputies, electoral heads or principal inhabitants of the townships and villages, but, says Sri Aurobindo, the more opulent people of the different communities exercised a

great deal of influence in it. Even if this body was not democratic in a very modern sense, it expressed faithfully the life and mind of the whole people. Still, not having fundamental legislative powers, it was not like the parliaments of our day. Who, then, in the ancient Indian polity, had the sovereign legislative authority? Not the king in council, not the Civic Assembly, not even the General Assembly. It is not easy for the modern mind to grasp the idea, but it was *Dharma* alone that wielded sovereign authority. All the others exercised functions assigned to them by this *Dharma*. They had only powers of decree and regulation. The Metropolitan and General bodies seem to have sat from day to day and disposed of matters sent up daily to them by the King. Their acts, registered by the King, had the effect of law. But they were by no means restricted to this comparatively subservient position. When it became necessary, the joint session was "consulted in matters of succession, could depose the sovereign, alter the succession at his death, transfer the throne outside the reigning family, act sometimes as a supreme court of law in cases having a political tincture, cases of treason or of miscarriage of justice." Very wide powers indeed! But even ordinarily the royal resolution on all questions of vital interest to the state—e.g. special taxation, large schemes of irrigation, or a great war or sacrifice—had to be ratified by them. The two assemblies sitting jointly, therefore, cooperated with the king's authority, but also, at urgent need, went beyond it.

Whether these marvellous institutions decayed with the lapse of time or whether they were destroyed by impact with outside countries cannot be said for certain. Anyhow, the collapse set in at the top. The need of establishing large empires with a strong centralised government was

felt after the Greek invasion. Also monarchies of the Persian or Babylonian or Macedonian type began to appear in India, possibly in imitation of those countries with their tradition of personal autocratic rule. In these newly-formed empires, such as that ruled over by Chandragupta or Vikramaditya or Lalitaditya or Samudragupta, there was a great gulf between the royal government and the constituent urban and rural self-governing units. This is what occurred in the North. In the South, the old Indian political system continued for many more centuries, though the public assemblies were different in constitution.

The inferior assemblies—that of the *kula* or clan, that of the *jati* or caste, that of the guild, naigama—changed in character, as the State developed into a more and more centralised institution. The *Kula-Sangha* was at first a political body, with the lapse of time it lost its supreme powers and could only administer with a subordinate authority. The *kula* persisted as a socio-religious institution, especially amongst the Kshatriyas, with a clan-*Dharma* of its own. This Dharma developed a very high ideal of courage and chivalry amongst the Rajputs.

The *jati* or caste arose out of the original four orders. Under the stress of various forces, each order split up into so many castes. Every caste had its own *jati-sangha* and *jati-Dharma*. These sub-divisions with their own moots and their own codes played an important part in the growth of the organised state. Sri Aurobindo says, "As the Indian policy in all its institutions was founded on a communal and not on an individual basis, the caste also counted in the political and administrative functioning of the kingdom."

The guilds were mercantile and industrial units. They, too, were originally self-governing institutions, but gradually lost that character and merged into the general urban body along with the caste-*sanghas*. The guild (*naigama*) governments, while they lasted, were something more than mere municipalities.

These little republics—for, republics they undoubtedly were—formed the most tangibly stable basis of the whole system. We should never lose sight of the fact that these were "always true communal unities with an organic life of their own, that they functioned in their own power and not merely as a subordinate part of the machinery of the state." Their activities were manifold and embraced all that concerned the welfare of their people (villagers or citizens, as the case may be)—Police, Justice, Education, Public Works, Charge of Sacred Places etc.

THE SYNTHETIC TURN OF THE INDIAN MIND

The synthetic turn of the Indian mind and life was exemplified as much in the harmony achieved between separate individual rights and communal unity, as in the synthesis of the various ideals of group life in the State,—the monarchic, aristocratic, plutocratic, theocratic and democratic. All these tendencies were fused together in the whole in such a way that the polity "bore the characteristics of none of them nor was yet an accommodation of them or amalgamation whether by a system of checks and balances or by an intellectually constructed synthesis, but rather a natural outward form of the inborn tendencies and character of the complex social mind and temperament."

We have already referred to the growth of large cen-

tralised kingdoms and empires under the stress of new political circumstances. The establishment of the Maurya empire as a direct result of Alexander's invasion was a case in point. But the aggression of the Macedonian was not the only one India had to meet. For several hundred years thereafter a number of savage and powerful tribes went on attacking the North-Western frontier of India—the Scythians, the Huns, the Goths among others. Some of these settled down in the country and were assimilated into the Indian socio-political system. But a large number of invasions had been repelled already by the powerful kings of Ujjain—the great victory at Korur was the culmination of this struggle. Sri Aurobindo says, "The evolution of an organised State authority supervening on this system was necessitated in India as elsewhere partly by the demand of the practical reason for a more stringent and scientifically efficient coordination than was possible except in small areas to the looser natural coordination of life, and more imperatively by the need of a systematical military aggression and defence and international action concentrated in the hands of a single central authority." What is important to remember is that the entire life of the people retained for a long time its first principle and essential working—a co-ordination of self-governing communal units. It never quite lost its character till after the Muslim conquest. Even then it retained a substratum of the conception of the *Dharma* as the sovereign head, which in many parts of the country was accepted, however partially it be, by the alien conquerors. Akbar the great, Ibrahim Jagatguru of Bijapur and Hussain Shah of Gaur-Bengal, along with a number of lesser rulers stand forth as examples of alien monarchs who tried to adopt and adapt the principles of *Dharma-rajya*.

Let the Western critic learn that old India was very far from being incompetent politically. In every direction, she developed her culture along her own lines, in accordance with her own ideals. She evolved her polity by remaining faithful to her own *Dharma* in obedience to the Gita's immortal precept, "It is more meet to die in your own *Dharma,* the *Dharma* of another can only inspire terror in you." Sri Aurobindo summarises thus the achievements of Indian culture, "On the contrary, Indian civilisation evolved an admirable political system, built solidly and with an enduring soundness, combined with a remarkable skill the monarchical, democratic and other principles and tendencies to which the mind of man has leaned in its efforts of civic construction and escaped at the same time the excess of the mechanising turn which is the defect of the modern European State." Why, then, did India fail to achieve unity—asks the Western detractor of our civilisation. He forgets that India is a bit bigger than Switzerland or Belgium or even England. Why has it never been possible to unify Europe in spite of a common religion and in spite of most of its languages being mere dialects of Latin? The real reason for a failure to achieve unity is always the absence of a strong desire to be politically one. Unification by force or as the result of policy is a passing thing. We have seen this exemplified so many times in the Iberian and Scandinavian peninsulas. In India's case, we can say definitely that a mere political oneness effected by an arbitrary centralised rule imposed by conquest was never her aim. The entire basis of her thought and action has always been her spiritual and inward turn. Therefore, what she has sought to create has ever been a spiritual and cultural oneness. Political unification might follow as a result thereof, but would never be her chief aim. A fair critic would always measure the greatness of India's civili-

sation by her own standard, otherwise he would always, like William Archer, be trying to find out the weight of an object with a tape, or its length with a pair of scales. The political unity achieved by the Roman or Assyrian or Persian empire never endured. The Macedonian empire of Philip and Alexander collapsed in a few decades. The Indian ideal of spiritual and cultural oneness not only endured in the past, but is a living force even today and, if we are not very foolish or very unlucky in the future, will build up the great India of the centuries to come. Sri Aurobindo's words are eloquent, "After all, the spiritual and cultural are the only enduring unity and it is by a persistent mind and spirit much more than by an enduring physical body and outward organisation that the soul of a people survives. This is a truth the positive western mind may be unwilling to understand or concede, and yet its proofs are written across the whole history of the ages." Let it be clearly affirmed, then, that a truly great India can only be a *Dharma-rajya* based on spiritual and cultural unity. She must be loyal to her age-old ideal and not be carried away by the lure of rupee-jingling or sabre-rattling in the face of others. For, unless she can fulfil her mission of carrying the message of the Divine to the nations of the earth, there would be no point in her achieving political freedom and political power.

In the closing words of his book on Indian polity, Sri Aurobindo conveys to his countrymen both an assurance and a warning—"The lifeless attempt of the last generation to imitate and reproduce with a servile fidelity the ideals and forms of the West has been no true indication of the political mind and genius of the Indian people. But again amid all the mist of confusion there is still the possibility of a new twilight, not of an evening but a morning *yuga-*

sandhya. 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 for 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 cycle of the occident's success and failure, but still the ancient immemorable 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*."

Part III

INDIAN ART

THE TRUE MEANING OF INDIAN ART

WE SHALL now proceed to present to our readers the true meaning of Indian art as set forth by Sri Aurobindo in his various writings published in the 'ARYA' three decades ago. The extract, we have just given from his 'Indian Polity' can be taken as a key to our understanding of India's achievement in the region of art as well. India has run after the Will-o'-the-wisp too long in her recent history. She must now be true to her own *Dharma,* her own *Swabhava.* When we speak of Indian art, we mean, roughly, the aesthetic side of Indian culture. But art is not wholly the discernment and expression of all beauty. It is rather the expression of the Highest Beauty when it is the same as the Supremest Good and the Supremest Truth. More explicitly, it is not only aesthetic values, but life values and mind values and soul values as well that enter into real Art. These values can pertain to the life of the individual as much as to the life of a people. Every nation that has a distinctive mode of living and thinking develops a national art of its own which expresses the truth behind its life and thought. The art of every nation has likewise its own conventions and technique which are largely incomprehensible to others. This is the reason why oriental art with its own peculiar modes and characteristics was for a long time unappreciated by the West, looked upon as something bizarre and eccentric and called a curio. Thanks to the efforts of Binyon and others, Chinese and Japanese art obtained occidental recognition as *objects*

d'art some decades ago. But India had to wait still longer till Havell and Abanindra and the brilliant galaxy of disciples inspired by them brought forcibly to the notice of Europe in comparatively recent years not only the ancient Indian art, but the renaissance thereof principally in Bengal. In mentioning Havell and Abanindra we are not forgetting Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy who, for a number of decades, was known as the staunchest champion of Eastern art and Eastern culture generally. There is, undoubtedly, an Indian art which is the expression of Indian life and thought, and we have to find out wherein its greatness lies. But just as there is a true Indian art, so there is, and there was even in ancient times, a bogus and fictitious representation thereof. Of pseudo-Indian art of the old days the best example was the sculpture of the Gandhara school, mostly the work of the Greek sculptors of Bactria and their disciples. These carvings in stone have always obtained some recognition from European art connoisseurs because they are so little Indian. Not that they are deficient in technique in any way. The Buddhas carved by the Græco-Bactrian sculptors have very fine features of the Hellenic type; their pose is dignified and their well-proportioned bodies are draped with marked artistic skill. But something is lacking and the beautiful and noble expression on the face does not quite make up for it. Place a Gandhara Buddha side by side with the celebrated Buddha of Sarnath or the Prajnaparamita of Java, and the difference will be perfectly clear. In the first, the beauty depicted is very largely external, while in the two latter something behind the apparent, something nearer to the soul is brought out before the onlooker. More of this anon, when we consider in greater detail Sri Aurobindo's appraisement of Indian statuary.

