

# Sri Aurobindo's view on Religion of Humanity

**Dr. Saloni Kumari**

M.A., Ph.D.

Department of English,

L.N.Mithila University, Darbhanga.

*Abstract* : In this paper we focus on Sri Aurobindo's view on religion of humanity. From the analysis of Sri Aurobindo's ideal of nationalism, national integration and his vision of India, it is evident that he was not a chauvinist and his nationalism has universal appeal. From his writings a broad outline of national reconstruction and national integration can be derived. It has its different aspects, political, economic, social cultural and spiritual. The very basis always remains the same, the spiritual transformation of man and society. Here his nationalism transcends the limit of nation and enters into the realm of universality. If it can be based on the ideal of human unity, it will become a permanent and fundamental unity. This plan of reconstruction and integration are to be infused with religion of humanity. This is not the intellectual religion of humanity but a spiritual religion of humanity. This can only lead to a strong and social foundation of human unity. This universal and integral outlook of Sri Aurobindo is to be seen in common with that of John Ruskin, Tolstoi, Gandhi, Rabindranath, Sorokin, and Swami Ranganathananda. An altogether different approach of human integration comes from M. N. Roy. Whatever were their approaches, the emphasis remained the same - a concern and love for humanity. They drew their inspiration from religion and approached a comprehensive understanding of human and the universe by combining material - scientific and spiritual insights. The basic principle of their thought was the religion of humanity.

**Keywords** : Sri Aurobindo, humanity, vision, universe.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Humanism can be defined as a philosophy and an attitude of mind, which gives primacy to the human individual and recognizes his or her right to live in freedom and with dignity. The religion of humanity was mind born in the 18th century, of the rationalist thinkers, its aim was to recreate human society in the image of their kindred ideas, liberty, equality and fraternity. Humanitarianism has been its most prominent emotional result. Philanthropy, social service and other kindred activities have been its outward expression of good works. Its fundamental idea is that mankind is the godhead to be worshipped and served by man and that the respect, the service, the progress of human being and human life are the chief duty and chief aim of the human spirit. Science even must not be allowed to make claims contrary to its ethical temperament and aim and only to help serve the progress of religion of humanity. War, capital punishment, all kinds of cruelty by individual or State or Society, degradation, oppression, exploitation of man are all considered as aims. The life of man is to be sacred, preserved, strengthened, ennobled, and uplift. This is the idea and spirit of the intellectual religion of humanity.

## II. SRI AUROBINDO'S VIEW ON HUMANITY

Sri Aurobindo's vision of ideal human unity and unity of mankind emerges as a superstructure built on the foundations laid by the creative thinkers and mystics of the Renaissance. Sri Aurobindo's *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle* present in clear terms the history and psychology of the development of mankind and how they lead to the ultimate goal of unity and oneness. Sri Aurobindo came to the Indian political scene much earlier than Gandhi and Roy and acted as the precursor of Gandhi and Roy. Gandhi,

who left India for South Africa in 1893, the year in which Sri Aurobindo returned to India, came back to his country at the starting of the First World War. All of them have keenly responded to the crisis of India. Their diagnosis is common but their prescribed suggestions are different.

The Ideal of Human Unity was written in a serial form in the pages of the monthly review, *Arya*, between 1915 and 1918. They reflect the rapidly changing phases of ideas, facts and possibilities, which emerged in the course of European conflict. Sri Aurobindo was very much optimistic about the idea of World State, which would raise a hope of new order in the mind and heart of people to establish permanent peace and well being of mankind. The international unification could be brought forward either by a centralized World State or by a looser world union, which might be either a close federation or a simple confederation of the peoples for the common ends of mankind. The most desirable form of it would be a federation of free nationalities. Such a union would have the greatest chances of long survival or permanent existence. He expressed his hope that the ideal of human unity could be no longer remaining an unfulfilled idea but an accomplished fact. His idea of lasting peace was to be established by a World State. It can raise the hope of a new order in the mind and heart of people to establish permanent peace and well being of mankind. This will assure its peace and harmony, a free room for the realization of the highest dreams, for the perfectibility of the rare, a perfect society, higher upward evolution of the human soul and human nature.

