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THE INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE TRANSFORMATION: AUROBINDIAN PARADIGM OF CULTURE OF CHANGE

ABSTRACT

Artikel ini bertolak dari suatu keyakinan bahwa kendati kebudayaan sebagai suatu keseluruhan yang kompleks berkecenderungan mengontrol, ia juga memberikan peluang dan jalan bagi pembentukan karakter dan bagi proses spiritualisasi penciptaan dalam evolusi. Pertumbuhan dan perkembangan suatu bangsa bergantung pada orientasi dasar dan kebiasaan yang telah tertanam lama dalam kebudayaan. Namun di sisi lain, terutama mengacu pada pemikiran Sri Aurobindo, itu juga bergantung pada pencarian dan pencerahan spiritual dalam dunia batin individu. Maka artikel ini mengajukan pentingnya keseimbangan antara dunia luar dan dunia dalam, dunia interaksi sosial dan dunia individu. Yang menjadi fokus dalam artikel ini lantas : apakah kebudayaan

memang memungkinkan transformasi individual dan sekaligus transformasi masyarakat?

Key Words:

The meaning and value of culture • Culture and human survival • Cultural dynamics • Process of evolution/transformation • The individual as facilitator of evolution • Spiritual and mental transformation of the individual and the society

A glimpse in the history of mankind has always shown a culture of struggles, triumphs, failures, invasions, conflicts, and wars. Ancient history shows us the rise and fall of empires in different eras. Countries wage war in the name of their respective flags; just as religious wars are fought in the name of their own gods. After the Second World War, the invention of nuclear warheads seems to have served its purpose as a deterrent to a large-scale potential war. Thus, world war has lost its sting and humankind experiences decades of world peace. Each one is trying to dominate and conquer the other. The constant and persistent search and desire for power and dominion of the other is an obsession for some and a compulsion for others. The dominant passion for human excellence appears, in this sense, to be in control. To be in control is to be powerful. To be powerful entails a development and expansion of the intellectual life.

In general, we can say the determinants of wars may be economic, military, political, ideological or religious. In our Global Age, a war is no longer fought with arms and ammunitions; but rather a war must be waged in different fronts against, such as, hunger, poverty, famine, diseases, environment pollution, global warming, population explosion, unemployment, dwindling natural resources, terrorism, crimes and so on. In some areas of technology, science and communication endow humankind with a lot of benefits and conveniences. Breakthrough in the science of medicine creates wonders in curing even dreaded diseases and prolonging life longevity. The use of technology has vastly improved trade, commerce and industry in the different parts of the world. In the midst of this emerging new civilization of globalization, still the human factor of dominance, greed and power is still a force to reckon with. The quality of life belongs to the rich and powerful while the middle class is fast shrinking and the poor becomes poorer. Some countries have to grapple with daily problems of malnutrition, hunger, education and sanitation. Millions of

children die of hunger. Unfortunately, in certain highly developed countries, some people treat their dogs and cats more than a human being.

Despite the pile of layers and layers of civilizations and cultures throughout the centuries, humankind seems not to have yet achieved a global society where peace, love, joy and prosperity may reign supreme. The growing world population of five billion people and depletion of life sustaining resources, have even more compounded the complexity of the human situation. Yet, in the face of all these, one truth remains. A human being is not only a material being but also a spiritual being who has the intellect and will power to change the course of history of humankind. As Sri Aurobindo has once succinctly describes the dimension of human intelligence, and I quote:

“But the intelligence of man is not composed entirely and exclusively of the rational intellect and the rational will; there enters into it a deeper, more intuitive, more splendid and powerful, but much less clear, much less developed and as yet hardly at all self-possessing light and force for which we have not even a name. But, at any rate, its character is to drive at a kind of illumination, not the dry light of the reason, nor the moist and suffused light of the heart, but a lightning and a solar splendor.”¹