We have now got a government of our own, and it ought to be quite easy to work out a system of education truly national. In such a system artistic training should find a prominent place side by side with the training in science and literature. It is not necessary that every man should be an artist, that is to say, a creative artist, but it is essential, in Sri Aurobindo's words, that "every man should have the artistic faculty developed, his taste trained, his sense of beauty made habitually active, correct and sensitive." A man so brought up will have no use for the ugly, the vulgar, the crude and the inharmonious in life. Little by little, the life of the nation all round will become attuned to the call of the Spirit within, a call towards absolute Truth, Good and Beauty. It should be our special duty to revive the true spirit of the ancient Indian art. The renaiscence in the art of painting, that commenced some years ago, has justified itself. We have now to see that it does not suffer a setback or get lured into easy and attractive by-paths. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "the taint of occidental ideals and alien and unsuitable methods have to be purged out of our minds."

It has already been mentioned that the Neo-Indian art movement of Havell and Abanindra and their disciples took the Western world by surprise;- this was largely possible because that world was already getting shaky in its allegiance to the old realistic ideals that it had followed so long. The discovery of Indian art following upon the discovery of the art of the Far East has indeed had a salutory effect on the art world of the West. But the effect has been very much more healthy, as Sri Aurobindo points out, on the mind of the Indian himself. He received a most useful shock and was lifted out of the bog of a false imitative culture in which he was wallowing helplessly.

Even so late as sixty years ago, the average "English-educated" Indian revelled in the flashy beauty of Raphael Tuck's calendars and Christmas cards and accepted them as high examples of artistic creation. He had lost his innate sense of beauty, and was prepared to seize upon anything that the masterful European had to offer, however vulgar it might be. But he was not in a position to understand and appreciate any European work of art,—painting or sculpture or music—that was truly classical. A travesty of such art was all that was within his grasp. Sri Aurobindo says, "What more flagrant sign of this debacle could there be than the fact that all educated India hailed the paintings of Raja Ravi Varma, an incompetent imitation of the worst European style, as the glory of the new dawn?" Equally ludicrous was the artistic effort of a highly educated Indian poet who, only fifty years ago, wrote a national anthem of undoubted merit (though a bit too sloppy) and set it to the tune of *Funiculi Funicula*—a topical street song of Naples. However, let us hope that these days of vulgar hybridism have passed away for good, and that we shall never be caught again in the toils of crudeness and incongruity in art—painting or sculpture or architecture or music.

Now, let us pause a while and consider how this vulgarity creeps into the art of a people. In Europe, side by side with true classical art there has existed a pseudo-classical travesty of it by artists devoid of any genius but possessed of a great deal of skill. Sometimes this travesty has been made by an artist to please a plutocratic patron, sometimes it has been to tickle the eyes and ears of the uncultured many in order to achieve a cheap fame,—sometimes bizarre and eccentric works of art have been pushed forward merely to satisfy the vanity of the artist himself. This kind

of thing may happen at the best of times, but if a whole country goes mad in the pursuit of wealth, or when a whole people can think only in terms of utility at the cost of beauty, the effect is clearly seen on the whole artistic output of that people. Nondescript buildings are built, queer pictures are painted, hideous statues are carved, all for the delectation of the wealthy philistine by artists toiling for hire. Some seventy-four years ago, there were some fresco paintings done by a wandering European artist in the house of a very rich merchant in Western India, the most prominent picture being on the ceiling of the big hall depicting the master of the house as Zeus in a chariot driving through the clouds. During the same period palaces and public buildings galore were built all over India in various bizarre styles embodying, say, a Renaissance dome with a Doric facade and pretty little Indo-Saracenic balconies all round. In the Louvre gallery we find a series of large-size paintings done by Reubens in the early seventeenth century representing his patroness, Queen Marie de Medici, a plump middle aged lady, in very bold costumes and poses. It is even said that a head of Christ done by a famous painter was really a portraiture of King Francis I of France. In the Tate Gallery in London today there is a life-size picture of a girl on horse-back which was done by two famous painters in the last century, —the girl by Millais and the horse by Landseer. A wonderfully executed painting, most life-like, but there is very little in it that we would call true art. The true genius of Millais and Landseer is clouded over by the urge of talented craftsmanship.

Such examples need not be multiplied. They only emphasise the need of imparting sound artistic education to the young if a country is to build for itself a life of Beauty,

a life truly worth living. Of the India of today Sri Aurobindo says: "The inspiration and directness of vision which even now subsists among the possessors of the ancient tradition, the inborn skill and taste of the race, must be recovered and the whole nation lifted again to the high level of the ancient culture—and higher".

ART IN INDIA AND ELSEWHERE

In the present writing we are concerned directly with the art of India alone. But in order to understand that art, we must have some little knowledge of the art of other lands, if for no other reason, at least for the purpose of comparison. Classical European art, Mediaeval art, Renaissance art, Modern European art, Far Eastern art, all have a claim on our attention. All these various endeavours are but different aspects, are but feeders, of the one mighty flood of human endeavour. All the manifold activities of the race in diverse countries, in diverse spheres of life converge towards a single point, the great synthesis. When that comes, all art will be one. But in the meantime each stream must fulfil itself along its own course. We are personally inclined in favour of a pure ideal in art and look upon all hybridisation with disapproval. Yet it must be admitted that harmonising of ideals sometimes leads to new standard modes which, when brought about by a master, are very pleasing to the senses. We have already referred to the Gandhara sculpture stigmatised as "bastard" by Sri Aurobindo. Of a less obvious and crude kind are the innovations known as the Indo-Saracenic mode of architecture, the Moghal school of painting and the *Kheyal*, *Tappa* and *Thumri* styles of music. We shall say nothing of these later styles in music beyond this that the classical *Dhrupad* best appeals to us personally. Sri Aurobindo has

said nothing on the subject. Yet one thing must be said. According to our best tradition, a new mode in music can be given only by a recognised Ustad or Master. It requires a Tansen to evolve a *Miyaki Mullar* or *Darbari Kanada.* Indo-Saracenic architecture and Moghal painting—the two new modes in architecture and painting—have, however, both been fully considered by Sri Aurobindo. We shall come back to them later on.

ART, INTUITION, SPIRITUALITY

All truly great work of art, Indian or Western, is at the beginning an act of intuition. The intuition is direct and relates to some truth of life, some form that this truth takes in the mind of man. No real artistic work starts from an intellectual idea or an imagination in the intellect. The European artist brings his intuition down into his ordinary mind and gets his intelligence to clothe it with a mental stuff "which will render its form to the moved reason, emotion, aesthesis". Then the artist sets eye and hand to represent the real thing that he has seen. The more ordinary painter and sculptor start and finish with an imitation of life and nature, and never get to the subtle truth behind. In any case, the appeal in European art is not straight to the vision of the deepest self within, but to the outer consciousness. It awakens powerfully the sensuous, the vital, the emotional, the intellectual and imaginative being. Of the spiritual being we get only as much as is possible through the external man. The Infinite and its godheads remain concealed behind many veils.

The theory of Indian art is different. It is not that all artistic work in India attains the ideal. But it is only by the best that we can judge its intrinsic worth. Sri Auro-

bindo thus characterises Indian art in one short but clear sentence,—"Indian art is in fact identified in its spiritual aim and principle with the rest of Indian culture." That is to say, its highest aim is to reveal something of the Self, the Infinite, the Divine to the regard of the soul through its manifestations in finite nature, through its visible powers and forms and symbols. Even when this art comes down to the material plane, it does not altogether lose its greater vision and its divine stamp. In all really great work of Indian art, life is seen in the self, in the infinite, in something spiritual beyond,—those subtle things form the background of the visible representation. This vision in the self is the method of the Indian artist; this is what he is bound to acquire by the canon of his craft. The medium of expression is, no doubt, form and tune and colour as he sees them in nature, but he is not bound to a realistic representation thereof. They are not his primary preoccupation in art. They are only vehicles for carrying "on them a world of things which have already taken spiritual form in the mind". We shall see this clearly when we go on to a more detailed consideration of particular works of art. But one thing we must get firmly fixed in our mind. "Indian architecture, painting, sculpture are not only intimately one in inspiration with the central things in Indian philosophy, religion, yoga, culture, but a specially inward expression of this significance". Such art intuitive and spiritual in character and significance must be looked at with the intuitive and spiritual vision. For, to the superficial eye its hidden message is bound to remain for ever hidden.

The most ancient art had always been faithful to the original truth of the Soul. It was the art of Greece that came down from that level and strove to express the visible

reality of the senses. The Greek took the forms of Nature as they appeared to him, idealised them to some extent, seeing and emphasising their best aspects. The idealisation did not, however, last and in the end Greek art devoted itself to the simple service of the intellect and the senses. Still it never degenerated to the level of modern realism which appears to take pleasure in laying equal stress on the beautiful and the ugly in every object, in pushing forward all deformities and blemishes along with the harmony and beauty of every form. In the Middle Ages art sought to return to a profounder urge than that of the intellect and the senses and even achieved a partial success, but it never quite got out of obscurity into the deeper knowledge that informs the artistic work of the East. Sri Aurobindo explains how the discovery of Oriental art has tended to break down the walls of narrow prejudice, "In recent times the West has been searching in various directions for a new form in Art which will transcend the obvious and external and go deep down in order to discover the true significance of the outer objects in Nature. The search has not so far met with any success, but the discovery of Indian art of late years is bound to give it a proper direction. The walls of hide-bound prejudice, so characteristic of the Nineteenth century, are crumbling down, and it is generally realised today that Indian sculpture and Indian painting have canons of their own and cannot be judged by either a Hellenistic or a realistic standard".