Sri Aurobindo discussed some practicable options for the formation of World State or World union. The international unification could be brought forward either by a centralized world-state or by a looser world union, which might be either a close federation or simple confederacy of the peoples for the common ends of mankind. A confederacy would mean the preservation of national basis and great freedom of national life, but the subordination of the separate national to the larger common interests and of full separate freedom to the greater international necessities. To Sri Aurobindo that form was to be more desirable as it could give sufficient scope for the principle of variation, necessary for the free play of life and the healthy progress of the rare. He also laid down the broad guidelines for the political, economic and administrative arrangements (what he has called mechanical means) needed for the ideal of human unity to work.

At the same time he was aware of the serious limitations of these alternatives. A centralized World-State must end either in a death in life, a stagnation or by the insurgence of some saving but revolutionary force or principle which shatter the whole fabric into pieces. Similarly a centralized socialistic state might end in disintegration, or the generalization of Socialism through but the world was not easily for seeable. He concluded that the ultimate result must be the formation of a World-State and the most desirable form of it would be federation of free nationalities in which all subjection or forced inequality and subordination of one to another would have disappeared and, though some might preserve a greater natural influence, all would have an equal status. A federal order would be the most desirable. Such a union would have the greatest chance of long survival or permanent existence. He expressed his hope that the ideal of human unity would be no longer remaining an unfulfilled ideal but an accomplished fact.

According to Sri Aurobindo the unity of mankind is evidently a part of nature's eventual scheme and must come about and this will keep the race intact in the roots of its vitality, richly diverse in its oneness. This unity of mankind can be brought by mechanical means that is by establishing a world union or a loose confederation states on the basis of centralization and uniformity in administration, control of foreign affairs, economic centralization, legislative and social centralization. Only a psychological unity can give such a formation a permanent base. A fundamental, complete and real human unity is possible by a spiritual religion of humanity. A spiritual oneness can create a psychological oneness not dependent on any intellectual or outward uniformity and compel an oneness of life and this will be the basis for a higher type human existence. A psychological unity would bring an inner change which could give some chance of durability to the unification. That is only possible through religion of humanity.

A religion of humanity may either be an intellectual or spiritual aspiration. The aim of religion of humanity was formulated in the 18th century to recreate human society by liberty, equality and fraternity. This is the intellectual religion of humanity. It has faith in humanity and its earthly progress, yet able to effort comparatively much of what it set out to do. To some degree it humanized society, law, punishment, outlook of man by man, abolished slavery, stimulated charity and service of Mankind, encouraged the desire of freedom, made possible for man to conceive of a world free from war. It gave new conceptions of the dignity of the human being, self-development and potentiality, spread enlightenment. Sri Aurobindo borrowed this idea of religion of humanity from Augustus Comte, the philosopher and sociologist of 19th century, though he was not satisfied with the mechanical turn that Comte gave it. He thought that this idea of religion of humanity was not sufficient to bring any adequate and fundamental change in the formation of unity of mankind. This idea had to be made itself more explicit, instant and categorically impressive. It had to fight against its enemy, egoism of individual, class and nation. For him the aim of religion of humanity must be love, mutual recognition of human brotherhood, a living sense of human oneness and practice of human oneness in thought, feeling and life. He exposed the weakness of the intellectual idea that it has been obliged in an intellectual age to mask its true character of a religion and a thing of the soul and the spirit to appeal to the vital and physical mind of man rather than his inner being. He criticized it that it had failed to some extent to revolutionize political and social institution and modify the ideas and sentiments of common mind of mankind. It had rather brought a change in the inner human nature and inner way of living. For that he thought the awakening of the soul of man is necessary. In *The Human Cycle* he presented the solution of the problem of relationship between the freedom of the individual and the collective uplift. He pointed out that a purely political and institutional solution would not work. He said, "The union of liberty and equality can only be achieved by the power of human brotherhood and it can not be founded on anything else .... When the soul claims freedom, it is the freedom of its self-development, the self-development of the divine in man in all his being. When it claims equality, what it is claiming is that freedom equally for all and beings .... Freedom, equality, unity are the eternal attributes of the spirit".

