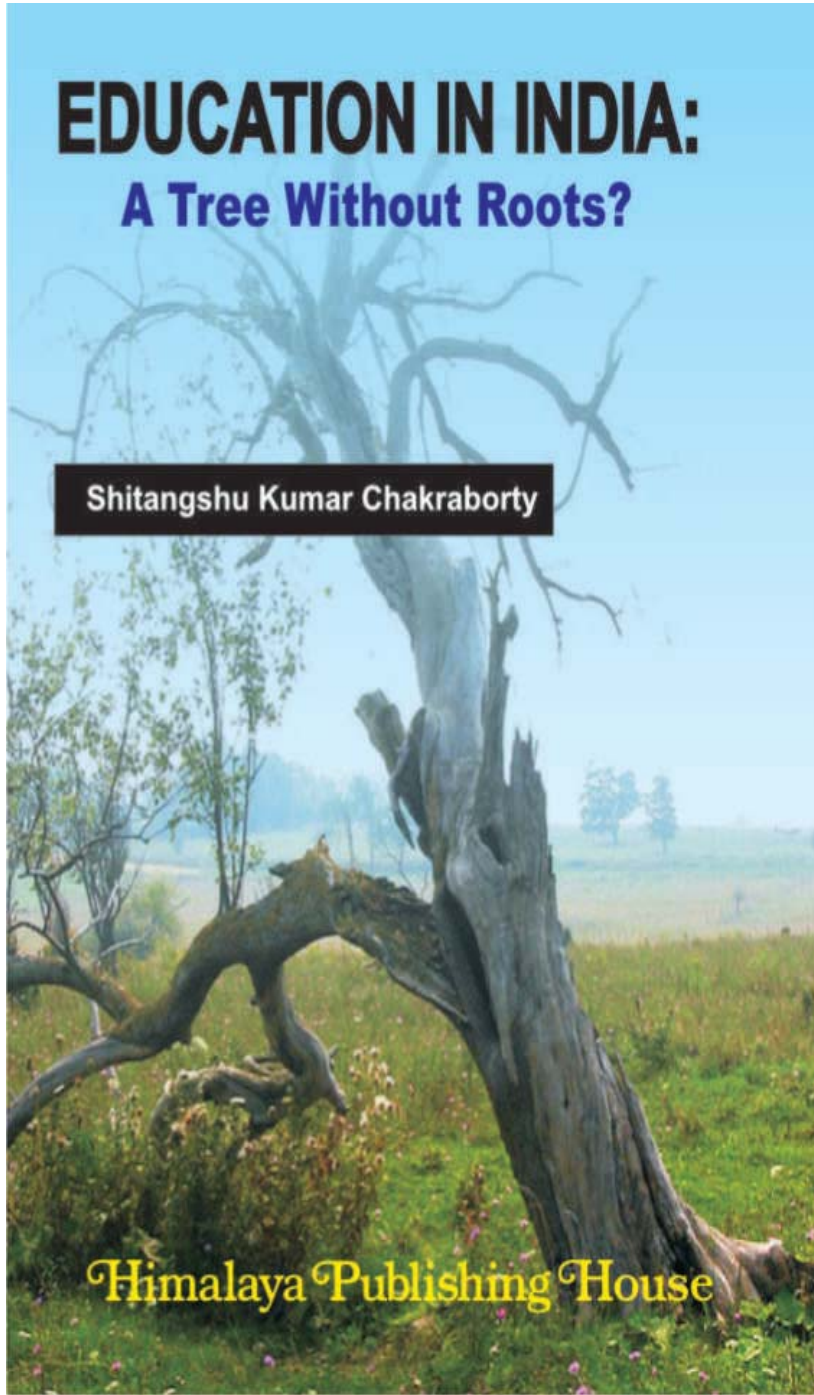


# **EDUCATION IN INDIA:** **A Tree Without Roots?**

Shitangshu Kumar Chakraborty

Himalaya Publishing House



# EDUCATION IN INDIA : A Tree Without Roots?

**Shitangshu Kumar Chakraborty**

**Mentor Emeritus**

**Rabindranath Tagore Centre for Human  
Values**

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Chalati ekena padam,  
Tisthati ekena buddhiman;  
Asamikshya param sthanam  
Na purvam ayatanam tyajet.

– **Hitopadesa, Mitrabha.**

**[The wise one pauseth before moving a single step. Without careful scrutiny of even a glorious destination, he does not forsake his previous ground.]**

To The Late Sashadhar Ganguly:  
Twameva Bandhuscha, Sakha Twameva  
**[Friend, philosopher and guide in my early youth.]**

Nabh kamal mein hai kasturi,  
Kaise bharam mitey pashuka re?

– **Sant Kabir Das**

**[The musk is lodged in the navel within, How, alas,  
can the deer get  
rid of the illusion that it is without in the forest.]**

## Foreword

This book — **EDUCATION IN INDIA : A TREE WITHOUT ROOTS?** — is a product of exceptional erudition. With keen insight it draws attention to the deep-rooted malaise that has overpowered the education system of India, its aims and directions.

The author is an internationally reputed thinker and is a true lover of India. With his immense learning and wide experience as a teacher, and his association with various organizations about proper dissemination of human values, he has marshalled irrefutable facts to challenge those who are defining the sacred temple of Education in India with materialistic and iconoclastic attitudes, as also by pursuing a policy of commercialisation of the education system for spinning easy money.

He has also given a clarion call to all right-thinking persons to pause and ponder whether the educational policy of India is proceeding with the Right Temper and is on the right track, and what should be our real goal.

It is a pity that India — *Bharatvarsha* — has fallen on evil times and on evil tongues. There was a time when the entire world looked up to *Bharatvarsha* for true knowledge and proper guidance in all matters, material and spiritual, so as to build character to stand up in the world with the head high.