Of course, Indian art is nearer to other Oriental art than it is to the art of the West: still there is a something in it, a dominant note which differentiates it from, say, the art of China or Japan. The general characteristic of all Eastern art is that it seeks to go beyond the emotions and the

senses. Sri Aurobindo remarks, "A Japanese landscape of snow and hill is as much an image of the soul as Buddha or a flame-haired spirit of the thunderbolt. Yet there is a difference, and it is this; other Oriental art, though it goes beyond the external, remains in the cosmic, while in Indian art there is a constant endeavour to go beyond Nature, into the Supernatural, into the infinite bliss of the Divine." It is thus clear that the Indian artist does not strive after producing a figure exactly resembling the natural, the anatomy faultless and the details superbly executed. He pays no heed to these demands, though he succeeds generally in imparting to his creation a great deal of charm and grace along with a living rhythm and movement. This is apparent in all good images of Nataraja, the dancing Shiva. It would be interesting to find out how the artist achieves this. When we look closely at an old bronze piece as Gangooly has described in his 'South Indian Bronzes', we find that its body is not a representation of human flesh and human life, but a "form of divine life, an embodiment of the gods". Physical beauty has been transcended, sometimes totally disregarded, and its place taken by something psychically beautiful.

Some of the bronze figures reproduced in Gangooly's book are those of devotees of Shiva or Vishnu. In these the artist has sought to express, says Sri Aurobindo, "the pure and absolute status of the mind and heart in which the soul manifests its essential being void of all that is petty, transient, disturbed and restless". The expression of the face and eyes, the poise of the body, every curve and every detail of it are expressive of supreme bliss and the loving surrender of the Bhakta. To the Indian mind the meaning of this embodied ecstasy would be perfectly clear, while the Westerner would miss altogether the true inner

significance and see in the figure a crude and anatomically inaccurate representation of a man at prayer.

Looking closely at the images of the gods themselves, we see that in the eyes of the sculptor they were never of this world at all, they were dwellers in the infinite—the finite form of bronze was only a medium through which infinity expressed itself. This infinity expresses itself in so many ways—supreme power, supreme consciousness, supreme bliss, light, love and knowledge—but always one has to look behind the outer form to discover the truth not to the external senses, not even to the comprehension and imagination of the human mind, but to the soul, —through the senses to the supra-sensuous. In short, this is "a sacred and hieratic art, expressive of the profound thought of Indian philosophy and the deep passion of Indian worship".

Yet, Sri Aurobindo says, there is a difference between these comparatively recent bronze figures and the majestic statuary in stone belonging to an earlier period. In the bronzes we see more of grace and rhythm, while in the others we find more of sublime grandeur.

The best figures in stone expressive of sublime repose, so far found, are, the well-known images of the Dhyani Buddha of Sarnath and the goddess Prajnaparamita of Java —both mentioned already. We shall come back to these again, when we set forth Sri Aurobindo's appreciation of Indian statuary. The most notable example of a bronze figure representing life and movement (but movement subordinated to repose) is the image of Nataraja, the King of Dancers. It shows Mahadeva, the Great God, dancing the cosmic dance. Looking at the figure closely, we find

that the arms, legs, in fact the whole body, is represented to be in a state of violent but rhythmic motion—"the mad bliss of the cosmic movement"—while the face is in perfect repose, in a high state of self-absorbed concentration. So much so, that if the face and head be covered up, the whole body would express only a violent whirling movement; if on the other hand, the body be covered up, the head and face would appear to be part of a figure in sublime repose.

DEFECTS IN WESTERN CRITICISM OF INDIAN ARCHITECTURE

We shall now try and give the reader an idea of what Sri Aurobindo tells us about the motive and meaning of old Indian architecture in his book 'The Significance of Indian Art'. Of all great oriental work of art it can be said that it does not easily disclose its hidden motive to a casual onlooker, one who comes to look at it merely in a spirit of aesthetic curiosity. This is the reason why the Japanese have put up their temples and Buddha images far away from human habitation where only those who are truly interested can go and look at them with the requisite concentration and reverence. Indian architecture demands this concentration and self-identification even more. In India the sacred buildings are definitely "the architectural self-expression of an ancient spiritual and religious culture." We can appraise this art only if we are conscious of the spiritual and religious meaning underlying its outer aesthetic and mental aspect. It has to be remembered that in this work of appraisement, "we must not bring in any occidental memories, or make use of occidental standards". A comparison with the Greek Parthenon or an Italian church or Duomo or Campanile or even the great

Gothic cathedrals of Medieval France would only be an instrusion of, Sri Aurobindo says, "a fatally foreign and disturbing element". An immixture of standards and canons is worse than useless in the work that we have to do.

It is necessary to note that hardly any secular buildings of ancient India, her palaces and assembly halls have survived the ravage of time. So practically nothing can be said about their external beauty or their inner motive. But so far as sacred architecture goes, whatever their age or style, it can be said that they all go "back to something timelessly ancient", something that was in the past and yet will again be in the future. It matters not to what particular deity an Indian temple has been erected, it is inwardly and really an altar raised to the eternal self. This must be understood and everything else seen in the light of that understanding. The mere artistic eye will only see the outward beauty and miss the inward reality. The intelligent mind will never be able to reach the supramental truth, the truth of the Spirit in the temple. We must approach such an artistic creation with quite another seeking; some intuitive light in our own soul must look for the soul in it.

This is where the Western critic of Indian architecture goes wrong. Unable to see the true motive behind, he cannot discern wherein lies the unity that is essential in all true work of art. He sees in it merely the work of a skilled craftsman who has executed a mass of incoherent details, with no apparent object whatsoever. Archer, whose ill-conceived, and even malevolent, criticism of Indian culture generally elicited Sri Aurobindo's brilliant defence thereof in the 'ARYA', is blinder than many other European critics; he is most vociferous in his denunciation of

Indian architecture. The gentleman dislikes a massive structure as a rule, or, possibly, he is incapable of grasping its sublime beauty; so, naturally, the huge temples of South India have failed to evoke his admiration except as marvels of construction. Archer realises that they are huge, but fails to see in that hugeness either unity or sublimity. But, asks Sri Aurobindo, how can there be a marvel of construction without any unity of design or a mighty massive edifice without any grandeur? Archer complains that ponderousness prevails everywhere, everything is overwrought, all parts writhing with bizarre half-human figures which are senseless and seem to have no connection with the whole. How does he know that they are senseless? He has apparently made no effort to find that out. Very rightly has Sri Aurobindo stigmatised his attitude as self-satisfied complacency. The Northern temples of India, which have not quite such a lavish display of ogres and demons and bizarre scroll work on them, have not gained quite such a strong disapprobation as the temples of the South. But that is all; there is nothing to show that this critic understood them any better. The mixed building art known as Indo-Saracenic architecture has alone escaped the general condemnation of being barbaric. It is indeed strange that these critics, some of them men of education, should have failed to realise that Indian art may have a canon of its own, that there may be a principle of unity in our architecture which they have failed to see because of their insular and alien way of thinking. One reason can be suggested on the supposition that this mistake is honest. They have been used to "the Greek unity gained by much suppression and a sparing use of detail and circumstance or the Gothic unity got by casting everything into the mould of a single spiritual aspiration", which are both quite different from the Indian conception of it. The

sacred architecture of India always aims at depicting the eternal oneness of the Divine underlying and upholding the marvellous diversity of the created universe. Its massive design and significantly rich and varied ornamental work starting from oneness and returning to it cannot be comprehended by one who sees with the eye alone and dwells only on the beauty of the form as caught by the imaginative mind. This applies to architecture as much as to sculpture and painting, applies to those works that are epic in their grandeur as much as to structures that are smaller in size, which Sri Aurobindo calls lyrics of the Infinite. The European critic desirous of posing as a superior person may say what he likes, but an Indian should not be swayed, even a hair's breadth, by his prejudices or by his myopic way of looking at things. He should approach a sacred building of his own people with reverence, throwing his mind wide open to its subtle influence. The true meaning will then disclose itself gradually, and the age-long message of his country's culture make itself heard through the beauty of the structure before him. Sri Aurobindo suggests that one should go to some temple far from human habitation where the background and environment are quite natural. Two names have been suggested by him—Kalahasti and Simhachalam—both situated in South India. They are alike in motive, but different in execution. Sri Aurobindo says, they should be seen, not detached from their setting, but in unity with the sky and the landscape, low-lying or hilly. Thus regarded, these man-made structures will appear as one in motive with the background. Sri Aurobindo describes the two temples in these simple words: "One of these buildings climbs up—bold, massive in projection, uppiled in the greatness of a forceful but sure ascent, preserving its range and tune to the last; the other soars from

the strength of its base, in the grace and emotion of a curving mass to a rounded summit and crowning symbol. There is in both a constant, subtle yet pronounced lessening from the base towards the tops but at each stage a repetition of the same form, the same multiplicity of insistence, the same crowded fulness and indented relief, but one maintains its multiple endeavour and inclination to the last, the other ends in a single sign". The description is so lucid that it calls up before the mind's eye a clear vision of the two temples and even suggests the natural setting of each. The massive base resting on the earth, the gradual taper as the edifice rises, the throng of figures indicative of infinite multiplicity, the symbol ending at the top against the vast expanse of the sky, all express, not a lack of unity but an immense oneness. When the whole is seen thus, every detail becomes easy of understanding.

The method of interpretation set forth above applies to all Dravidian temples from Madura and Tanjore down to the small but beautiful shrines by the way-side. The motive is the same for all. The architecture of the North is not quite of the same kind, the basic style is different, but in interpreting it we have to follow the same method—intuitive and spiritual. The result is also the same. The outer beauty is but an expression of the inner Truth. Just as there is an innate unity in the various aspects of Indian spirituality and religious feeling, so is there a oneness in all the creations of hieratic architecture. There is a large variety of styles and motives, but they all express that unity.

The European critic is constantly bringing up his objection to the crowding of detail and ornament so common in temple architecture, urging forcefully that this stressing of detail mars the unity of design. But this very argument

shows that he has allowed his mind to dwell on the details without relating them to the essential unity in the spirit. It is the same with regard to the world in general. If we allow our mind to dwell on and emphasise the Many in the universe, we shall find only a "crowded plurality". To arrive at oneness we have to reduce or suppress the diversity we have seen and go back to realise the Self, the infinite reality behind. The rich variety and detail of ornament in an Indian temple represent the unending diversity of creation on all planes and suggest the infinite oneness of the unending multiplicity of things.

