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A BLUEPRINT FOR A NEW AND REVOLUTIONARY SPIRITUAL PATH

The idea of a total and radical change, not only at the individual but also at the level of humanity at large, for the betterment of our times, was taking shape in me for sometime. We all know how grave the modern day malaisé is and the dangers that loom over our heads threatening the peace of our times. A warning from Sri Aurobindo, the Indian sage-philosopher, given some thirty years ago, points a way out:

“It is for the men of our days and, at the most, of tomorrow to give the answer. For, too long a postponement or too continued a failure will open the way to a series of increasing catastrophes which might create a too prolonged and disastrous confusion and chaos and render a solution too difficult or impossible; it might even end in something like an irremediable crash not only of the present world civilisation but of all civilisation. A new, a difficult and uncertain beginning might have to be made in the midst of the chaos and ruin after perhaps an extermination on a large scale, and a more successful creation could be predicted only if a way was found to develop a better humanity or perhaps a greater superhuman race.” (*The Ideal of Human Unity* pp. 389-390).

The question is what possible forms of change and alternatives could be offered to what exists presently but perilously.

My first acquaintance with the thoughts of Karl Marx, Lenin and Mao-tse-tung convinced me then that all truths were historically and socially conditioned; and that the optimum economic and political structures of society were more important than any other value. I was also convinced that religion and spirituality were evolved by man to hide this basic fears created by a capitalist superstructure; or, in Marx's terms 'religion is the opiate of the people'.

A disillusionment soon grew when I saw the atrocities and hypocrisies of the so-called socialist, nay communist, states and the consequences the Marxist ideology led to. In short, I came to realise, from Marx's own youthful writings, that man does not live by bread alone. In other words, mere economic and political changes are not sufficient for a *total revolution*: something more is necessary. Thus I toyed with the old Idealism and Philosophical Romanticism which drove me back to Plato, and several other thinkers who were concerned with man in a much deeper sense than could be found in socialist ideologies.

My student days witnessed a lot of questioning and protests against the establishment, which reflected in the anti-war demonstrations and marches; but which also extended to a much more intellectual inquiry into the whole ethos and philosophy of the sorts of systems we have been living under. This led to the growth of an awareness that, we are in need of new alternatives or serious change in consciousness, an spiritualization of the human plane of existence. Thus, a revolution, if there is to be one, must arise from this plane. It is not necessary that an economic and political revolution come first and the spiritual afterwards—this possibility has been falsified in the socialist's attempt anyway. Rather the converse is what I, along with Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo, the two pioneers of modern India's freedom, maintain. That is to say, it is more probable that a total spiritual change will enhance the necessary changes in the economic and political-social structures. The past is our witness to this effect; societies have been radically transformed when a handful even of more enlightened and illumined souls began to influence and counsel those in power, economically and politically. King Ashoka's works and kingdom come here to mind—but so do the achievements of the Lama dynasties in Tibet, and the Hang-tsu dynasties in China.

Spiritual philosophers do not rely solely on the rational faculty for their insights into the roots of the problems confronting a particular era, nor on any collected scientific data alone; they, however, discern through intuitive insights and a detached witnessing of what goes on around them, the deeper roots, as it were. Spiritual philosophy looks to transcending the finitude and limitations of man, and looks at man in a much broader cosmic context: it is concerned with man's liberation, both individually and collectively considered. It has to be said

that the economic factor is not the *sole* force in human existence, however much the socialist and liberal-capitalist economists will try to convince us of. To carry further this analysis let us explore some truths about the human make-up and human existence.

One can distinguish basically five factors in human existence:

1. the biological-physiological factor;
2. the physical food plane, which includes shelter;
3. the emotive, affective needs, such as love, care, understanding;
4. the need for honour, prestige and other self-regarding virtues and merits;
5. the intellectual and aesthetic inclination.

We may add a *sixth* factor, of a purely spiritual and transcendental aspiration for self-betterment and liberation, or *freedom*, as we more commonly call this.