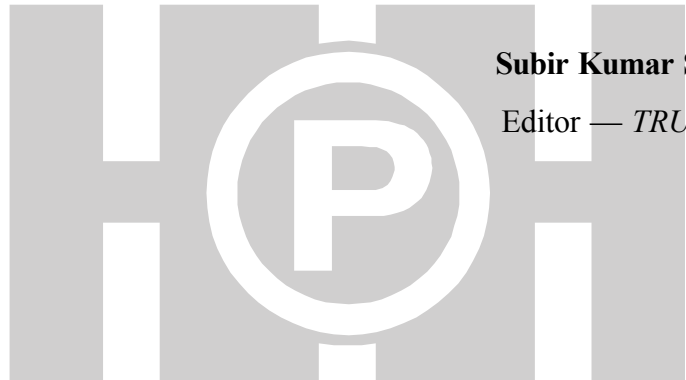
Unfortunately however, bewildered by the dazzling feats of modern science and the ever-increasing allurements of consumerism, a progeny of the globalization of industries, people are forgetting the true goal of human life. As a natural consequence, greed, passion and lust for newer and newer fleshly comforts are rising steadily. International terrorism is also another manifestation of the weird outlook towards basic human values.

We have forgotten that in this glorious land of ours, where a Nachiketa had asserted — *Na vittena tarpaniyo manushya*, or a Maitreyee could solemnly declare — *Yenaham namritam syam kimaham tena kuryam*, character of a human being was of prime importance, and the attainment of proper knowledge of Truth was the highest goal. The ignorance and apathy of modern policy-makers and so-called intellectuals

about the infinite treasures contained in our resplendent intellectual and spiritual heritage are appalling. This has given rise to shameful corruption in every sphere of life in a country which was once highly acclaimed as the Land of Truth.

This book also draws attention to the precious opinions of many world-renowned scholars and thinkers who sincerely believe that the future of civilization is not safe along the path of extreme technology of the West, but in the human values and the spiritual insights of the invaluable tradition of India.

It has been a privilege to read this courageous book containing immensely valuable information and proposing a proper orientation of ideas for setting right the Educational Policy of India.



**Subir Kumar Sen**

Editor — *TRUTH*

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## Preface

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Kolkata

This book is likely to prove to be a ‘cry in the wilderness’. But it is not a, ‘crying wolf’. In early April this year the author was standing in front of ‘Swamiji’s mango tree’ at Belur Math for the umpteenth time perhaps. This grand old sentinel had been standing there even before Swami Vivekananda had acquired the land for the Ramakrishna Math and Mission on the Western bank of the Ganga. This was in 1898. It has thus been a witness to Divine events, and is perhaps now at least one hundred and twenty-five years old, still bearing mangoes and giving shade.

In silence an image flashed across the author’s mind: Suppose this venerable ‘senior citizen’ of Nature, in a sudden spell of ‘enlightenment’, were to begin to loathe and deny its roots as a mass of dirty, uncouth tangle. It wanted to wrench itself off from this filthy bondage, and to stand free on fresh ground. What might happen then? The tall, concrete pillars supporting some of its decrepit trunks would themselves have crashed first, and then the sacred witness itself would be gone for ever — fruits, leaves, branches and all that.

Another image may well complete the one above. Imagine that the river Ganga, flowing past the Math a few metres to the east of the mango tree, were to receive the ‘wisdom’ that its present course from the Gomukhi to the Bay of Bengal has been a big mistake. It must therefore roll back and carve a new pathway supposedly more meaningful than the one traversed for several millennia. If the Ganga could do that, what results would follow? Comprehensively disastrous in short.\* The *Kena Upanishad* called such blight ‘*mahatih vinashti*’. These two images appear to capture and convey some anxious worries and concerns voiced in this book. Having

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\* In fact, Vivekananda, in his unsurpassable treatise on comparative culture. *The East and The West*, had posed this very question and given his emphatic reply by using the word ‘river’ instead of Ganga. Thus: (a) ‘If it ever tries to trace back its course, it will simply dry up by being dissipated in all directions’; (b) ‘if our national life of these ten thousand years has been a mistake, then there is no help for it; and if we try now to form a new character, the inevitable result will be that we shall die’; (c) ‘I ask in all seriousness — which is easier, to give up our national character evolved out of thousands of centuries, or your grafted character of a few hundred years?’ (*Complete Works*, Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, vol. 5, 2005, p. 460).



gathered some experience teaching at various levels. In India and abroad, for five decades, the author has been irresistibly compelled from within to share some critical thoughts. He has nothing to win, nothing to lose. So, sitting on the fence has been eschewed. The bandwagon has not been joined. Playing to the gallery has been shunned. Every episode, each event, all information recounted below has been personally experienced or gathered by the author. It is a duty to posterity that our fading generation leaves for them somewhere a modicum of honest insights into the educational legacy that is in the making in post-independence India. Not only has our own nation enormous stakes in this endeavour the whole world too has.

This book is appearing at a time when education in India is being treated as a 'business' sector worth ₹ 90 billion per year, when teachers in handsomely remunerative government institutions are resorting to hunger strikes and else for still larger pay packets, etc. It is appearing in a period when heavy-weight opinion-moulders are writing books with titles like – '*Fault Lines of Mind Civilization*', '*The Siege Within*', '*India Unbound*' and the like. They do not seem to mind advocating, 'compound fracturelines', or 'siege without', or 'borrowed bondages'. They forget, or ignore that this is the land of '*guru-gariba-vasa*' ages ago Vishnusharma (of **Panchatantra** fame) had refused to accept any remuneration for educating a King's children. Education, *sbiksha daan* was not put for sale. These pages are seeing the light of day also when this author had been summarily put down by two senior IAS officers (once at Mussoorie and once at IIM Calcutta) asserting that Vivekananda was not an authority on Indian culture and whatever he had done was outside India, nothing within. Moreover, it is a time when gross national product (GNP) is soaring while gross national character (GNC) is nose-diving. The book is emerging when the world seems to have turned wild. Everything is being made unsustainable: harmony at home, sacred manage, frugal lifestyle, purity of air and water, harmony with Nature, nobility in teacher-student relationships, etc., — Quiet desperation — has yielded to groaning desperation. Yet, ironically, all this is accompanied by the stupid cant of 'sustainable development'. The pervasive tendency now is one

of ugly duplicity – which this book has tried to avoid\*.