Archer in his attack on Indian architecture repeated over and over again, *ad nauseam*, his theme that the profusion of ornamental work in Hindu temples, especially of South India, was barbarous and bizarre, and that it gave no relief to the eye and allowed no calm. Sri Aurobindo answers that the "unity on which all is upborne carries in itself the infinite space and calm of the spiritual realisation", and that consequently no unfilled spaces of a superficial kind were necessary, the eye being there only an entry to the soul of the art. The massiveness of these temples has been considered fully by Sri Aurobindo. They could not but be massive, representing, as they do, the creation seen as a whole. Of the sacred edifices of the North, some have "a singular grace, a luminous lightness...a rich delicacy of beauty in their ornate fullness." Not lightness and clarity of the Greek kind, "clarity of naked nobleness", but a remarkable blending of opposites, such as characterises the trend of Indian relig on as well as art.

We need not set forth in full Sri Aurob:ndo's reply to the critic's minor strictures. They proceed mostly from narrowness and perversity—a refusal to admit any beau:y in

forms that are new to him. There is one comment of Mr. Archer, however, that deserves mention here because it has also been made by fair-minded critics like Professor Geddes. It is this, that in these huge buildings there is always a "monstrous effect of terror and gloom". The comment is totally unwarranted. The Indian knows full well that terror and gloom are incompatible with his religion, art and literature. If they ever appear in his religion, it is only to be dissipated at once. Even when they appear, says Sri Aurobindo, "they are always sustained by a supporting and helping presence, an eternal greatness and calm or love or delight behind". Take the Great God, Mahadeva, for instance. He is Rudra the fierce, Maheshwara the great Yogi, but he is also Shiva the Auspicious, Ashutosha the Compassionate, the support and refuge of men. Again, take Nataraja the dancing Shiva, wrongly described as Shiva destroying the universe. If the poise of the body, the mad fling of the limbs terrifies anybody he has only to turn to the serene beauty of the face in repose to be reassured immediately. In the image of Kali, where even the face is afire with the zeal of destroying the powers of Evil, we have the two right hands in the pose of Vara and Abhaya, one promising a boon to the faithful and the other saying "Fear not". Only one word more on the subject. In the decoration of the sacred edifices we find depicted various unhuman and half-human figures. The alien sitting in judgment does not know, or does not believe, that these formidable-looking creatures actually exist on certain planes other than our own and that it is perfectly consonant with the spirit of Indian art not to exclude them from any comprehensive design representing the cosmos. They form part of the wonderful diversity of the universe.

INDO-MOSLEM ARCHITECTURE

Sri Aurobindo devotes a couple of pages in this section to Indo-Moslem architectural art. We have already referred to this art as an example of the blending of ideals and styles. All over India we find mosques and other edifices, small and great, of what has been called Indo-Saracenic design,—most of them, or at least the best of them pertaining to the Moghul period. Sri Aurobindo finds in many of them "an impress of the robust and bold Afghan and Moghul temperament." Still, on the whole, he considers them to be typically Indian art creations. The decorative scheme that one sees in these buildings is to be found in many Hindu temples in Northern India, too. A lyric grace was developing in the North even before the Moslem advent and this found its place in the Indo-Saracenic buildings side by side with purely Islamic technique and motives. This lyric grace has found favour with Archer, at least he finds therein something he can understand—it is its rational beauty, refinement and grace, normal, fair, refreshing after the monstrous riot of Hindu Yogic hallucination and nightmare! There is a lot more about the beautiful domes and minarets, stately halls and majestic gateways, that Archer writes,—all by way of praising this pretty hybrid style at the expense of the monstrosities of Hindu art. But still, how can a critic of this kind bestow unstinted praise on anything Indian? So he qualifies his approval by adding that there is no moral value in all this beauty, and that it is wholly sensuous. As moral value is the last thing that we can expect from architecture, the remark of the critic can be summarily rejected as unintelligent. His last observation is still more inane. He finds Moghul architecture to be effeminate and decadent—an absurd remark about the mentality of the

man of that Great Age! We are ourselves not very fond of the Indo-Saracenic style, at least not of some of its aspects. The very narrow waisted dome of these buildings is certainly inferior in grandeur to the true Saracenic cupola, a symbol of the vault of the sky under which the Arab of the desert said his prayers. The lotus petals arranged round the base of the typical Indo-Moslem dome look to us out of place and detract from its beauty. Looking at the Taj Mahal which is undoubtedly the finest example of this style, what hurts our eyes is the extreme slenderness of the minarets around it. Why could they not have been more in keeping with the size of the main building! In Bijapur we have two old buildings, mausoleums of two of the Adil Shahi kings—the Bol Gumbaz (Echoing dome) and the Ibrahim Raza. The latter has a narrow-waisted lotus-based dome of the Taj Mahal type and the rest of the edifice in keeping with it. The former, a massive structure, several storeys high, has a huge dome of the true Saracenic style on top and round it are four minarets of commensurate thickness forming an eminently suitable setting for the central building. To our understanding the Bol (or Gol) Gumbaz is nearer to "the vast spiritual content of the Indian mind" than most other buildings of this style. The latter are possibly prettier, more pleasant to the eye, but they lack the majesty of the famous Gumbaz. The Taj as an emblem, as the memory of a love that defied death, is unique with its wonderful fretwork and mosaic and other delicate ornamentation, typifying the undying affection of a fond husband; but in many ways some of the buildings of Fatehpur-Sikri are finer specimens of Indo-Moslem art. About these Sri Aurobindo remarks, "The buildings of Fatehpur-Sikri are not monuments of an effeminate luxurious decadence * * * * but give form to a nobility, power and beauty which lay hold upon but do not wallow on the

earth". Of the best examples of Indo-Saracenic art we can say that although the all-powerful spiritual motive of the old Hindu temples is not there, "other elements of life not ignored by Indian culture and gaining in it since the classical times are here brought out under a new influence and are still penetrated with some radiant glow of a superior lustre."

ANCIENT INDIAN SCULPTURE AND PAINTING

We shall now present briefly to our reader Sri Aurobindo's appraisement of the sculpture and painting of old India and his elucidation of the motive and significance of these two branches of Indian art. As far as sculpture is concerned, we have already traversed part of the ground in connection with his review of Mr. Gangooly's book on some comparatively recent bronze figures of South India. We shall not, however, avoid repetitions where they serve to emphasise the salient points of his exposition of our national art. The reader will recollect that the whole book, 'A Defence of Indian Culture', of which the brochures on Indian art and Indian polity form part was begun as a reply to a virulent attack on the ancient culture of India launched by a peculiarly narrow-minded English journalist but it developed ultimately into a brilliant exposition on the many-sided culture of India. As a matter of fact, rash vapourings of scribblers of the Archer type, who write without authority, without responsibility, without taste or knowledge, no longer require any serious refutation, because in recent years ancient Indian art has been "rehabilitated with a surprising suddenness in the eyes of a more cultured European criticism." The necessity of refutation arose then mainly from the fact that, owing to a lack of true cultural training, the so-called educated Indian mind was prone to

attach a great deal of weight to the old narrow style of European criticism; and owing to a lamentable inferiority complex it was apt to regard any expression of opinion by a European as a message from Olympus. The situation has vastly improved since Sri Aurobindo took up his pen in defence of his country's culture. As far as art is concerned, the cultured Indian of today is conversant with the views of competent critics like Havell or Abanindra or Binyon or Okakura or Coomaraswamy, and is not likely to cast aside as unworthy of his notice the inspired work of the ancient masters of his country. Still there is ample room for a diligent study of the arts of ancient India, for without an appreciation of them no Indian can claim to be able to appreciate truly the spirit of his own civilization. Coomaraswamy used to say that he had no use for a free India where the classical *Dhrupad* was not sung and where the artisan had forgotten the art of weaving Dacca muslin and Benares brocade. And this statement of the great critic of art was not a mere *bon mot;* it indicated where the soul of a people really lay. The Indian mind has for too long a time been "side-tracked off its true road by a foreign, an anglicised education and, as a result, vulgarised and falsified by the loss of its own true culture". A real inward understanding of ourselves is almost overdue.

For a true discernment of Indian art we have at the outset, to get a proper perspective. And this is where the critic of Archer's type is deliberately misleading, his favourite trick is to trot out constantly before us the classical Greek ideal of art. It is stupid to assert that all Indian sculpture must be governed by the standard of ancient Greece. Greek art is assuredly great in its own province, but we must not forget the rather strait and narrow bounds of that province. Sri Aurobindo rightly emphasises this fact by saying, "What

Greek sculpture expressed was fine, gracious and noble, but what it did not express, and could not by the limitations of its canon hope to attempt, was considerable * * * * (it) was that spiritual depth and extension which the human mind needs for its larger and deeper self-experience". We need not go deeper into the limitations of the canon of Greek art here, but Sri Aurobindo's meaning would be perfectly clear on a comparison, such as we have already suggested, of the Sarnath Buddha with any good Gandhara statue of that Deity in the Lahore or Peshawar museum. We can go farther and suggest a comparison of the famous image of Prajnaparamita with the equally famous statue of Venus de Milo in the Louvre. To an understanding eye the difference between the two would be perfectly clear in ten minutes. It will realise that there is something subtle which the Greek aesthetic mind could not conceive or express, but which was easily expressed by the Indian sculptor—the spirit in form, the soul in body. An interesting fact is that the older and more archaic Greek style had something in it that indicated its origin to be Egyptian and Oriental—something more Eastern in spirit, not necessarily something cruder in execution. Later on, it developed along the lines that we associate today with the characteristic Greek aesthesis. The ordinary lay enquirer might ask us to specify if the Greek statue was merely a fine realistic representation of the human figure. Obviously, it was not. The figure of Apollo Belvedere or of Venus de Milo is certainly not human, no human being can possess such a body. Where, then, is the difference? We shall quote what Sri Aurobindo tells us—"The Olympian gods of Phidias are magnified and uplifted human beings saved from a too human limitation by a certain divine calm or impersonality or universalised quality." Now in what way is the statue of the Indian god different? It is, says Sri Aurobindo, "an embodiment of

some great spiritual power, spiritual idea and action, inmost psychic significance, the human form a vehicle of this soul meaning." This is indeed something distinct from the aesthetic motive of the Greek sculptor! The aim of the Indian sculptor is not "the ideal physical or emotional beauty, but the utmost spiritual beauty or significance of which the human form is capable. * * * The divine form in us is its theme, the body made a form of the soul is its idea and its secret." The famous Java image of Prajna-paramita, already referred to, is a very good example. At a first glance it represents principally a human form of remarkable beauty, but as one goes on looking at it, a subtler charm and a deeper meaning appear, which throw into obscurity the beauty of form which entranced one at the start. This explains how Indian sculpture on its religious side is intimately connected with our spiritual experiences, such as we gain in our meditation and adoration. The clever Mr. Archer suspects this, for he contemptuously uses the expression, "Yogic hallucinations"! As far as we are concerned, the proper expression is "soul realisation". Such realisation creates a piece of Indian statuary and such must be our method of appraising it.