The focal point of this paper revolves around the lever of individual transformation through the philosophy and methodology of Sri Aurobindo (a Hindu philosopher) in particular. A recognition and acceptance of the Divine Source of Energy and aligning our spirit with the Divine is a classic response to the spiritual need of each individual. The idea that each individual is a tiny portion of the Spirit is enough to elicit enough sense of spiritual well-being, even at its mildest degree. Knowing the natural human weakness because of the flesh (ego) makes the assumption of individual transformation essential. Using history as a reference and cornucopia of vast and varied information and knowledge, we can say (if not) conclude, mankind never learned its lesson. Whatever the degree of relevance history may take, it is incumbent upon us to dig into our bag of tricks so that one day after going through the process we can say that 'it is finished.'

Civilization and Culture

A term may be defined in one way or in some other ways. Let me start with the re-reading of what the terms “culture” and “civilization are. Culture is a pattern of behavior where the philosophy in life, values, ideals, beliefs, outlook in life, institutions, customs, traditions, mores, laws, lifestyle, tools/instruments, forms of art (architectural design, music, interior design, dance, sculptural design, painting, writing, etc.), eating habits, games, facilities, movies, language, way of thinking, rituals, ceremonies, and many more differ from one group or country to the other.” It connotes a complex world where we all live in. Its complexity goes far beyond what we see externally. From the crown of our head to the sole of our feet; and, from the reality in and out the self or the body manifest the reality called culture. Therefore, a culture depicts a pattern, a way of life or behavior of an individual or a group or a society. Simply put, culture is defined without bias or prejudice because it is essentially important for any civilized person or society to learn to respect and understand; but may not necessarily accept, the culture of others. A culture is said to be a burden if a specific culture does not or cannot respond to specific needs and wants of the individuals. On the other hand, a culture may pose as an opportunity if a culture can help improve the quality of life of the individuals or help improve the outlook, attitudes, values and habits of the individuals. In an overall sense, a culture must help improve the quality of life in all aspects of human endeavors.

Civilization, on the other hand, “in its ordinary, popular sense, refers to the state of civil society, governed, policed, organized, educated, possessed of knowledge and appliances as opposed to that which has not or is not supposed to have these advantages.”² Civilization and culture guide and define not only the individual's behavior in relation and in response to the social life but the society's or the nation's entire being as well, bared and unmasked. The multifarious ways and means whereby this life-force finds its unique and distinct expression into the innermost minds and hearts of groups of people shape, mold and to a certain extent control, influence and manipulate human activities.

With the globalization, a new culture of respect and acceptance seems to have been emerging rapidly. The mass media and communication technology help people understand other people. It seems that the wave of information throughout the world has built an invisible kind of common bonding among peoples of different nations, colors, ideology and creed.

Logically, by knowing our neighbors we can better understand and appreciate them for who they are, what they do and how they do things. A tolerance on the culture of others is the first step towards better understanding and “neighboring”. If there is a first step, a second, a third step may soon follow suit. Eventually, world peace, love and prosperity will spread and endure. Now, a new spiritual culture seems to have been sweeping the world. The use of media by the spiritual and charismatic leaders has been gaining thousands and millions of followers. Undeniably, religious and spiritual leaders have helped in the metamorphosis of the individuals to become better human beings and better citizens.

An individual living in Spirit is no different from ordinary human mortals. He or she is living with and for others in the society within the sphere of a reciprocal goal-instigated behavior. In this context, therefore, social relations connotes reciprocity in terms of services, training, and economic, educational, political or even religious opportunities because inevitably the “individual life has to cast itself in that mould of culture, serve that power of life, consent only to exist as an instrument for the maintenance and efficiency of the collective existence.”³