Yet another inspiration underpins this book. It is a humble token of gratitude to all the ancient and contemporary *risushis* and *savants* of *Bharatvarsha*. They first, realized *Truth* or *Ritam*, and then performed the sacred duty of educating society for the holy and sacred. *Artha* and *Kama* goals were not left 'unbound'. Hence the sustainability of their cultural legacy. No less ample is our gratitude to the numerous thinkers of the West (no, mere researchers or scholars) who have understood our culture both deeply and loftily. They have been able to pick-up the gems, instead of licking the muck, from *sanatan* culture. They all repose high hopes in these treasures and lament that India is educating herself about them. For such thinkers — political distinctions between majority and minority communities have been irrelevant.

Such conscientious Indians outside the establishment harbour a sense of helpless agony at the determined and orchestrated bid to scuttle an entire culture model — evolved over so many thousands of years of high *tapasya* and noble universality. Schemers without and betrayers within seem now to have swooped down on — education — to set fire, for the time-being and apparently at least, to Bhartiya culture's central themes. The prolonged and tragic post-1950 total eclipse of the national mind in India has no parallel in either the East or the West.

Hardly anybody has heard, far less been electrified by these words of Swami Vivekananda, uttered at, Kumbakonam in 1897: in the West they are trying to solve the problem of how much a man can possess, and we are tiding here to solve the problem on how little a man can live. ...if history has any truth in it and if prognostications ever prove true, it must be that those who train themselves to live on the least and control themselves well will in the end gain the battle and that those who run after enjoyment and luxury, however vigorous they may seem for the moment, will have to die and become annihilated (*Complete Works*, vol. 3, p. 181) and Vivekananda was only thirty-four when he delivered this prophecy.

During a Harvard University address in 1913 Rabindranath Tagore had diagnosed: '... we lust, after pleasures not because they are truly desire, but because the red light of passion makes them appear desirable; we long for things not because they are great in themselves but because our greed exaggerates them... These exaggerations, these falsifications... break the harmony of our life at every step; we lose the standard of values and are distracted ...' (*Sadhana* Macmillan, 1988, p.32). In that year Tagore was 44

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\* *The one bright ray in this gloom is that the 150th birth anniversaries of Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda are being celebrated during 2011-13. Though eleven of Tagore's paintings recently fetched £1.6m. at a London auction in June, yet the country's capital has no major road or statue or art gallery in his name within its glittering hub.*

years old.

Gandhiji had opined thus in 1908: — When I read Mr. Dutt's *Economic History of India* I wept; and as I think of it again my heart sickens. Is machinery that has impoverished India. ... Machinery has begun to desolate Europe. Ruination is now knocking the English gales. 'It' would be folly to assume that an Indian Rockefeller would be better than the American Rockefeller. ...Machinery is like a snake-hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes', (*The Selected Works*, Navjivan, 1969, vol. IV, pp. 188-91). And Gandhi's age was 39 then.

A few words from Sri Aurobindo (1915-8) are equally apt: Therefore, in a commercial age ... if it persisted too long, life would become clogged and perish of its own plethora or burst in its straining to a gross expansion. Like the too massive Titan it will collapse by its own mass, mole ruet sua and 'Economics' etc., may be man's first business, but no, its chief business'. (*The Human Cycle* 1985, p. 73 p. 148). Aurobindo was around 43 then.

It appears that a few courageous writers and thinkers of the West had begun to echo every forecast and warning of the four Indian seers above, but only from after the end of the First World War, e.g., Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein, Alexis Carrel, Aldous Huxley, Arnold Toynbee, Andre Malraux *et. al.* Of course they have not mentioned any of these Indian names, although once in a while, suddenly, a Sanskrit word or two pops up!

Let us have a few corroborative lines from a 1980-book from the USA: 'The MNC is the dinosaur of our energy environment. Too big, too energy consumptive, and too specialized, they will run to their own evolutionary dead-end as production moves back to a localized, small-scale base. ... In a low-entropy society, big, centralized, energy and capital-intensive techniques will be discarded in favour of what it is called appropriate or intermediate technology.'(Rifkin, J, *Entropy*, Bantam, 1980, p. 21? Mercifully, Gandhi is quoted on p. 210). The Carl Sagan Committee (1990) had accused sci-tech and commerce for 'committing crimes against creation' (See chapter 5 below).

Here is another such honest 1999 appraisal: 'Global corporations are now reaching out to establish the hegemony of the culture of greed and excess in virtually every country of the world in their relentless search for more customers ... devaluing their cultures as backward, boring and poor, and

offering in their stead promises of a material paradise of excitement, ease and prosperity for all' (Korten, D, *The Post-corporate World*, Berrett Koehler; 1999, p. 31)

Yet, today, we get to know that 'moon mania' has begun to grip India. The world's richest country is now set (announced in 2010) to usher in 'space tourism' on a commercial basis, each seat priced at \$ 2,00,000. This country is reported to be using up (in 1980 or so) as much of the fixed energy resources as 22 billion people (Rifkin, p. 219). Who dares to talk of and educate students about the deepening crisis and chaos of 'unavailable' energy because of the second law of thermodynamics — high entropy. Cosmetic courses on 'environment' are a dampsquib. The rhetoric of sustainability in IIT's and IIM's is a cruel joke. While globalization is proclaimed as 'inevitable', entropy gets buried under the sand. Apparently, Einstein was foolish to assert that of all the physical laws, the entropy law of thermodynamics could never be overthrown (Rifkin, p. 44). Greed and lust have always been there in human society. Now 'speed' has added a fearsome feature to 'greed'. Moon-mania, money-mania and techno-mania are invading the corridors of education at whirlwind speed.

In early 2010 Stephen Hawking had warned that too much of hob-nobbing with other planets might invite raids from more intelligent aliens there to plunder earth's resources and move on — as it had happened after Columbus had first landed in America (*Truth*, 05.02.2010, p. 106). Hazel Henderson had relabelled global village as a 'global casino', where only 10 per cent of world's wealth was 'real' production, the rest only monetary froth (*Beyond Globalization*, Kumarian, 1999, pp. 2-6). In our 'his-master's-voice' educational outfits books such as these (and others like the *Collapse of Globalise. The Case Against Globalization, etc.*, ) seem to be on the banned list. The Juvenile Justice Act of India speaks of the 'age of innocence' up to the age of 18. At the same time, 'life-skills' education is being imparted in schools. Its core appears to be sex education for safe inter-sex mixing. Is this not obliterating the very 'innocence' the Act seems to adumbrate (in a grossly one-sided and immature manner?)