SCULPTURE AND SPIRITUALITY

The old sculpture of any country bears an intimate relationship to the architecture of that country. Sculpture has indeed, says Sri Aurobindo, "flourished supremely only in ancient countries when it was conceived against its natural background and support, a great architecture". This is as true of India as of Greece or Egypt,—only more so here, where statuary has almost always formed part of a general artistic scheme. We know that the architecture of old India with its rich variety of ornament represents the infinite

diversity of the created worlds, but this infinite multiplicity is an expression of the infinite unity and exists in it. This is how we have to understand an ancient image of Shiva or Buddha with reference to its elaborate setting. The spiritual vision of an old sculptor ever sought to realise and express the immanent Divine against a background of the endless diversity of His manifestation. Sri Aurobindo sums up the idea thus—"Old Indian sculpture like its architecture springs from spiritual realisation and what it creates and expresses at its greatest is the spirit in form, the soul in body * * * the universal and cosmic individualised in suggestion but not lost in individuality". This spirit we can discern even when the image is not human, but an animal study. Innumerable are the examples of the bull and the elephant in painted pictures and in carved stone, as well as in wrought metal which show clearly the inner intent of the artist, but the most notable instance is the beautiful stone horse of Konarak. It is undoubtedly the terrestrial animal that we know of as a horse, and yet it is something more, the horse that draws the chariot of the sun across the firmament,—of the earth, and yet divine. After referring to the inner spiritual meaning of the figures of the gods, Sri Aurobindo says that even with the figures of groups of men a fine inner aim and vision govern the labour of the sculptor. The figure of a king or a saint conveys not only the king or the saint but is intended to embody a soul-state or a soul-quality. So whether the subject be a Buddha or a Shiva, a bull or an eagle, a king or a devotee, the artist intends his statue to be the embodiment of a soul-state, an inner soul-quality. It is, therefore, futile to discuss whether an old Indian image is anatomically correct, true to nature, or not. It is not necessary for an artist to be a physiologist in order to depict the body of a god or king or saint, any more than it is necessary for an artist to be a botanist in order to carve

or paint a lotus. We need not labour the point any further. The most beautiful representations of a lotus in Indian sculpture do not resemble a lotus in real life.

It is almost certain that the oldest medium for the sculptor in India was wood. But this material being perishable by nature, no ancient specimens of wood-carving have come down to us. Some figures in wood have been found in Nepal, but they are not very old. The famous triple image in the Puri temple is wooden and ancient, but, as is well-known, the wood-work is renewed from time to time. Still considering the fact that wood-carving and ivory-carving had attained a high pitch of perfection some centuries ago, both in the North and in the South, it can fairly be inferred that even in olden times, carving in these softer media was on a par with stone carving. A Krishna, a Shiva, a Buddha, a bull or an elephant, done in ivory or wood today, shows the same characteristics as older statuary done in stone. The style is undoubtedly the same. Looking back, we find that the stone sculpture in our country has passed through many phases, each phase corresponding to the then stage of spiritual development. Sri Aurobindo's words are eloquent. This sculpture has passed "through many changes, a more ancient art of extraordinary grandeur and epic power uplifted by the same spirit as reigned in the Vedic and Vedantic seers and in the epic poets, a later Puranic turn towards grace and beauty and rapture and an outburst of lyric ecstasy and movement." The last stage has been one of rapid decadence. But even in its decadence it retains something that saves it from utter degeneration, hollowness and meaninglessness. Herein lies our hope. Our culture failed for a time after a long period of greatness, just as other old cultures had failed, and along with it our art fell into decay. But the spiritual fire within still

burns and in the renascence that is coming it may be that this great art, too, will be resuscitated.

The self-expression of the Indian sculptor has, we have seen, passed through many phases. The first heroic age we can put down as Pre-Asokan, Asokan and Post-Asokan—an age marked by nobility, power and great dignity. Then came the magnificent statuary of the many cave temples, which was unique in beauty and splendour. Durga with her eighteen arms killing the demons or the splendid many-armed Shiva of the Pallava creations display a remarkable epic rhythm and grandeur. Later sculpture has been characterised by Sri Aurobindo as "the noble, accomplished or gracious imaginings of Bengal, Nepal and Java" or "the singular skill and delicacy of the bronze work of the South", where perfect grace was blended with an intense lyrical sweetness. Of these southern bronzes, the best-known, Nataraja, has already been referred to. Another, the Kala-Samhara Shiva, is marked not only by majesty, power and dignity, but much more "by the concentrated divine passion of the spiritual overcoming of time and existence which the artist has succeeded in putting into eye and brow and mouth and every feature," and has subtly supported it by the movement of every part of the body. Does one expect a scrupulously exact knowledge of anatomy in such artists? The Indian sculptor may start with what he has received by the physical senses but he soon closes his eyes to them and begins to see the psychic contours by a subtle vision and proceeds to depict them, deleting the material outlines where necessary. To appreciate such an image, one has to have the psychic vision.

INDIAN PAINTING THROUGH THE AGES

We shall now pass on to a consideration of Indian paint-

ing. Much of what we have said about the motive and significance of Indian sculpture applies to this art also. But owing to the perishable nature of the materials employed by the painter of old, very few specimens of his work have come down to us. This has led some shallow thinkers to infer that the art of painting had never had a firm footing in ancient India, that it was pursued but fitfully till the Moghul period. When Sri Aurobindo wrote his book, there were only three caves known where old frescoes were to be seen—some splendid but fragmentary specimens of decorative painting in the Bagh cave, some female figures in the rockcut chambers at Siguria and, lastly, the gorgeous range of pictures on the walls and ceilings of the Ajanta caves. Since then a few other pictures of the Ajanta type have been found in some southern temples. We feel sure that some day, all of a sudden, there would be discovered a hidden store-house of pictures, as rich as Ajanta, in some remote mountainous region. Ajanta itself, placed as it was in a wild tiger-haunted glen in Central India, was practically unknown till the advent of the last century. It was then discovered by a British military officer who copied in oil twelve selected pictures and exhibited them in England. They received high appreciation from understanding critics, but were unfortunately destroyed by fire. A like fate overtook another set of copies two decades later. At that time there were frescoes extant in almost all the twenty-seven caves. During the last quarter of the century, however, when Griffiths of the Bombay School of Art worked at these pictures with his students, they were to be seen in only sixteen of the caves. In another few years, they underwent rapid decay till there were no longer any frescoes to be seen in as many as twenty-one caves. The paintings were peeling off and the ground work crumbling rapidly when we went over the caves in 1961.

They could not stand human attention. For some few decades now, the Hyderabad State has taken up the work of preserving these mural pictures, but we do not know that they have been able to do much. A few points about these pictures might interest the reader. There are two or three colours used that are truly marvellous. The ones we remember best are a particular shade of brown and a gorgeous blue. The blue is pure *lapis lazuli* powdered and looks as if it were laid on yesterday. The brown is the colour of the skin of some of the figures and is remarkably warm and vivid. The panels of the ceiling are mostly clusters of fruits and flowers and leaves but there are some that represent people drinking wine out of shallow cups, with a beatific expression. These votaries of the cup are either Persians or Brahmins. We knew the former by their garb and the latter by the tuft knot. One of the large size pictures shows King Pulukeshi of Badami receiving a Persian embassy in full dress. The full Persian dress was thus a familiar thing to the artist and evidently caught his fancy! The technique employed by these fresco painters is interesting. The wall surface of the cave was at first dressed passably even and then there was a thickish layer of clay spread on it. The plaster when it was quite smooth, was covered over with a layer of powdered conch shell. This became the ground on which the picture was painted. Some unfinished and decayed frescoes showed the process clearly. The reader may like to know whether any knowledge of perspective has been displayed in the pictures or whether they are all flat. We certainly did not find them to be flat; a great deal of depth had been achieved in the various scenes depicted. But this perspective was their own; it was neither the perspective of a Japanese landscape, nor of a Moghal picture nor of a modern European painting. The landing of Prince Vijaya in Ceylon, the

resistance offered by the native Rakshasas, the strenuous fight, the final victory and the apotheosis—the crowning of Vijaya, are all shown together on the walls. The grouping of the figures, the depiction of the foreground and the background are so well done that nowhere does one miss the Western perspective.

Paintings of this kind must at one time have covered the walls of palaces, monasteries and temples, as well as the dwelling houses of the rich. The frescoes at Bagh, Siguria, Ajanta and the southern temples, above referred to, cover approximately a period of six or seven hundred years, though with gaps in between, and nothing now remains of any paintings earlier than the first century after Christ, except a few of a century before more or less spoilt by blundering attempts at restoration. There is no work which can be assigned to a period subsequent to the seventh century. But there is evidence that carries back the traditions of this art several centuries before the Christian era and brings it down to a few centuries after and links it on to the later schools of Rajput painting. The history of Indian painting—the self-expression of the Indian mind in line and tint—thus covers a period of well-nigh two thousand years. Recent discoveries in India and outside, relics found in the Himalayan region all go to support this view. Though the old paintings we have now are the work of Buddhist artists, the art itself certainly existed in India before Buddha's days. Regarding the proof of this, Sri Aurobindo says, "The Tibetan historian ascribes a remote antiquity to all the crafts, prior to the Buddha and there is an ever-growing mass of evidence in support of this." In the third century B. C. the six essential elements of the art of painting—*shadanga*—had been recognised and the theory thereof well founded,

Poems and dramas of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti or earlier still, those of Bhasa, as well as the big epics refer frequently to painted pictures and, occasionally, to picture galleries in such a way as to make it clear that men and women of those times were familiar with the art of painting. In the absence of actual surviving specimens, it is not possible to say precisely what kind of pictures these were, but the old literature refers to both portraits and landscapes, both religious and secular subjects. We have already mentioned two pictures in the Ajanta gallery—one about the conquest of Lanka by Prince Vijaya and the other about the reception of the Persian Embassy in the Badami Court. Let us add to these the portraits of the queens of King Kashyapa in Ceylon. These all go to show that the early Indian artists painted lay subjects freely—both pre-Buddhist and Buddhist painters. It can also be safely inferred that the traditions of pictorial art continued right down to the Rajput period. As in sculpture so in painting, there must have been epochs of brilliance and epochs of comparative dullness, but the stream of inspiration flowed continuously for two thousand years or more. The essential spirit was there throughout, in spite of a great variety of forms and manners. In following the history thereof, we find the same course of development in painting as in sculpture. The earlier pictures of Ajanta are akin to the earlier Buddhist statuary, while the better finished frescoes of a later epoch correspond to the more finished sculpture that we see in Java. The style and manner of painting have remained the same spiritually, not only in the Ajanta and Bagh caves but also in the frescoes of remote Khotan, as well as in the illuminated Buddhist and Jain manuscripts and in the later productions of the Rajput schools.