We need to interact and interrelate with others. This inner need and desire is the driving force that is inevitably granted and actualized in man's collective life. “In our present human existence there is a physical collectivity held together by the common physical life-fact and all that arises from it -- community of interests, a common civilization and culture, a common social law, an aggregate mentality, an economic association, the ideals, emotions, endeavors of the collective ego with the strand of individual ties and connections running through the whole and helping to keep it together.”⁴ But to believe that the collective social life is unchained from conflict and opposition from within and from without is to think of the impossible. It is not empty of internal and/or external dissent, mishap, confrontation, friction, hostility, antagonism or bad blood that sometimes even lead to wars or other forms of destruction. Nevertheless, the necessity of close encounters with others necessitates a social world where compromise and co-existence are designed and devised. Aurobindo asserts that “life is a self-affirmation of being, even a development and survival of ego, but of a being that need of other beings, an ego that seeks to meet and include other egos and to be included in their life.”⁵

Both civilization and culture are evolving forces founded on the mind, heart and spirit of a given number of people, a community, a nation, a country. This concept of what culture and civilization is all about conveys

the idea that mankind being material in itself and by itself is constantly changing and is subject to change due basically to external environment that defines their very survival as individuals and as a people. It is not easy at all to categorically say when a culture is an opportunity and when it is a burden. Although looking into the perspective of a culture, one tends to define, for example, that the Filipino culture is warm and hospitable in general; the Japanese culture is honest and hardworking, etc. But this kind of labeling does not help us at all fully fathom the essence and importance of culture in defining the destiny of mankind towards global consciousness of harmony, peace, prosperity and love.

At the hem of the culture are the very people who operate with one another in a given time, place and event. Looking at world history, we can distinguish western civilization, ancient civilization, oriental civilization, so on and so forth. Different times, different people, different events and the kind of environment local or international make up a specific civilization for a specific purpose. Humankind scan, review and refer to human experiences in the past in an apparent attempt to learn from the lessons of the past and move toward a better and progressive life, which, after all, is the very purpose of human life.

At this junction, quite a number of questions may arise. When can we say that a culture is a burden and an opportunity? What kind of culture is a burden? What kind of culture is an opportunity? Then the questions of comparative perspective will set in with the questions such as: Is American culture the reason why it is so progressive and the only super power of the world? Does the sudden shift of China toward democratic (sort of) enterprise the x factor that propelled it to be the second wealthiest country after USA? More questions will pop up from the different dimensions of human daily lives and activities as we try to pry open the essence, meaning and role of culture to humankind. It will indeed be arbitrary to say that a specific culture is a burden and an opportunity. Although we look at culture in its totality, in a sense, referring to the culture of a specific group, community or nation we cannot and must not categorically say that one culture is good and the other bad. This brings to mind that the understanding of a culture is tantamount to trying to understand what a human being is in composite. Pointing at a specific character or trait of a person to be good or bad does not make that person intrinsically what he is perceived to be. His behavior can be categorized but the spirit working within him is another matter.

Individual And Collective Evolution

It has been quite a while since the word “globalization” invaded the mentality and language of people. The world has become much smaller because of technology, science, communication and transport. This has brought about rapid change, where the rule of thumb in almost all sectors of the society, in order to survive, is speed in order to meet the increasing demands of a more demanding society. Consequently, in satisfying the changing needs of the people, instant coffee, fastfood chains, disposable products, instant messages, faster airlines among others have become more prominent in our society. We are now emerging as a new breed of people in our new millennium of culture and civilization.

Globalization seems to have interconnected it with civilization and culture. To think of globalization is to think of change. In fact, this global focus has penetrated the academic and business world. The ocean-deep dream of “globalizing” everything ought to commence and be instigated by individual transformation and evolution. If individual transformation is achieved, there would be an echoing impact on the collective consciousness, elevating the spirit to a higher perspective; hence, from individual elevation to collective transformation. Culture is a dominant or the pervading collective consciousness. Basically, it is the mental state of a group of people. Through the passage of time, this collective consciousness is molded, re-directed, influenced, and even suppressed by other groups of people. This is quite similar to what commercials aim to achieve influence the minds and hearts of people. Consequently, the philosophy of business is to use varied ways and means in order to alter and re-channel the consciousness of the majority. Pre-need services, the mass hysteria caused by the cellphone and electronic epidemic have revolutionized the minds of many people, making the Philippines the cell phone hub of the world! There are so many cases of *argumentum ad populum* (a wrong belief that “the majority is always right”) and *argumentum ad verecundiam* (a wrong belief that since a popular person such as a celebrity endorses a product, idea or belief then, it must be true) but nevertheless, such instruments to influence people have been remarkably effective. The magnetic pull of such a rationale is economic, social and technological in nature that corresponds to the physical or material aspect of being human. Now, “as long as we live in the ignorant seeming, we are the ego and are subject to the modes of Nature. Enslaved to appearances, bound to the dualities, tossed between good and evil, sin and virtue, grief and joy, pain and pleasure, good fortune and ill