This book is neither negative nor pessimistic. Someone had to do the 'dirty job' as they say. Everything briefly mentioned above and elaborated later is factual and truthful. It often borders on stupid complacency or immature escapism when we merely mouth homilies and platitudes — whether as monks or as ministers, or as teachers. If one has the

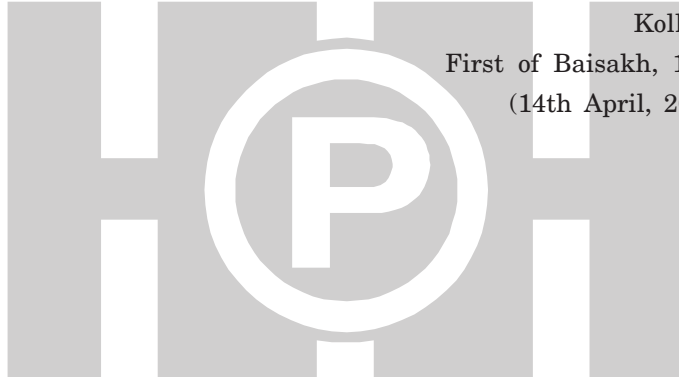
patience and openness to read the whole book. One should find it positive and hopeful in the real sense. It is consistently urging all to begin redrawing from the roots of our *sanatan* ethos. In this task sometimes striking hard at our 'ostrich' mentality could not be avoided. An obstinately intoxicated fellow may at times require a reluctant dose of thrashing to bring him back to good sense. Should a few like-minded readers wish to take a courageous stand as this book has let all of us then say: *abhih*, no fear; and pray: *tasmin tushtey jagat tushtam*, if O! Lord Thou art pleased then all the rest should be pleased too.

**S.K. Chakraborty**

Kolkata

First of Baisakh, 1419

(14th April, 2012)



## Contents

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|     |  |         |
|-----|--|---------|
| 1.  | GOD IN PRISON: Agenda for <i>Desh Rin</i>                      | 1-15    |
| 2.  | COURTING AFFLUENT PENURY:<br>The Enigma of Education In India  | 16-40   |
| 3.  | EDUCATION FOR 'NATIONAL MIND':<br>Let Sister Nivedita Teach Us | 41-54   |
| 4.  | THE 'BEAR HUG' AND CULTURAL<br>DISEMPOWERMENT                  | 55-80   |
| 5.  | SCIENTIFIC TEMPER: A Clinical Probe                            | 81-125  |
| 6.  | LEARNING FOR MODERNITY: What<br>Does It Mean?                  | 126-149 |
| 7.  | 'LEARNING TO DO': The "Essential"<br>Way of four CEOs.         | 150-164 |
| 8.  | THREE DUTIES AND LEGITIMATE<br>EDUCATION                       | 165-205 |
| 9.  | EDUCATION ACROSS A CENTURY:<br>A Bird's Eyeview                | 206-232 |
| 10. | DEAR STUDENTS, MIND YOUR<br>CHOICE TO TRUST                    | 233-263 |
| 11. | INDEX  | 264-274 |

CHAPTER

1

**GOD IN PRISON:  
Agenda for *Desh Rin***

नमो मात्रे पृथिव्यै  
नमो मात्रे पृथिव्यै इयं ते राड्  
यन्ताऽसि यमनो ध्रुवोऽसि धरुणः ।  
कष्यै त्वा क्षेमाय त्वा रष्यै त्वा पोषाय त्वा ।।  
(यः ९/२२)

Obeisance to Mother Earth (Country),  
This is thy sovereignty.  
Thou art the controller, ruler,  
Thou art steady firm.  
Thee for culture of the land,  
Thee for peace, thee for wealth,  
Thee for Nurture.

*(Yajurveda 9/22)*

[Quoted from **The Call of the Vedas**, by A.C. Bose, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, 1970, pp. 277-8. All similar citations at the beginning of each chapter are from this source, except the last two]

I

It was a mellow afternoon in early February, 2009. The Sri Aurobindo International School at Puducherry had given us an opportunity to speak informally to the senior students there. It was nice to see about a hundred of them squatting relaxed on the floor of a large hall. At one stage we requested them to indicate by show of hand how many had seen the cell where Sri Aurobindo was confined in the Alipore prison in Kolkata. About half-a-dozen hands went up.



We suggested that they should all visit that cell (now a sort of modest shrine) as early as possible. It would be a pilgrimage, a homage to the pinnacle of *sanatan* Bharatiya ethos personified in Sri Aurobindo. Aurobindo Ghosh had been holed up in that solitary cell for full one year, May 1908– May 1909. This cell, with a circular one-foot diameter opening in the middle of the arched ceiling, had no windows or other source of light or ventilation. It measured a meagre nine feet long and five feet wide, bare floor. His own first instinct about the cell was that of an ‘animal cage’. But this initial shock was quickly transmuted into that of an ‘ashram’ for spiritual discipline where he ‘found God’. Parents, teachers and students should fathom this miracle, and be afire. For, we feel this miracle to be a matchless saga of human metamorphosis in the present era.

Most of the factors setting the frame of life for Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghosh till 1893 were antagonistic to the emergence of Sri Aurobindo. His anglicized father had insulated him from all native influences. An English governess was given the charge of ‘civilizing’ the boy. At seven he was sent Education in India: A Tree Without Roots off to England where he stayed and studied for fourteen years at Manchester, London and Cambridge. He did exceptionally well in his studies. He had qualified for the ICS too, but dodged the horseriding test. When he landed in India (1893) he was twenty-one, and a cipher in both Bengali and Sanskrit. To cap it all, it has been said that Aurobindo’s mother was mentally sub-normal. How could then such a person find God in the Alipore ‘ashram’, under inhuman physical conditions for under-trial prisoners, without falling sick? No ‘princely’ treatment for him in royal mansions!