We have, already under sculpture, spoken of the spirit

and tradition of Indian art. It is sufficient to repeat here that there is a profound self-vision behind all Indian pictorial work, that it is the expression of a psychic truth "with the greatest possible purity and power of outline" along with the rhythmic unity of all parts in an artistic whole. What the Indian artist draws and paints is the soul-figure, the true figure behind the outer form which, to him, is but a travesty of the inner reality. What he seeks to depict in line and colour are the psychic lines and the psychic tints that he has visualised inside himself. This is why the *Sukraniti* has forbidden an artist to have any actual flower before him when he is drawing a flower, his business is to depict the psychic image of that flower that he has discovered in himself.

THE SIX LIMBS OF THE ART OF PAINTING

We have already mentioned that the painters' art had, according to the ancients, six limbs. They may be indicated here with profit. The first is *Rupabheda,* distinction of forms. The second is *Pramana,* proportion, design and perspective. The third is *Bhava,* emotion or aesthetic feeling expressed by the form. The fourth is *Lavanya,* the seeking of beauty to satisfy the aesthetic spirit. The fifth is *Sadrishya,* the truth of the form. The sixth is *Varnikabhanga,* the harmony of colours.

The orthodox Western artist is fired by his zeal for "immediate fidelity to nature; to him, the most important thing is the faultless reproduction of an outward form. His model is the external world and he is bound to repress any tendency of allegiance towards any subtler spirit." As a matter of fact, however, a truly great artist of the West —a Raphael, a Titian, a Murillo—rises to "a revelation of

the glory and beauty of the sensuous appeal of life or of the dramatic power and moving interest of character and emotion and action." The sensuous appeal, *Lavanya*, is there in the Indian artist too, but it is only one element of "the richness of a soul of psychic grace," which is, to him, the only true beauty. The dramatic motive occupies a secondary place, only so much of it is recognised by the Indian painter as helps to bring out the deeper psychic feeling, *Bhava*. To the occidental artist, *Sadrishya* is outward resemblance; to the Indian, it is fidelity to the soul form, the truth of the essence of the form. To achieve this, the latter proceeds to "a total suppression of everything that would interfere with its boldness, strength and purity, or would blur over and dilute the intense significance of the line. A characteristic of this art is the subtle and meaningful use of the hands to express the psychic motive. *Mudra*, the gesture of the hands, has always been looked upon as a most important aspect of an image. The symbolic words which guide a devotee in his meditation of a divine form always describe clearly the gesture of the hands. For instance, in the famous *dhyana* of Shiva, "Let us always meditate on the Great God &c.", the *mudras* of the four hands are explicitly described to be the Axe, the Deer, the Boon and the Assurance—all full of the psychic meaning. In the frescoes of Ajanta, we find many examples of the speaking hands. A very good one is the picture of the Naga queen narrating a tale with great enthusiasm to her lord. The famous picture of the mother and child before Buddha, too, discloses very clearly this method of the classical Indian artist. Sri Aurobindo has analysed it minutely. All the six elements of our pictorial art are exemplified to prefection here. The mother, full of spiritual emotion, is seeking to awaken that emotion in her beloved child. She is dedicating the body to her Lord with

a firm confidence that her dedication would be found acceptable. The whole poise of her body, the rapturous expression on her face, the longing look in her eyes, as much as the pose of her arms and hands, indicate her deep devotion to the deity along with an ineffable tenderness towards her offspring.

Our presentation of Sri Aurobindo's appraisement of Indian art has become rather lengthy. We shall just refer to two things before we close it. The first is the characteristic difference between the two modes of self-expression—sculpture and painting. The difference, Sri Aurobindo points out, "has been imposed on them by the natural scope, turn, possibility of their instrument and medium". The sculptor working in the monumental spirit of stone or bronze is bound to express his psychic vision in a static form, there is an insistence of stability which he can try to lighten but can never shake off. The painter, on the other hand, "lavishes his soul in colour" and achieves a fluidity in the form, and a mobile grace which enables him to express himself in a more dynamic and emotional way. Of all the arts, painting is the most sensuous, and the business of the true artist is to spiritualise the sensuous appeal by making the outward beauty a reflection of the true beauty underlying it.

The second thing we wish to touch upon is the origin and character of Moghul painting. Is this school of painting indigenously Indian, or is it an importation from Iran? Sri Aurobindo finds that it is not an exotic, but is a blend of the Indian and the Persian art. We would call it an Indianised Persian art like the composite style of architecture known as Indo-Saracenic. All Oriental art is inspired by the psychic vision—the Indian as well as the

Persian. The only distinction is that the psychicality of the latter is "redolent of the magic of the middle words." The Moghul school, on the contrary, turns towards a kind of externalism and a certain secular spirit, but the central thing is always a profounder urge. The Indian spirit has seized and transformed the original Persian spirit.

One last word. In the general decline of Indian culture, painting was the last to touch the bottom. There are ample signs to show that it is going to be the first to rise again, and "light the dawn fires of an era of new creation."

Part IV

INDIAN LITERATURE

THE VEDAS

We have now seen what the true scope of art is, and also how far the art of India has fulfilled it. But, as Sri Aurobindo points out, it is the literature of a people that we must seek for "the most flexible and many-sided self-expression" of the spirit. The principal medium of our ancient literature was Sanskrit, "one of the most magnificent, the most perfect and wonderfully sufficient literary instruments developed by the human mind." We have already touched upon some aspects of our ancient literature, principally the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagawad-Geeta* and the various schools of philosophy. But great as they are, these works do not, by any means, form the whole contribution of old India to the world's literary output. Our sages dealt with all branches of learning, that were within the ken of mankind in those early epochs—politics, statecraft, economics, sociology, eugenics, town-planning, sanitation, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, medicine, arts and crafts, Lexicon, Grammar, Prosody Rhetoric—all these and other subjects were studied and taught and written upon—taught, not only to our own people, but to far-off nations like the Chinese, the Arabs and the Greeks. We may have a few lines to add, later, to what we have already said about India's cultural give and take in the ancient times. Regarding the purely literary work achieved by ancient India, Sri Aurobindo says: "The people and the civilisation that count among their great works and their great names the *Veda* and the *Upanishads*, the mighty structures of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti and Bhartrihari and

Jayadeva and the other rich creations of classical Indian drama and poetry and romance, the *Dhammapada* and the Jatakas, the *Panchatantras*, Tulsidas, Vidyapati, and Chandidas and Ramprasad, Ramdas and Tukaram, Tiruvalluvar and Kamban, and the songs of Nanak, Kabir, and Mirabai, and the southern Shaiva saints and the Alwars * * * must surely be counted among the greatest civilisations and the world's most developed and creative peoples." Their mental activity and the subtle urge behind it were so great and remarkable that their achievement has never been surpassed in the history of mankind.

A critic of Archer's type may have something to say about the external aspect of politics and sociology, painting and statuary, but he has not got the higher mental equipment, certainly not the inward look to enable him to understand either the spiritually inspired poetry of the *Vedas* or the subtle and profound philosophy of the *Upanishads*. About these sacred revealed books so much has been written already by deep scholars—both Indian and European—that most of my readers are bound to be familiar with, at least, their superficial aspects. Certain typical verses have been extracted by Sri Aurobindo from the Vedic hymns and included in the text of his 'Defence of Indian Culture.' We do not reproduce them here. Their beauty of thought and language is obvious but their true meaning cannot be realised by the mental intelligence. The only way to realise it is by meditation along lines laid down by a qualified preceptor. The *Veda* itself utters its own central secret by the famous words—*Ekam Sad Vipra bahudha vadanti*—"One of whom the *rishis* speak variously." These *rishis* thought differently from us, used their images in their own peculiar way and "an antique cast of vision gave a strange outline to their substances".

About the technique of the hymns Sri Aurobindo says: "The physical melted its shades into the lustres of the psychic. Obviously such poetry, written by poets with such vision cannot be understood or interpreted by rational standards. When the *Veda* speaks of the Bull and the Cow—the shining herds belonging to the Sun lying concealed in the cavern—they are strange creatures to the mind, but they are true and living creatures on their own plane, actual and significant. Thus is Vedic poetry to be interpreted according to its own spirit and vision and the psychically natural truth of its ideas and figures." Of the style, Sri Aurobindo says, "their speech (is) lyric by intensity and epic by elevation, an utterance of great power, pure and bold and grand in outline, a speech direct and brief in impact, full to overflowing in sense and suggestion." What to the European is myth and legend is in the *Veda* an actuality, strands of our inner being. What would be to the Westerner poetic imagination and metaphysical speculation is to us an experience, a direct realisation. This turn of the Indian mind, its spiritual sincerity and psychic positivism, gives the *Veda* and the *Vedanta* their immense importance. Ancient India "did not err" says Sri Aurobindo, "when it traced back all its philosophy, religion and essential things of its culture to these seer-poets."

THE UPANISHADS

Of the *Upanishads*, the first thing we have to remember is that they are *Vedanta*—a continuation of the *Veda*—they are revealed scripture and not embodiments of metaphysical speculation. They refer back constantly to the *Veda*, saying "Thus have we heard from sages of old", and occasionally extract whole verses from the original Sruti. The

Upanishads came long after the Vedic period—even the oldest of them. When we speak of the *Upanishads*, we mean the twelve principal ones—for there are *Upanishads* and *Upanishads*, and some of them belong to the later Puranic period. These old scriptures are often designated *Vedanta*. Of these again some are older than the others. The earlier ones kept close to their Vedic roots and preserved the spiritual pragmatism of the Vedic sages. The later ones entered an ascetic and antipragmatic phase; life began to be stigmatised as illusory and hurtful to man's spiritual interest. The two points of view had come to a clash very early and a book like the *Isha-Upanishad* was called upon to harmonise *Karma* with Asceticism—the sane Vedic outlook on life with the monist's uncompromising abstention from action.