Now it would appear that the existing ideologies cater for the factors we have listed here in a decreasing order of importance, and often totally ignore the sixth factor, when what is most needed for a balanced and all-rounded system of existence is an increasing attention to the individual factors from one to six. The factors in effect trace out a map of "evolution", and if we haven't achieved this yet then in what sense can we speak of a revolution?

Revolution literally means going or turning over back to where we were. But it would be rather dismal and a catastrophic affair if we were in any sense to go back to where we started from, namely the primitive economic structure based on demand-and-supply, or 'survival of the fittest...' mentality. That would be a chaotic and frightful return to the state of competitive struggle for existence. What of course we obviously are in need of is *evolution*, and serious alternatives to the existing ways of organising the individual and social life. There is in the world today sufficient food, wealth and subsistence material to cater for every human's needs; but the distribution and spread of the same is unfortunately in the hands of a few, who exploit those that have less. Technology is advanced enough to continue the growth

of material goods—but what we need is a softening down of the technological process: in need, in short, of *soft technology*, that produces just those items that man *needs*, and not what he *wants*. That is to say, technology and economics taken out of the gross consumerism and market exploitation that exists in our days, will aid rather than cripple the direction we are looking towards. We need more groups like 'Friends of the Earth' and 'Down to Earth', and alternative farming and the Aboriginal communities to tell us how to live simply and happily in harmony with nature.

The 'evolution' however, in question is not one that seeks an overhaul of the economic-technological structure alone, but one that has ramifications in other structures governing the organisation of life, such as social, political, educational and spiritual. If there is to be genuine evolution in all spheres of life, every aspect of living has to be looked into, and alternatives sought to the present way of going about these. It is in this sense that we speak of a radical view of revolution, whose basis is in the *spiritual* platform of life. An alternative in the spiritual domain may lead us to giving serious thought to the structures and organisations that presently supposedly look after our spiritual needs. Let us explore, as an example, what an alternative in this context would sound like.

Alternative approaches to the traditional and conventional spiritual ways arise in the wake of increased global contact of all peoples and cultures and their religions, and this initiates dialogues and attempts to understand each other's beliefs and ways, and to resolve differences as much as one's tradition would allow. Thus we have the World Council of Churches, the Ecumenical Movement, the Black Theology schools and so forth.

The alternative approach is an attempt at liberalization of the values of traditional establishments of the religious institutions, and to get these to turn their focus on more pressing human issues and situations away from, what someone has called, 'cockpit preoccupations'. There is also the challenge of science and modern philosophies which have clashed with the religious ones. The alternative approach is to discuss and exchange.

In its own make-up, the alternative would not necessarily deny the 'divine' element in religion; nor deny 'revelation', but would ask

for its reinterpretation. For example we see that the Buddhist and the Aboriginal have a totally different idea of the 'divine', the Spirit, to what the more theistic and semitic religions have. As for 'revelation' it would regard that to be a continuous on-going experience of man-kind, and not necessarily a closed book, as in most traditional religions. Its most marked feature would to be the concentration on the *human* aspect of man's existence and experience, and would thus look towards humane and spiritual values that would bring greater harmony in man's life with the world, his fellowman, and with nature.

For its more *human* approach it might do well to look at and take seriously many aspects of man's experience, what we might call in conventional terms 'other experiences', such as the creative, aesthetic, love, insight, and some of which Maslow classed as 'peak experiences'. Newer dimensions of experience need also to be explored, and traditional ones, such as the mystical, ecstatic, the silence and peace of prayer and meditation would need to be incorporated. Its energy then would be directed towards self-actualization through self-culture, which makes the *individual* the centre of the religion as also the sole responsibility for actions and so forth. Here techniques developed and used in traditional as well as new developments in such investigations as Transpersonal psychology, Eastern approaches, and so forth need to be taken seriously. In terms of research and investigation and religious studies, the approach would be more a phenomenological and participant-observer one than any other, such that one's understanding doesn't have to rest on the pillars of professional clergy, on blind following, on temporal power and conversion or exhortation. Finally, if this appears to be secularization of religions, let me also say that it could be the religionization or spiritualization of the secular, such that the distinction is eliminated.