In other words, both genetics or heredity and environment or nurture fail to explain the ‘phenomenon’ of Aurobindo metamorphosing into Sri Aurobindo. No other great leader of India of these times has had to face such enormous hurdles from the spirituo-cultural angle. The only satisfactory rationale for being able to overcome these stubborn negative forces can be found in the psychological theory of *samskaras*. It is an original and indispensable pillar of the holistic Indian theory of human character, ignored by western psychology. This third component of character theory can explain what the two earlier ones fail to do.

The astonishing example of the Seer of Pondicherry illustrates to students and teachers alike that the ‘Being’ embodied in the 1872–1950 Sri Aurobindo would have been evolving through many previous

existences in other forms and names which were devoted to the cultivation of the God-ward, Divine powers (*daiivi sampat*)\*. These efforts, *sadhanas*, inclinations, tendencies, impressions, aspirations were being accumulated from birth to birth in the progressing ‘subtle being’ or entity. Therefore, in the 1872-1950 ‘gross’ existence of this ‘being’, the cumulative momentum of all previous sacred labours, *tapasya* was so irresistible that all the adverse forces, domestic and external, were vanquished. Even if this were a hypothesis, no superior one is available.

Swami Vivekananda had once written a letter to an Indian devotee saying that he was convinced that ‘leaders are born, not made’. This statement is both true and not true. True, because when we observe a Vivekananda or an Aurobindo within our limited timeframe, in a discrete manner, then we are naturally inclined to infer that towering leaders are ‘born’. This suggests that there is ‘effect’ without ‘cause’. But when we look into the *samskara* theory (fully supported in chapter 6 of the Gita, verses 41-5) we get a logical and plausible explanation about cumulative causation behind the apparently sudden emergence of truly good and great leaders – from nowhere as it were. This last view contradicts human reason. There must be an unbroken continuity – though invisible. Otherwise ‘evolution’ becomes a meaningless term in the human sphere. Such sound understanding of the *samskara* theory, associated with Patanjali’s involution-evolution theory, appears indispensable for young minds in pursuit of character-building education. Now, a rationalist student (or even such a teacher) might turn back to ask: ‘What is there in character-making for me?’

What did Sri Aurobindo gain from his travails and tribulations?’ The answer depends on how one defines ‘gain’. In his own words, in the last paragraph of his ‘Tales’, he said : ‘I had tasted a little of Equality, Non-attachment and Peace’. As many readers would know, these three psychological states of *samatwa*, *anasakti* and *shantih* had constituted the core of education received by Arjuna in the second chapter of the Gita (verses 47, 48, 51, 66, 70 and 71). Are these states not ‘gains’? Have we been, are we being educated for such abiding ‘subjective’ gains within? True, Sri Aurobindo had gained nothing in objective terms. But the composition of *samskaras* was exalted enough to endow him with a character that could shove the

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\* *The Bhagwad Gita*, chapter 16, verses 1-5

so-called objective gains into a wee corner of life's mansion. The technocratic modern society, and its educational tricks, require this indispensable saving turn towards sanity.

## II

Speaking in glowing terms about an entirely innocent, young prison-mate, Ashok Nandi, Sri Aurobindo had himself confirmed the truth of the Gita theory cited above. Let us listen to him:<sup>1</sup> 'After the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and the spread of Vedantic knowledge and the study of the Gita that truth [*samskaras*, rebirth] is being re-established. Just as heredity is the chief truth of the physical world, so, in the subtle world, reincarnation is the chief truth.'

Unfortunately the gross secular mind spurns all subtle truths. Earnest parents and children however, have today the long-term, basic responsibility, born as they are in Bharatvarsha, to return with humility to Sri Aurobindo and ponder over his following words about the Ashok Nandi phenomenon:<sup>2</sup> 'In love and devotion he was inferior to none. His generous character, sober devotion and loving heart charmed everyone. ...Towards the end Ashok's yogic powers developed considerably; on the day of his passing away, absorbed in the power of Lord Vishnu, he spoke of the holy, salvation-inducing Name and gave spiritual advice to others before giving up the body with the Name on his lips. Ashok Nandi had been born to work out the consequences due to a previous incarnation.' Tearful resonance is what every legitimate teacher of this land should be feeling while reading this tribute. In the passage preceding the above depiction, Sri Aurobindo had envisioned a budding, fresh Bharatvarsha, with Ashok Nandi in mind, with the following hopes:<sup>3</sup> 'These new children of Mother India, ...have grown bold, full of power, high souled, self-sacrificing, inspired by the high ideals of helping others and doing good to the country. The youth are sparks born of the Great Energy, *Mahashakti*, eager to build the new... Among the youth is a marvellous sign of manifesting the Age of Gold, a religious bent of mind, and in the hearts of many, a longing for yoga...'

A century ago Sri Aurobindo had etched out the above benchmark blueprint for his beloved Mother India. It is this Bharatvarsha which has been and still is the object of adoration and preservation the world over. Great soul-searching among parents and teachers is called for while assessing their achievements (?) and failures in this duty of nurturing Indian youth for the Age of Gold. Sri

Aurobindo's touchstone for Bharat's youth was not arrogant, fashionable, scientific temper. It was enlightened, authentic yogic temper. A huge chasm separates the many spurious present-day 'visions' about India, and those of Sri Aurobindo (Alipore prison 1908-9) and of Swami Vivekananda (Kanya Kumari, 1892). When shall we discriminate, choose, and prioritize?

Early this year, the centenary year of Sri Aurobindo's secret Chandannagore sojourn, we had heard a top notch, elderly Indian technocrat conveying his impression of today's youth in course of his convocation address at a national institute of higher learning: 'They expect a lot more from life'. The Chairman and Director had proudly announced that the highest annual salary secured by the graduating batch was that of a boy with ` 6 million per year flowing into his pocket. One of the current standard parameters for judging the relative prestige of such institutions is the size of the highest pay packet offered to a fres graduate, sometimes crossing ` 10 million a year. This practice has been around us for about fifteen years so. On the other hand, the average Indian annual per capita income has barely crossed ` 36,000 only in the year 2009. None of them had deemed it a duty to tell this fact to the students.