fortune, success and failure, we follow helplessly the iron or gilt and iron round of the wheel of Maya. At best we have only the poor relative freedom which by us is ignorantly called free-will.”⁶ This is precisely the crucial point of Aurobindo's Integral Philosophy - influencing the minds of people “effecting a synthetic harmony of the intellect, the heart and the will in an integral divine realization”⁷ through individual transformation towards collective transformation.

However, the burden of survival still lies on the shoulders, attitudes, beliefs, values and decision of the individuals who have been trying to cope with change. Change is a painful process whether it is mental, physical or spiritual. Sri Aurobindo prescribes an Integral Philosophy as a means to help man or woman alleviate the hurts and pains of the process and ultimately emerge victorious. The tripod dimension of Sri Aurobindo addresses the human needs for physical, mental and vital development and transformation. This holistic approach may be timely and relevant to the growing complexity of the world brought about by globalization.

The human person is an embodied spirit. Human beings are more than the body possessed. Though the human body plays a vital role in an individual's interaction with the material world, to conceive of a human being is to conceive of him in his totality. There is a far more important and essential aspect of culture that affects its development and improvement. This is where the individual's critical role comes in. The collective consciousness is incontrovertibly anchored on the individual consciousness. As the individual follows the inner driving force to improve quality of life, a point arrives when more existential questions set in pertaining to something more lasting, eternal, and intangible obviously something material can never satisfy. “This is because mind and thought are not the sovereign principle or the highest term of our existence; mind and thought, therefore, can, to a certain extent, fulfill themselves, but they cannot fulfill life nor can they give to man his complete self. Mind is an instrument, not the self of man; nor the complete reality or highest reality of his being. It is a mediator between the being and life; it seeks to know truth of being and truth of life and bring them together.”⁸

Perhaps, I will venture into the concept that culture has an inherent spirit, permeating the moral fiber of a people. It is easier to understand that people of the same spirit converge as a group. For those who cannot bear or get into the stream of a culture will eventually depart or go somewhere else where his kind can blend in and they with him. The cliché "birds of the same flock feather together" has its own truism. Every group in every culture has

a significant opportunity and, at the same time, a burden, depending on how culture responds to the needs of the individuals. The way petty traffic violations are dealt with in a place where the rule of law prevails down to the grittiest detail as compared to a place where no one respects the law can manifest which best fit an individual's inclination.

Assessing a culture to be a burden or an opportunity does not merely entail measuring external manifestations that can be quantified in terms of the benefits and privileges of the individual member in a given society. The social, moral, religious, economic, legal, and political structure of a given country is highly pre-occupied with a lot of things. Inventions, discoveries, science and technology, infrastructure, and many more constitute humanity's focus and concern. Yet, in spite and despite the maximization and enlargement of the vital and physical life-force, there is the accelerating, unstoppable development and evolution of the human consciousness. This is more than physical or material aspirations and driving force. Human nature's dynamism transcends all these sooner or later because an individual “may have to open his mind to what is beyond it and to govern his life more and more by the light and power that he receives from something greater than himself.”⁹

Normally the infrastructure of change is manifested in the physical realm. Thus, by instinct or reason for survival human reaction is that of physical concerns. The need for food, shelter, clothing, education and other material needs has become the primary pre-occupation of many people. However, a picture of frustrations and failures can be seen in the picture of the number of suicides, people in prison and in the mental institutions.