The goal of the Vedic sage was pragmatic and utilitarian in the highest sense of the words. He aimed at spiritual progress—his own and that of others. Of the Vedic hymn generally Sri Aurobindo says, "It rose out of the soul, it became the power of the mind, it was the vehicle of the self-expression in some important movement of the life's inner history. It helped him to express the god in him, to destroy the devourer, the expresser of evil". The *Veda*, as we have it, marks the close of a period. Vyasa, who compiled it, had his face towards the obscurity of the ensuing *Kali Yuga* which was soon to overtake the glorious Age of Intuition that had gone before. He compiled it for a race already turning towards darkness and decay, already looking for "the easy and secure gains of the physical life and of the intellect and the logical reasoning." The decadence was inevitable. Firstly, because there is a law of the human cycles; secondly, because the whole system was such as could not endure long. Once the first intensity had

passed "periods of fatigue and relaxation were bound to intervene." The deliberately ambiguous language of the hymns was no longer understood. Rituals were multiplied, and even the officiating priest did not always comprehend the meaning of the text. The power disappeared, the light departed, what was left was but a mass of myth and ritual.

Decadence had well set in before the Vedantic seer stepped in with the object of recovering what he could of the ancient light. Just as the authors of the Brahmanas proceeded in their own way to fix and conserve the Vedic rites and rituals, the composers of the *Upanishads* pursued another method; they "sought to recover the lost or waning knowledge by meditations and spiritual experience." The text of the mantra gave them a starting point or a seed of thought. The external sacrifice became to them a more and more meaningless and useless survival. Theirs was a sacrifice, not of *dravya* but of *dhyana*. They concentrated themselves on the search of the Supreme Truth by meditation. No doubt they recovered the old truths, but they put them ever in new forms. Even the mode of expression changed. The old symbolic language was dropped and a more philosophical style adopted. The old "veil of concrete myth and poetic figure" was cast away. They were more concerned in founding a *Vedanta* than in interpreting the *Veda*. In time, the Vedic text became as obsolete as Vedic sacrifices to the new thinker of the Upanishadic period. The Age of Intuition passed into the first dawn of the Age of Reason. The *Upanishads*, "increasingly clear and direct in their language, became the fountain head of the highest Indian thought." All this took time to accomplish itself. In the meantime Buddhism had to come and declare open revolt against the Vedic rituals. Rational philosophy had to crystallise itself into various schools of thought. Although

these schools acknowledge the authority of the *Sruti* or revealed scriptures in theory, they brought in startling innovations by interpreting them on this basis of reason. Asceticism and renunciation gradually got firm hold of the Hindu imagination. Last came the Puranic revival. Language was still further simplified, new forms of religion arose to suit the new environments. As intuition had given place to rationalism, so rationalism in time gave place to conventionalism. We shall have occasion to refer to these later phases of our cultural evolution and the appropriate literature of each, very briefly, later on. To come back to the *Upanishads*, we must remember one or two things. Firstly, they were meant to be heard and not read, and secondly they were meant to be heard only by people who had a general familiarity with the tenor of thought of the sages and even had some personal spiritual experience. The ideas behind each verse or sentence are implicit rather than explicit. There is very little room in an Upanishadic verse for logic as we know it; what there is of logic is, in Sri Aurobindo's language, the logic of the Infinite. The *Upanishads* can be called the finest work of the Indian mind and the highest expression of its genius, an expression in which philosophy and religion are made one. In Sri Aurobindo's beautiful language, "the *Upanishads* have been the acknowledged source of numerous profound philosophies and religions that flowed from it in India like her great rivers from their Himalayan cradle fertilising the mind and life of the people and kept its soul alive through the long procession of centuries, constantly returned to for light, never failing to give fresh illumination, a fountain of inexhaustible life-giving waters." Their ideas can be said to be rediscovered in "much of the thought of Pythagoras and Plato and form the profoundest part of Neo-platonism and Gnosticism" and we can say

freely that they influenced largely through these Greek sages the philosophical thought of the West. Sufism was very little more than Upanishadic thought in a new garb. Whatever the Archers of the West may say, most of the main philosophical ideas of later times had their seed or indication in these old writings. Not only this. Even the larger principles of physical science had already been anticipated and suggested by these old seers. Yet the *Upanishads* are not intellectual speculations, they have not gone in for any metaphysical analysis. Their composers were great Rishis who saw Truth rather than merely thought it. They acquired direct knowledge of things by an integral knowing of the self. It is clear that the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* are not only the very foundation of Indian philosophy and religion, but are also the ultimate source of all art and poetry and literature in India.

Regarding the work of the legists, the importance of books like *Manu Samhita*, we have said quite enough in the portion on Indian polity. These books are known as *Dharma Shastras* and presumably give directions and lay down the canon whereby the *Dharma* becomes the sovereign power in an Indian State and in Indian Society.

THE EPICS

We now pass on to an important branch of our literature, namely the epics. The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* top the list. Then there is a second kind which can be roughly designated as dynastic history, of which some famous examples are *Raghuvamsham* of Kalidasa—a story of the dynasty of Ramchandra, *Harshacharitram* of Bana —an account of the famous monarch Harsha and *Rajatarangini* of Kalhan—a history of the kings of Kashmir. The

three books differ in character. *Rajatarangini* is more definitely a book of history according to current notions. Kalidasa's *Birth of the War-God* is a mythological epic. But both in the *Epic of the Raghu Family* and in this *Birth of the War-God* there are portions which are of very high lyrical value. The literary epics of Magha and Bharavi are more or less of Kalidasa's epoch and belong to the same fundamental type, but they are more artificial and laborious in style and indicate the setting of a general decline. A popular couplet describes Bharavi's poetry as possessing *artha-gaurava*—the grandeur of meaning. Sri Aurobindo's words about him are, "Bharavi has qualities of grave poetic thinking and epic sublimity of description". We have no space to dilate on the subject here beyond saying that in splendour of poetic genius, none of the writers we have mentioned reach the great height of Kalidasa. One more species of epic poetry should be mentioned here—*Hari-Vamsham* and *Shrimad Bhagawatam.* They both relate to the life and teachings of Krishna and have a high spiritual value, but we would call them Puranas rather than epic poems. We shall come to Puranas and Tantras at a later stage.

THE MAHABHARATA AND THE RAMAYANA

Let us now go into a more detailed consideration of the two master epics—the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana.* These two great books were both distinguished from the other epics by the critics of old by giving them the name of Itihasa, which implied an old historical or legendary tradition "turned to creative use as a significant mythus or tale expressive of some spiritual or religious or ethical or ideal meaning and thus formative of the mind of the people." Sri Aurobindo characterises the *Mahabharata* and

Ramayana "as a profound stress of thought on life, a large and vital view of religion and society." A strain of philosophic idea runs through the two poems and the whole culture of ancient India is presented in a living fashion. The *Mahabharata* has even been called a fifth *Veda*. Whether we agree to go so far or not, there is no doubt that these two famous books are not only great poems, but great *Dharmashastras* as well—embodiments of a comprehensive religious and ethical and social and political thinking. As such, they have been familiar through their translations into the various vernaculars to the vast mass of the Indian people. *Kathakas*, too, have through their sing-song recitations carried the high ideals held forth in the original books to the lowest strata in the country. Familiar incidents have been culled from the two epics and turned into popular dramas. A knowledge of these folkplays has formed part of the education of the people—truer education than a rudimentary training in the three R's. This process of dramatising began very early. Such famous Sanskrit plays as *Sakuntala, Uttara Rama Charita, Veni-Samhar, Janaki-haran* by renowned authors are based on themes culled from the two famous epics. Tagore's *Chitrangada* is only one of innumerable modern dramas in the vernacular laguages.

In both these epics the old old struggle of *Deva* and *Asura*, God and Titan, for pre-eminence occupies the centre of the stage, but in the terms of human life. It assumes the character of righteous war (*Dharma-yuddha*) —between Rama, the Champion of divine power, and Ravana, the instrument of the anti-divine forces, in the one epic, *Ramayana*, and between the five virtuous Pandava brothers and their hundred vicious Kaurava cousins in the other, *Mahabharata*. The side of righteous-

ness wins in both stories. Rama, the victor in one, is God incarnate, while the five Pandavas in the others are offsprings of various gods, and their mentor and guide is Krishna himself, who is another incarnation of the Divine. But neither epic is a bare story of the eternal warfare between God and the Devil or between Ahura Mazda and Ahriman. There are wonderful sidelights on human character woven into the two plots, which make them immensely valuable as studies of human society in its varied aspects. In the *Ramayana,* for instance, one of the most remarkable figures, the *beau ideal* of faithful service, the bravest of the brave in the war, the wisest of the wise in council is Hanuman, who is not a blue-blooded Aryan at all, but a denizen of the monkey kingdom of Kishkinda. Rama's truest friend at the very commencement of his forest life is Guhaka, the chief of a hill tribe who put himself and his little army at Rama's disposal in order to regain his throne. Equally wonderful is the loving devotion of Shabari, the Bhil woman, who waited from early youth to extreme old age, patiently, just to have a glimpse of her beloved lord. According to both Valmiki and Vyasa, then, greatness of character was not a monopoly of noble birth. They have put forward the catholic plea that the highest ideals belong as much to the nobleman as to the commoner, as much to the Arya born as to the Anarya by birth. Nay, more than that. It was the demon king, Ravan, who was the highest authority of the time, on statecraft, and Rama visited him on his deathbed and sought his advice on a King's duties. In the *Mahabharata,* likewise, we find the most charitable man in the Kaurava camp; it was Karna who by his open-handed generosity had won the name of Data Karna. The highest type of a virtuous woman, a noble queen and a loving wife in the great epic is Gandhari, the mother of the vicious Kauravas. There is a curious

mix-up of vocations, too, in these two books. Janaka, a Kshatriya King in the *Ramayana,* is the most famous Rishi of his time and Parashurama, a Brahmin by birth, is the most renowned warrior. In the *Mahabharata,* the Brahmin Drona is the preceptor of archery and swordsmanship and military science generally to the galaxy of princes, while Vidura, the King's brother, is the most highly respected devotee and sage. And Vyasa, the compiler of the *Veda* and the composer of the *Mahabharata,* known as Krishna of the Isle is himself, of anomalous descent. These things go to show that the two authors have nowhere sought to pander to the narrow prejudices of latter-day Hinduism.