## III

Sri Aurobindo, in a 1905-letter to his wife Mrinalini Devi, had repented that he was beginning to feel like a 'thief' for spending as much as '14 annas out of 16' (i.e., 7/8th of a rupee) on himself. This is the man who had left the big Baroda job (1906) to become the first principal of the National College in Calcutta. He had accepted a paltry monthly salary of ` 300/- only, which was one-third of the Baroda remuneration. This again was the man who had to survive for one whole year with the bounties of an all-purpose aluminum plate and a bucket and a smelling blanket and, above all, having to gulp *lufsi* in its Wisdom, Hiranyagarbha and Virat aspects. To these regal facilities got added small-scale floods in the cell during heavy rains. It shall be education in the true sense for today's elite youth, at the hour of *samavartan*, to evaluate the merit and morality of their 'a lot more expectations' against the canvas of Ashok Nandi's and Aurobindo's (and thousands more like them). They had suffered and sacrificed with only one expectation.

The freedom and flowering of authentic Bharatvarsha. Are our parents and teachers conscious of their crowning obligation to rekindle this dying spark?

The Dalai Lama, at one stage in course of a lecture at an IIM in June 2009, had remarked: 'You students here are fortunate to be born in India'. Some mild clapping followed. We wondered whether this response signaled anything really genuine. Or was it a mere mechanical gesture of courtesy? For, when the question-hour came, not a single point was raised by the audience touching even remotely on the above comment from the Dalai Lama, despite the fact that he had briefly stressed later on the duty to revive the learning and wisdom stored in the ancient Bharatiya universities like Nalanda. It was so depressing to listen to for about an hour of irrelevant exchanges centering around Tibet-China political relationships.

And yet, the above observation of the Dalai Lama had recaptured one essential feature which the *drashta rishis* have always been educating us about: An unflinching, intrinsic trust and love for this *deva bhumi*. This is no mere figure of speech. But the lowdensity, shallow character of most of what is called 'education' in India today has inoculated us against such elevating ideas and ideals.

After his release from prison through his magnificent defence by CR Das, at the behest of Vasudeva, Sri Aurobindo had delivered a 'divine' speech at Uttarpara. Among his last words were these:<sup>4</sup> '...it is the Sanatan Dharma which for us is nationalism. This Hindu nation was born with the Sanatan Dharma, with it it moves and with it it grows. When the Sanatan Dharma declines, then the nation declines....'. The 'beating-about-the-bush' disease afflicting post-1950 Indian education is a crime against the legacy of perennial principles we have received from the Vedic Rishis up to the Sri Aurobindo's and his likes. It is an irony of fate that most of this treachery is being perpetrated or abetted by the Hindus themselves.

Sri Aurobindo had assured the world, on the basis of historical evidence, and on the strength of the flawless impulse of the *adesh* from Him: 'Go forth and speak to your nation always this word that it is for the Sanatan Dharma that they arise, it is for the world and not for themselves that they arise' (p.120). So far as we understand, this holds even more true at this hour.

Let us reproduce a few complementary words, from Sir WW Hunter, President, Indian Education Commission, 1883:<sup>5</sup> 'Your [British] state education is producing a revolt against [the] principles...which represent the deepest want of human nature – the principle of discipline, the principle of religion, the principle of

contentment. ...What are you to do with this class, forced under a foreign system, without discipline, without contentment and without God?' One hundred and thirty years on, not a syllable or comma in the above quote can be challenged. Certain quarters today lionize the mischief-making Derozio. He was doing exactly the things that Hunter, a contemporary, had grieved about. Those who shout hoarse against imperialism are also the ones who celebrate one of the founders of imperialism in India. Hunter's ominous picture now looms larger than before for such eyes as can see. And Sri Aurobindo's or Swami Vivekananda's luminous visions? Are they lost and gone forever? Dear parents, dear fellow-teachers — please hold your breath and ponder.

#### IV

There are a few things to be proud of in India today e.g. atomic energy science and technology, space satellite and communication technology, IT, third or fourth largest economy of the world, etc. But what is the substantive fallout of all this? In international diplomacy India appears always on the retreat – whether it is in relation to USA or China, Pakistan or Bangladesh, Nepal or Sri Lanka. Our assessment is: In all these countries faith in their nation and culture is founded on a few firm, basic nationalistic convictions – right or wrong. Strength flows from this source. Post-1950 India has no footing in such convictions. Hence she is weak, she vacillates, she dithers, she capitulates. Seers and savants like Sri Aurobindo, who had crystallized and formulated the most constructive convictions of universal character, have been exiled from the mind of Indian elite. Without recovering and building on them, despite all her superficial achievements, she cannot hope to be treated with genuine honour and respect.

Many noble and understanding Western minds however expect India to hold aloft the Aurobindovian vision, essentially. Some such names may be gratefully recalled: Sister Nivedita, The Mother, H. Thoreau, A. Toynbee, L. Renou, S. Beer, A. Huxley, A. Malraux, K. Raine, Ronald Nixon, Will Durant, JBS Haldane, AL Basham, Lizelle Reymond, D. Frawley, M. Danino, Romain Rolland and so on. Learning from them also is our supreme duty. In effect, collectively, these really 'good Samaritans' are delivering an unflattering message to the educated Indian: You are like a donkey, carrying a big pile of fragrant sandalwood on your back, knowing little how precious it is.\* That is why 'Tales of prison Life' and Sri Aurobindo's are becoming a tragic



waste for India and the world. No amount of technology and economics can ever fill this void of sacred conviction.

Students should be helped to grasp these indispensable truths – both at home and in formal institutions. But where are the parents, the teachers who will stick out their necks and undertake such a labour of love for man-making, not just money-making? One small group of Indian citizens, with high education and high status, are positive towards religion, spirituality and indigenous culture. But they nurse a meek despair about the destructive forces of the present. A sort of goody-goody, keep-alooof, table-talk mentality is exhibited by them. The other class of highly-placed Indian citizens goes over-board in praising and lapping up every new-fangled ideology and technology bandied as progress. They have little time or sympathy for the world-saving, enduring principles that Bharat's culture enshrines. Our *acharyas* should not belong to neither of these categories. Rather, they ought to actively confront the second group, equipped with a firm stand on the unique Sanatan Dharma nationalism of Bharatvarsha.