An individual's natural inclination is towards the satisfaction or pleasure of the material or physical existence. With this, a human being's source of delight is manifested through the activities that satisfy the material life, the sensitive life and the economic life. It fascinates millions of people to see others fashion themselves into demi-gods through their inventions. The intelligent mind seen through the sheer genius and excellence of their work, Bill Gates to name one, shows us that the future is in the hands of the chosen few who control and manipulate many of the activities of mankind. Science and technology, rapid growth, and development in civilization seen through the innovation and production of things reflective of “giant minds” lead us to realize how the history of mankind has always been a history of maximizing the world of materialism in us. If “the pursuit of the mental life for its own sake is what we ordinarily mean by culture,”¹⁰ the intelligent individual or a successful person is gauged

by the material things possessed or the size of the wallet. And if such is the case, Aurobindo asserts that “all the actions of this Mind Energy proceed on the opposite basis of the Ignorance and its divisions and, although they are the results of a certain conscious knowledge, it is a partial knowledge, not a true and integral self-knowledge, nor a true and integral world-knowledge.”¹¹

It would be timely and appropriate to re-think and reflect on the real purpose of our existence. Sri Aurobindo, as one of the historical spiritual philosophers, is a firm believer of the Divine Enlightenment. He shares our common belief that by connecting and listening to our inner self, we will elevate our consciousness to a higher level. Integral philosophy, in layman's term, is a person who has a well-balanced and integrated view of one's life. Such a person is one in his thoughts, words, and deeds; he sees and acknowledges the great potential of each human being. One who has a well-integrated life thrives in the Spirit of love, peace, joy and superabundance for he believes in the Almightyness of the Divine Creator. For him, living in the Spirit of the Divine Energy is the sole power that propels him to do what he does, think what he thinks and say what he says. He is in perfect alignment with the Divine energy, an all-embracing power. He is constantly connected and aligned with His creator (24/7), making him an active co-creator of the entire universe and of God's creation.

This is not a faint attempt to help re-align the mind and heart of our people to God. There is a sense of urgency for mankind to reconnect itself to the Divine for Enlightenment. This is particularly needed at a time when the soul and spirit are tethering toward materialism and towards oblivion of the self-concept that man is a spiritual being with simply human experiences. Culture is naturally evolving, emanating from evolutionary thoughts, philosophies, religious beliefs, science, technology, law, norms, family values, and socio-economic fiber of a given people or race. People who live outside of the culture that is quite different from theirs may find adjustment to such a culture quite difficult and sometimes laborious, strenuous, and painful to bear.

Nonetheless, if one is a spiritual person, one can say that no culture is a burden. It maybe difficult to understand and assimilate at times but definitely a spiritual person will not perceive it as a burden but rather an opportunity to learn more about the people, their beliefs, and the many things that can further enrich his own life. After all, no culture is conceived or ever evolved to destroy itself and “the integral truth of things is truth not of the reason but of the spirit.”¹² A culture evolves primarily to better serve

its constituents; a culture develops and metamorphoses for the benefit of the general well-being of the people. One phenomenal spiritual (religious) development is the increasing number of charismatic groups throughout the world. The Christian charismatic explosion, infecting different types of people throughout the world is all about finding deeper meaning in aligning themselves with God through Jesus Christ. They hold the Bible as their main guide in their daily activities. The Koran and the Buddhist manuscripts serve the same purpose of bringing people to God. Therefore, we can say that the element of spirituality is one of the best forces that helps shape and evolve the culture of a people because “the whole formation of the common existence would be a self-building of the spiritual forces that must work themselves out spontaneously in such a life: these forces would be received inwardly by the inner being and expressed or self-expressed in a native harmony of idea and action and purpose.”¹³

Why is retracing our divine origin essential to our human existence, development and growth? For one thing, globalization and advanced technology can dictate the evolution of culture, trade, and commerce. Mankind can be so focused on its material developmental pursuit in the name of survival, competition, and success that the principle of “the means justifies the end”, can become the perennial guide instead of the inner voice or conscience. Hearing other people speaking of the Divine or of Moral issues may become a deterrent to growth or technology; thus, people abhor entertaining thoughts about the spiritual. In fact, the danger of sidestepping the moral issues in the name of scientific growth, trade, and commercial dominance is more of a reality rather than a theoretical premise.