Their vision is not bounded by any narrow limits. Where, in the *Ramayana,* the monkeys are sent out all over the globe to look for Sita, the description of the many lands that they visit is marvellous. So is the description of the different species of apes who assemble at Sugriva's call. There is nothing pale and vapid in the description of people in either of the two books. Rama and Sita and Laxman stand out clearly as "vivid with the truth of the ideal life." The five Pandavas stand forth distinct—each with his own living personality. Kaushalya and Kaikeyi, Kunti and Gandhari, are differentiated with great skill. We have said enough already to show that the two great epics cannot be put aside as mere legend and folk-lore. They are at least a highly artistic representation of the intimate significances of life. "They were," in the eloquent words of Sri Aurobindo, "fashioned to serve a greater and completer national and cultural function and that they should have been received and absorbed by both the high and the low, the cultured and the masses and remained through twenty centuries an intimate and formative part of the life of the whole nation is of itself the strongest possible evidence of

the greatness and fineness of this ancient Indian culture."

CLASSICAL LITERATURE

The classical age of Sanskrit literature covered, roughly, a period of one thousand years. It was no longer a period of youthful vigour, but rather of an opulent maturity. This mature age, however, endured long, and the decline, when it did set in, was by no means unto death. For the literary culture of India continued, though no longer through the medium of Sanskrit. Its place was taken principally by the daughter languages. From Jayadeva's *Geeta-govinda* to the lyrics of Rabindranath Tagore through the intermediate writings of poets and saints like Vidyapati and Chandidas, Tulsidas and Narsi Mehta, Kabir and Mirabai, Tukaram and Ramdas, Nanak and Chaitanya and a host of others is a long and gorgeous array. But after the early Upanishadic period, as time passed, a sort of difference arose between secular and religious poetry and mental formations replaced intuition as the motive power behind literature. But this is only partially true, for the major portion of writings has a mixed spiritual motive. The exceptions would be lyrical poems like *Meghaduta* and *Ritusamhara,* historic epics like *Rajatarangini, Harsha Charita, Naishadha Charita* and *Raghuvamsa,* technical works like *Sukraniti, Arthashastra* and treatises on medicine like *Charaka* and *Susruta* and works on astronomy like *Suryasiddhanta* and *Brihatsamhita.*

The representative poet of the classical age was Kalidasa. The type had taken some time in preparing, producing in the meantime talented writers like Kumaradasa and Bhasa, —and the type endured a few centuries without substantial change. Of course, there was a falling off in quality as the decades passed. The *Swan Messenger* and the *Moon*

Messenger could go nowhere near the *Cloud Messenger,* but the style and manner continued. That is but natural. The medium of this period, classical Sanskrit, is, in Sri Aurobindo's words, "perhaps the most remarkably finished and capable instrument of thought yet fashioned." Sanskrit had long ceased to be a spoken language and the language tended to be, later on, artificial and stilted as in Bana's *Kadambari* and in the *Bhattikavya,* but, even then, the possibilities of the language were enormous and its elasticity remarkable. Sri Aurobindo's words are full of meaning, "But yet with all this (it is) never poor or bare; there is no sacrifice of depth to lucidity, but rather a pregnant opulence of meaning, a capacity of high richness and beauty, a natural grandeur of sound and diction inherited from the ancient days."

When we speak of the decadent days in Indian culture, literary or otherwise, we must not forget that the *Navya-Nyaya* system of philosophy was founded by Shiromani in Navadwip and that the Dayabhaga branch of Hindu Law was instituted in Bengal by the legist Raghunandan as late as the Pathan regime. That a first class Sanskrit lexicon of the standard of *Shabdakalpadruma* should have been written (and that by a non-Brahmin) in the early Nineteenth Century militates completely against any theory of total literary decadence in India. We shall not take up any more space in putting before our readers dramatic works in Sanskrit other than Kalidasa's *Sakuntala.* We have named some already. *Mrichchhakatikam* or *The Toy Cart* is remarkable for two reasons. First, its plot; the life it depicts is purely secular, and not even princely. The story has not been drawn from the old epics or from the Puranas and is free from any ethical restraint. Secondly, it is of historic interest, as containing specimens of very many Prakrit

dialects. There is quite enough material in Sanskrit literature—its dramas, poems, prose romances, monographs, historical works, its tales like the *Jatakas, Panchatantras,* Dandini's *Dashakumarcharitam,* Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara,* much as in the old epics, which gives the lie to the myth that old India was lost in her philosophy and religion and was "incapable of the great things of life."

The dominant note, however, in the mind of India has been spiritual, intuitive and psychic. But this does not, by any means, imply that she has abstained from life and action. On the contrary, as we have amply shown, she made good in every branch of life as long as she was fully alive. It was when degeneration set in that she took up asceticism and other-worldliness as her ideal and bid fair to lose all that she had gained before. The teachings of the three southern philosophers indicate respectively the three paths recommended by them,—*Adwaitism, Visishtadwaitism* and *Dwaitism.* These teachings in prose have no poetry about them, but they mark the highest level in dialectics reached by our literature, and show a very high standard of intellectualism. This epoch of reason served its turn in keeping "the soul of India alive through the gathering night of her decadence." But it could not do its allotted work "without the aid of a great body of more easily seizable ideas, forms, images appealing to the imagination, emotions, ethical and aesthetic sense of the people." This need was satisfied by the Puranas and the Tantras. Of the latter we shall speak presently. Let us take the Puranas first. We have already under epic poetry mentioned two of the most famous works—the *Bhagawata* and the *Harivamsha*—both relating to Sri Krishna and his family. There is also another Purana relating to Vishnu and his incarnatio the Vishnu Purana. But there are,

likewise, Puranas relating to other deities, the three gods of the new Trinity and their Energies or Shaktis. It is not necessary to describe them. But we know of a few like Kalika Purana, Chandi, Garuda Purana, Matsya Purana etc., even an Isa Purana about the life of Jesus Christ written early in the British period by one Father Thomas. Generally speaking, these works are religious poetry developed to meet the need of the Indian at that particular stage of his religious evolution. Sri Aurobindo's words are, "It is only in an understanding of the terms of the Indian religious imagination and of the place of these writings in the evolution of the culture that we can seize their sense." It is no use borrowing the glasses of the narrow-minded rationalist of Nineteenth Century Europe in order to appraise the nature and utility of Puranic lore. We are beginning to understand now that the Puranic religions are only "a new form and extension of the truth of the ancient spirituality and philosophy and socio-religious culture." There were gods in the Vedas, but the Vedic religion had no need of images. In the Puranic age, such a necessity definitely arose. The metaphysical speculations, very largely intellectual, revelling in high-pitched discussions, was tending to reduce religion to an utter sterility. The Pandits of the period were very different from the Truth-conscious Rishis of the early Vedic days. Their dialectics did not and could not attract the average man who craved for a visible something, a tangible something, a comprehensible something, something that allayed his God-thirst and brought a breath of divine *ananda* into his life. The new lore brought to him new images and symbols of which the Puranic trinity and the Energies of Shiva and Vishnu formed the chief figures. "The Puranas are essentially a true religious poetry, an art of aesthetic presentation of religious truth," says Sri Aurobindo. "The

seeming profusion of symbols, apparently phantastic forms, must not put us off. We must go behind forms and appearances and realise how the Puranic and Tantric teachings contain the highest spiritual and philosophical truths—synthetised by a fusion, relation or grouping in the way most congenial to the catholicity of the Indian mind and spirit." All the eighteen Puranas are not on the same level. The earliest work is the best with one exception. On the whole it can be said that the poetic method employed is justified by the richness and power of the creation. The famous Bhagwat coming at the end, rises higher than the popular style and affects a more ornate literary manner and is "a still more remarkable production (than the Vishnu Purana) full of subtlety, rich and deep thought and beauty." Here we have the culmination of the movement leading to the evolution of the ecstatic Bhakti religions. This tendency was there in the earlier forms of thought, too, but it did not get a full chance of development till the classical period turned men's minds to the outer life and the satisfaction of the senses. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "The emotional, the sensuous, even the sensual motions of the being were taken and transmuted into a psychical form and, so changed, they became the elements of a mystic capture of the Divine through the heart and the senses and a religion of the joy of God's love, delight and beauty." Its popular form centres round the life of the child Krishna in the pastoral setting of Gokula. In the Vishnu Purana, as in the *Mahabharata,* Krishna is a hero and warrior and sage politician. The aesthetic and erotic symbol is developed in the Bhagwat and the *Harivamsa.* In the teaching of Chaitanya it reached a still higher level, but it received its fullest development in the inspired poetry of Vidyapati, Chandidas, Mirabai and a hundred others in the vernacular languages. The Krishna cult

underwent a different development in the Abhangas of the Maratha saint, Tukaram, and a few others, but any detailed consideration of these would be outside our limited scope.

THE TANTRAS

We shall close our presentation of Indian culture with a short analysis of Tantricism. Sri Aurobindo in the introductory chapter of his 'Essays in the Gita' observes, "There is yet another (synthesis), the Tantric, which though less subtle and spiritually profound is even more bold and forceful than the synthesis of the Gita, for it seizes even upon the obstacles to the spiritual life and compels them to become the means for a richer spiritual content and enables us to embrace the whole of life in our divine scope as the Lila of the Divine." Lila means the cosmic play of Brahman, of which we are a part. The whole Puranic tradition, it should be remembered, draws the richness of its content from the Tantra. In some ways, the Tantra "is more immediately rich and fruitful, for it brings forward into the foreground along with divine knowledge, divine works and an enriched devotion of divine love, the secrets of the Hatha and Raja Yogas, the use of the body and mental ascesis for the opening up of the divine life on all its planes." Another thing that is of very great importance is that the Tantra grasps at that idea of the divine perfectibility of man, which the Vedic sages possessed but which sank into the background during the subsequent ages. The value of this idea is very great to the future spiritual evolution of man.

During the recent centuries, the vast mass of the Indian people have been sustained in their higher life largely by

the two streams of spiritual thought represented by Vaishnavism and Tantricism. In the spiritual endeavour of the Nineteenth Century, both have played equally important parts. Sri Aurobindo's opinion of the Tantra we have given above. The great Ramakrishna Paramahamsa was in many ways a child of the Divine Mother. Keshab Chandra Sen was at least a quarter Vaishnava while his friend and associate in the Brahmo Samaj, Bijay Krishna Goswami, became a full-fledged Vaishnava seeker. Raja Rammohan, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj, was by habit of thought half a Tantric and his most cherished prayer 'Om Namaste Sate Te Jagat Karanaya' was taken from a Tantric scripture. The Raja's great friendship with the Tantric seeker Hariharananda, his visit to Tibet in order to investigate Buddhist Tantricism are all quoted to show his proclivities.

The great synthesis of spiritual thought, the full development of an inclusive yoga is before us. Sri Aurobindo has shown us the Light. The future culture of India depends on our realisation of his sublime synthetic ideal.