They forget that since Alexander's time almost every culture from the west of Bharatvarsha has been 'problem-creating' and 'problem inflicting' for the world, and especially for India. This tradition continues to this day. Sri Aurobindo is right to assert that (unlike Greece and Rome or Arabia and Germany, etc.) Sanatan Bharat has never risen to crush others. It has been well said that 'The road to hell is paved with good intentions'. Here is a small list of new dehumanizing technologies which are soon going to sweep us all as a huge tidal wave does, but being touted as inevitable advancement:

- Genetic engineering
- Nano technology
- Robotics
- Information super-highway, etc.

The high-speed, high-greed, high-noise, high-deception explosion of uncontrolled *rajasic* vital which is thus imminent must be

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\* *Yatha kharah chandanbharvahi.  
Bharasya vetta na tu chandanasya.  
Evam hi shastrani bahuunyadhitya.  
Arthesu mudha kharavat vahanti.*

anticipated and seen through. The gospel of 'inevitability' has to be jettisoned. Pretty soon such reckless changes prove to be 'problem-creating' interventions, resulting in intractable chaos. The pauranic legend of *Daksha-yajna* without Shiva is again here today: a pompous sacrifice at the altar of evil and chaos without the presiding deity of Common Weal. It is foolish then to take pride in 'problem-solving'. Teachers should realize that Bharat's sanatan culture has always been a 'problem-preventing' adventure. And hence by far the wiser. The Frankenstein today has to be met head on and put in its place. India possesses the *sattwic* wealth and spiritual power in her genes to lead this counter-attack. Teachers and parents should at least feel scared for their own children and grandchildren, if for nothing else. It is high time to abandon the present ostrich-like attitude associated with narrow professional allegiances. The *Manusamhita* (verses III – 70-4) had laid down five common debts or *maha-yajnas* or *pancharin* for householder citizens.<sup>6</sup> The author here is convinced that at this hour a sixth rin has to be added to this quintet: *desh rin*. We ought to pray for Manu's pardon and blessing. Books like 'The Tales of Prison Life' should form standard material for continuous studygroup reading and discussion – in homes as well as schools. Let the saving *samskaras* be planted without delay. Those who proclaim themselves as world citizens discharging world-rin, while recoiling from *desh rin*, are wrong. By engaging first in the discharge of *desh rin*, in the authentic spirit of masters like Aurobindo, Tagore, Vivekananda, Gandhi, etc., they will automatically discharge world rin in terms of what is really imperative. Docile acquiescence and blind imitation arise from *tamas*. They demonstrate neither true tolerance nor real dynamism. The culture of *sattwo-rajasic* or *rajaso-sattwic* disposition is 'essential' for the rebirth of intellectual *kshatra-veerya*\* in India today. Tamas-induced But *sattwo-rajasic*-driven 'essential' learning has no substitute.

### A couple of urgent imperatives for the latter are

- If individual suicide is among the greatest sins, cultural national suicide is no less.
- No roots, no fruits.

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\* *Chivalry of the warrior class. A public proposal to declare Netaji's birthday (January 23) as 'patriotism day' for the nation was (early in 2011) turned down by the authorities concerned. The message seems to be: India needs neither 'brahminical spirituality', nor 'kshatraveerya'.*

Education bereft of these 'essential' driving powers cannot be true education for discharging India's world-responsibility with self-assured dignity. There is a double significance of human birth and that too in Bharatvarsha: The fruition of progressively refined and sacred *samskaras* through many births, and the consequent responsibility to manifest them through one's life and vocation. If this essential apex learning can be fixed firmly as our abiding priority, then indeed 'Tales of Prison Life', and similar other sagas would not have gone in vain.

## V

In early August 2009, a young teacher of thirty-five had come to visit us at our home with his parents. He has settled in the West coast of the USA where he went some ten years ago after doing his MBA from one of the premier I.I.M.'s. Now he is a faculty member in a University there, and has a European wife. He was on a brief vacation to India after a few years. Sometime during discussions he alluded to violence and suggested to his father that he should adopt Buddhism. Then he turned specifically to the *Bhagwad Gita*, Sri Krishna, caste system and a few similar other topics. Some pointed questions were put to us. They were briefly responded to. But we later decided to inform him in some detail about a few vital principles and facts related to the issues he had raised. The following letter contains these replies. They are self-explanatory. They reveal a concrete case of the widespread alienation from *sanatan* roots among the present generation of educated Indians. What worth then has been the legacy of Vivekanandas-Aurobindos-Ashok Nandis-Gandhis-CR Das's-Ramanas-Tilaks and thousands more like them till 1947? What worth is de-nationalising education now being imparted? Any parallels elsewhere in the world?

Dear...,

It was good and stimulating to talk with you at our place a few days ago. This letter is a result of that evening's mutual exchanges on a few significant points. The thoughts below are meant generally, not for you in particular.

(A) First, here are a few early and recent quotations from the West on the *Bhagwad Gita* (BG):<sup>7</sup>

- **Thomas Merton:** 'The Gita can be seen as the main literary support for the great religious civilization of India, the oldest

surviving culture of the world .... Our (West) highly activist and one-sided culture is faced with a crisis that may end in self-destruction because it lacks the inner depth of an authentic metaphysical consciousness. Without such depth... all our protestations are so much verbiage.'

- **E.H. Powell (SUNY):** '...there must be a kind of truth in the BG, since those who follow its teachings display a joyous serenity usually missing in the bleak and strident lives of contemporary world.'
- **H.D. Thoreau:** 'In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the BG, in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial.'
- **R.W. Emerson:** 'I owed a magnificent day to the BG, ... It was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small and unworthy, but large, serene, consistent: the voice of an old intelligence ... which had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us.'
- **Bede Griffiths (Oxford):** 'The whole of the BG is Krishna's discourse to Arjuna. It is the spirit of God speaking to the spirit of man and teaching him how to conduct his life. That is why it is such a practical book. ... (it) can become a manual of spiritual guidance for the West. It has a universal message.'

One could cite more such appraisals. Quiet, careful reflection of each word above shows that several high class Western minds have not smelt violence in the *BG* and Sri Krishna. But there is also a class of what one may call 'pussy cat scholars'. They cannot but end up seeing the 'mouse' under the chair, though having gone to see the 'queen on the throne'. It is this class which seems to rule the roost today. Axing down the very roots of *sanatan* Hindu culture seems to be their latent agenda.