Integral Culture Of Opportunity

Human beings are embodied spirits. The activities or behaviors of people reflect their vast experiences in life and their encounters with the world in general. The human body is the most accessible vehicle to either satisfy one's needs and desires or actualize one's hopes and dreams in life. Obviously, if the person is dead, everything has already reached its completion. Aside from the body, the human mind has always been used to make the most of a situation or what life can offer. These are basic opportunities to grow from and to expand the horizon. It evidently

becomes a source of great power to be or not to be. Human beings as embodied spirits are placed in a situation where harmony and equilibrium can exist if the material body and spiritual activities are well-integrated; for instance, where these composites of being human are well-synchronized. The best of one's opportunity to transform and evolve is right before our eyes our everyday encounter with our body and spirit but only if we recognize such an opportunity. This reminds us of an old cliché: "an opportunity lost is lost forever."

One of the basic existential questions people raise is "what is the meaning of life?" The time during which a person is unable to or fails to respond to this question is lost forever. However, as we journey through life, new experiences emerge and we are placed in different conditions or situations that would perpetually instigate us to delve deeper into this and other existential questions. As we try to unravel the truth about the matter, this becomes an opportunity to ponder upon other aspects of addressing the question. A society is composed of various organizations and institutions that picture generally how people think and behave in a particular situation. But the individual is the most crucial and essential element in any society. In any given situation as well, it is the individual who makes decisions. It is the individual who makes a choice especially the people who hold positions of privilege and influence. Often the destinies of entire nations and trans-national conglomerates are in the hands of a few powerful men and women. The control over the price of oil, for instance, has had a tremendous impact on the fulcrum of economic and political dynamics throughout the world. Regardless of one's socio-economic status in life, this is seen and experienced by many people. This tone of marginalization has been the culture of the mechanisms of power. Nonetheless, we can use this opportunity to think about how to surpass and transform it into a culture of liberation.

No one should take the self-determining presence inherent in each individual to make or unmake things for granted. Everything boils down to what each individual thinks and does. This is precisely the point individuals should realize there is more to the development and expansion of the physical well-being of a person. Then the objective would not be to eradicate nor suppress the desire for fulfillment but to bring it to a higher level, transforming life to a life-divine. Accordingly, its fruition is more rewarding, lasting and more self-fulfilling. It should be reiterated here that the individual is more than the body he possesses and the nature of man to expand, grow, and expand his horizon is a good opportunity. The mission

geared towards the fullness of being must be integral, encompassing the mental life, the vital life and the spiritual life. People will see “that the great necessity is the conversion of the normal into the spiritual mind and the opening of that mind again into its own higher level as it reaches and more and more integral movement. For before the decisive change can be made, the stumbling intellectual reason has to be converted into the precise and luminous intuitive, until that again can rise into higher ranges to overmind and supermind or gnosis.”¹⁴