But this kind of a federation of free nationalities would be only of a mechanical unity unless it is based on religion of humanity. For Sri Aurobindo a spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. It is not a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. What he meant by the term is "...the growing realization that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth that the human race and human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here. It implies a growing attempt to live out this knowledge and bring about a kingdom of this divine Spirit upon earth. By its growth within us oneness with our fellow-men will become the leading principle of all our life, not merely a principle of co-operation but a deeper brotherhood, a real and an inner sense of unity and equality and a common life. There must be the individual that only in the life of his fellow-men is his own life complete. There must be the realisation by the race that only on the free and full life of the individual can its own perfection and permanent happiness be founded. There must be too a discipline and a way of salvation in accordance with this religion, that is to say, a means by which it can be developed by each man within himself, so that it may be developed in the life of the race". When man would realize this truth and seek to develop it in themselves, the Spirit might step in and lead humanity to the path of its highest possible happiness and perfection. Sri Aurobindo thought that the purpose of human existence is not the hedonistic ideal of pleasure seeking; it is to transcend the ego and to attain full possession of the spirit. He desired for total transmutation of contemporary agencies and instruments of mankind by the achievement of higher divine powers. Divine illumination will be conducive to the moulding of inner and outer existence by the power of a higher agency. Therefore the spiritualization of the mental being and its transformation by a spiritual ideality should be the aim of our vital and physical



nature. He dreamed that in this way true concretization of the ideals of liberty, equality and brotherhood would bring about a change of human nature and growth inward spirit and consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo had described the wider scope of religion of humanity that this religion of humanity acted as a constant intellectual and critical solvent, an unsparing assailant of the thing that is and an unflinching champion of the thing to be, faithful always to the future. This religion has faith in humanity and its earthly future and can therefore aid its earthly progress... this religion of humanity was yet able to effect comparatively much of what it set out to do .It, to some degree, humanized society , humanized law and punishment, humanized the outlook of man on man, abolished legalized torture and the cruder forms of slavery, raised those who were depressed and fallen, gave large hopes to humanity, stimulated philanthropy and charity and the service of mankind, encouraged everywhere the desire of freedom, put a curb on oppression and greatly minimized its more brutal expression.” 21 He further added, “ It made it possible for man to conceive of a world free from war as imaginable even without waiting for the Christian millennium .It gave new conceptions of the dignity of the human being and opened new ideas and new vistas of his education, self-development and potentiality. It spread enlightenment ; it made man feel more his responsibility for the progress and happiness of the race ; it raised the average self-respect and capacity of mankind; it gave hope to the serf, self assertion to the down-trodden and made the labourer in his manhood the potential equal of the rich and the powerful.”

By Religion of Humanity he does not mean some creedal religion, old and new, which the whole world would accept. The word ‘religion’ is used here metaphorically, to mean ‘a system of beliefs held with ardour and faith’, In contrast to the nationalist religion of the country. In Human Cycle he has given a most illuminating critique of what is generally understood by the term religion, it is in its inner nature a seeking after God, the opening of the deepest life of the soul to the Supreme Consciousness. True religion is spiritual religion , that seeks to live in the spirit, in what is, beyond the intellect, to govern one’s ethical , aesthetic and practical life by the light and law of the spirit.

### III. CONCLUSION

Many years later while revising *The Life Divine* he added a final chapter in the course of which he made a comprehensive formulation of the spiritual basis of existence, “ There is a Reality , a truth of all existence which is greater and more abiding than all its formations and manifestations; to find that truth and Reality and live in it , achieve the most perfect manifestation and formation possible of it , must be the secret of perfection whether of individual or communal being.....Humanity is a formation or manifestation of the Reality in the universe , and there is a truth and self of humanity, a human spirit, a destiny of human life.” The community and the individual is a formation of the Reality. He wanted a divine conquest of the whole world, the conquest of all its movements and the realization of the Divine Love.

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