As regards *education* much rethinking is in order. Though our present educational system in appearance is perhaps the most highly organised and elaborately funded, yet something crucial and of great importance is lacking in the system—namely, the preparation of the young for the *inner* life.

In today's educational system, children are not discouraged from revelling in following "every whim and fancy", and in finding "pleasure in the freeplay of the senses" and the faith in "materialism" is reinforced

(*vide* Sai Baba, *Vidya Vahini* 3). In other words, the aspects concerning the moral, ethical and spiritual education are neglected, while the attempt to create little efficient robots goes unquestioned. This is why education is a marketable commodity today if you have a degree, preferably in the sciences or engineering. Then you are someone, you can contribute to the GNP of the nation and of your State irrespective of your intellectual maturity, and despite your spiritual underdevelopment. This one-sided development against the neglect of the development of the truly intellectual, the vital and the psychic, in the present form of education is what Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, and before them Swami Vivekananda and Yogananda Paramahansa, described as dangerous trends in education. Rabindranath Tagore took his cue from these thinkers and began his own schools which he called Visva-bharati and Santiniketan.

Today we find Krishnnamurti echoing the same grievances. And the likes of Sri Sathya Sai Baba are working to revolutionise the entire educational system of India inherited from the British Colonial days of Macaulay, by establishing their own form of schooling system, right from the kindergarten to the university, and choosing the villages rather than the sprawling cities for the venues of these experimental-spiritual academics of learning and wisdom. There is much wisdom and lesson to be gained from the thinking and work of this very significant figure of our time on education, but not only on education, rather on many of the other structures for which we are seeking alternatives. A 'revolution' in this sense has begun in India, but not spread wide enough within India as yet to have involved all its people at all levels, nor yet famed enough for the world to pay heed too. But every Country needs to have *its* own guides as well, who can translated the alternatives to the context that we are here placed in, and to work out the minute details of the strategy that we shall need to work in accordance with. Where shall we look for these guides? To the youth of tomorrow? But the youth of tomorrow is necessarily a product of today, and if the foundations on which the youth of tomorrow is being trained is itself wanting and inadequate, then could we expect our product to be any more fruitful and prodigious?

In suggesting the changes and alternatives by pointing to the spiritual growth path, as a beginning in this direction, I do not mean that we become crazy about psychic and spiritual powers, behave weirdly and

undergo dramatic experiences induced by intoxicants, drugs. Nor is the suggestion that we wear weird clothes, adorn ourselves in saffron and costumes of another bygone era, and carry on stupidly in restaurants, streets and parks as the devotees of a few 'gurus' tend to do. These changes in outward trappings do not constitute an inner transformation necessary for the revolution. The search has to go deeper, and the changes to occur at the more subtle, mental, vital, psychic and spiritual levels. This is why it is important to realise that we are talking first and foremost about the radicalisation of consciousness, about the inner person coming out; and this would mean changes in the existing living pattern and the form of life, the educational system, the social-economic policies, and the political structure. The radical undertaking begins with a few and grows to encompass the larger population—not through bullets, economic bribes and ill-balanced qualifications—but through bubbles of love, wisdom, and the re-modelling and changing of the inner person, lubricated by the moral underpinning of Gandhian activism, non-violence and freedom. Work is not to be shrugged, for work is worship, and there is much work that needs to be done yet. Then there is need for establishing centres for growth of the person, where the emphasis turns to changes in consciousness through training in the vital, mental, psychic and spiritual growth and awareness. Such centres of learning and growth can serve as models for higher aspirations within this direction. They can serve as surrogate schools or academies, but unlike our existing educational institutions, the curriculum and teachings would need to be more balanced, all-rounded, and applicable to adults as much as to children and the youth. These would result in the establishing of true centres for adult education where emphasis would be placed on the study of metaphysics, philosophies, religions, yoga, and the practices of concentration, physical fitness, meditation, self-healing remedial and preventive medicine, as well as lessons in soft, self help technology and small-farm developments. The implications of such training centres can be far-reaching for the days ahead of us, if there is to be a real revolution.