- (B) Buddhism, flowing as a useful and temporary corrective from *sanatan* Hinduism, has been the parent of Christianity. Buddha's *karuna* and *ahimsa* are no doubt among the loftiest human emotions. But that too is one-sided (Merton above). *BG* teaches Arjuna to 'fight' to discharge a self-less social responsibility after exhausting all other options. But immense care has been taken by Krishna about Arjuna's purging of the mind of hatred,



jealousy, vindictiveness, vanity, etc., before picking up the *gandiva* (bow) again.

Human society has never consisted of all monks and shramans. Nor will it ever be so. Buddhism, however, ignored this reality. Buddha is unbeatable for steering individuals towards personal peace and salvation. But Krishna's character is immensely more comprehensive than that of Buddha or Christ. Krishna's charter comprises administration and governance for righteousness in an entire society in all aspects. This has to include protection of the good and punishment of the evil. Armchair sentimentalism is futile. But every bit of all this must preserve the spiritual progress of man and society. A most difficult and complex task. Krishna did not baulk from it. If apparent 'violence' becomes incumbent, as a last resort, to curb evil (taking due care of the inner motive), it needs to be employed. Hence, the supreme moral of *mahaprasthan* by the Pandavas after the *dharmayuddha* ended.

The honourable, peace-loving 'pussy cat' intellectuals may be urged to contemplate a Buddha, a Christ, or a Gandhi in Winston Churchill's shoes during the Second World War! Many historians today opine that the great emperor Ashoka may have overdone Buddhism, leaving the boundaries of Bharatvarsha quite porous. Later centuries to date have made this a credible hypothesis.

(C) As for caste system (CS), KD Sethna (Amalkiran), a Parsee and a centenarian disciple of Sri Aurobindo, had once rebuffed the superficial critics of the system declaring that 'Hinduism does not stand or fall by the CS alone' (in *India and The World Scene*). Swami Vivekananda had evaluated the CS as a protective armour for Hindu society during its darkest days under Muslim rule.<sup>8</sup> Mahatma Gandhi had opined that this system had acted as an insurance against life-corroding competition. Rabindranath Tagore had read into the quadruple CS a ladder for ascent along the social scale (In *Gora*, a Bengali novel).

In any case, the right expression for the quadruple design of society is '*varnashrama dharma*'. CS is a slippery mis-translation. So called castes are based on 'varna' (colour) variations which, in turn, derive from 'guna' differences. Thus we get four varnas + four ashrams + four purusharthas = 12 pillars of the *sanatan* Hindu social system. The aim is spiritual blossoming for all. There is no such theory

and goal behind the quadruple or other functional caste systems in Christianity or Islam. (e.g. Nobles and Lords, Knights and soldiers, merchants and farmers, workers and labourers). And they too contain their own abominations, including white-non-white casteism.

Only the 'untouchability' accretion is abhorrent and dispensable. But even this pales into insignificance in the light of the near-extermination of the Hottentots, Red Indians, Aborigines and others like them by the enlightened races! The ugly aspects of CS would also have naturally died out by now. But post-independence, fractured politicization of CS has blackened the fair and sensible face of society carved by our ancient social legists who were rishis with transcendental insight.

Lastly, if we possess a truly educated 'Indian Mind' in an 'Indian Body' then we may justifiably say this to the nit-picking scholars: "If the vast sacred culture and society of India has lived on for over 5000 years, its CS as you brand it, must have been fundamentally correct. At any rate, your own sci-tech based secular societies are falling apart at the seams. So, it is better to stop attending to Hindu culture and start greasing your own machines. Recently gained material affluence does not confer a Divine right on you to pass judgments on things you do not or will not understand. The CS, etc., are our domestic affairs. We do not cross over and sermonize on your domestic ways. Neither should you. For heaven's sake do not export your social plagues, masking them as modernization, to countries like ours e.g., a certain society, with only five percent of world population but having thirty percent of world's lawyers, teaching us trust. All the major world problems of today – from global warming to extinction of species, from brutal commercialism to ghastly terrorism – have originated in the so-called advanced and modern part of the globe. It makes little sense then to take lessons on responsibility, environment, ethics, etc., from rich countries who, as recently as in 2009, wanted to wriggle out of the Kyoto protocol."

(D) Bharatvarsha had also exchanges with many countries lying to her East. These were all characterized by cultural and peaceful contributions to those societies, the very opposite of what she received from across her western borders. No invasions, conversions, massacres, destructions, etc. But then this historical fact is also twisted and turned 180 degrees: India could not have conquered and ruled because of ceaseless internecine

strifes among the countless rajas and rulers of small territories; it is the raiding outsider only who gave India the semblance of a nation. What about Europe then? Countries there had not only fought incessantly among themselves; they had all invaded and colonized most of the world. Yet, all this confers legitimacy to them, but no credit for India's benign cross-border connections.

As for one nation, the unity of Bharatvarsha should be understood outside the frame of modern political discourse on nationalism. Her 'diversity in unity', not 'unity in diversity', as Sri Aurobindo had correctly understood Bharatiya culture, lay in the religio-spiritual plane. The four *dhams* (Rameshwaram, Dwaraka, Puri, Kedar-badri); the *kumbhmela* at Allahabad, Ujjain, Nasik, Hardwar; the fifty one *peethas*, Tirupati, Kanyakumari, Sagar *mela* in Bengal; the Shivratri, Ramanavami, Janmashtami, Ganesh *puja*, Dussehra, Diwali, Hanuman *puja* and many more are the all-India, all-caste, all-age, all-sex institutions and festivals of sacred character. Pilgrims from all corners of India visit these places or join these festivals with great reverence and hardship for a life-time or regular experience. Invaders and colonizers were not required to weave this timeless supra-political fabric of Bharat's nationhood.

I have presented above certain truths because you are a fellow-traveller like me – a *shikshak*, a teacher, born and brought up in *sanatan* Bharat. These thoughts may therefore ring a bell or two in your heart.

Finally, you may wish to keep in mind this aphorism of mine:

### **Rootless, Fruitless, hence Hopeless**

With prayers and best wishes'\*

S.K.C.

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\* (After a few weeks we received a curt, one-line e-mail reply : 'It is nice to know about other viewpoints'.)

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