Our thoughts are the thoughts of the Divine because we came from the original source -- the Divine Energy. Even before we decided and contracted with the Divine to become human beings we existed as perfect spirits because the Divine Spirit is perfect. Thus, being a tiny but significant portion of the Spirit we are not simply a creature of the Divine; BUT, a co-creator! The term co-creator defines the role each one of us has in the entire realm of Divine creation. This concept alone is enough to jolt us into our senses towards the realization that we must not only devote our every waking hour in satisfying and securing our material needs and wants. Apparently, the phenomenal and intensifying growth of highly developed technology, science and globalization has baffled the minds of so many in the different parts of the world. A new mind sets have emerged and keep emerging and this is to cope with the blinding speed of technology, commerce, communication. Gradually evolving behind these developments, are the cultural and moral fiber of the people. Institutions have been on the watch out for any scientific inventions on which will hinge the moral of humankind (or so, they thought). For example, human cloning experimentation, bioengineering of the human DNA, so on and so forth. But it will indeed be difficult to dictate on the scientists what can and must be done. The same is true even in law legislation, such as capital punishment, immigration, capitalism or simply, with regard to ideology. Now the big question is how can we infuse a moral perspective into the hearts and minds of our scientists, leaders and even ordinary human beings? Aurobindo tells us that “we must remember that our aim of self-fulfilment is an integral unfolding of the Divine within us, a complete evolution of the hidden divinity in the individual soul and the collective life. Otherwise we may simply come back to an old idea of individual and social living which had its greatness, but did not provide all the conditions of our perfection.”¹⁵

Definitely, through centuries we have learned that we cannot impose on the will of the person. There is an inherent power in an individual's free will. Man can temporarily and externally control the will power of another person but not for long. The power of choice has drawn the colorful and tremendous history of mankind. The martyrdom and patriotism of so many thousands even millions of people evidently manifest the power of the use of free will in making a choice. Human as we are, we need to discover certain spiritual tools that we can use in our spiritual quest. We need to learn and accept certain truths about human nature and its ultimate calling, that is, a call for perfection towards global consciousness. This sense of self-fulfillment or self-perfection is the earliest preoccupation of the entire humanity and manifested in various ways. The systems and procedures are well-grounded on the integral culture of change. Aurobindo says:

The vital part of the being is an element in the integral human existence as much as the physical part; it has its place but must not exceed its place. A full and well-appointed life is desirable for man living in society, but on condition that it is also a true and beautiful life. Neither the life nor the body exist for their own sake, but as vehicle and instrument of a good higher than their own. They must be subordinated to the superior needs of the mental being, chastened and purified by a greater law of truth, good and beauty before they can take their proper place in the integrality of human perfection.¹⁶

Deciding is never easy, especially, if such a decision entails giving up a lot of material comfort and advantages. The comfort of our convenient and enjoyable lifestyles, in most likelihood, will be difficult to give up in pursuit of spiritual enrichment. The higher level of consciousness of sharing our wealth with the least of our brethren will define the kind and quality of spiritual growth one has achieved. This is particularly difficult to do because it requires great and firm faith and trust in God's almightiness and super-abundance. If one truly believes in the super-abundance and perfection of God, sharing and giving will not be difficult but will rather be a great joy.

Integral Culture Of Change

The deployment of individual inherent powers and possibilities to transform and fulfill himself is held intact together in order to attain the fullness of his being. This being the case, an integral culture of change requires an integral philosophy that would provide the venue for its achievement.

If indeed our aim be only an escape from the world to God, synthesis is unnecessary and a waste of time; for then our sole practical aim must be to find out one path out of the thousand that lead to God, one shortest possible of short cuts, and not to linger exploring different paths that end in the same goal. But if our aim be a transformation of our integral being into the terms of God-existence, it is then that a synthesis becomes necessary.¹⁷

Aurobindo's philosophy presents elements that would hopefully elevate the mind, body, soul and the entire life to a higher level of individual and eventually, collective consciousness for global consciousness.

Integral System of Values

Sri Aurobindo asserts that whether consciously or sub-consciously, the passion for perfection, expansion, and maximization of life is mankind's age-old concern. This is caused by materialistic passion, influences, and mundane dissatisfaction. People's over-emphasis on this is seen in their lack of correct knowledge that there is more to life than all these concerns because "perfection is the true aim of all culture, the spiritual and psychic, the mental, the vital and it must be the aim of our physical culture also."¹⁸ In order to properly address this, we need to establish systems and procedures that will guide us in keeping a well-integrated and well-balanced life:

1. Silence the mind and the heart. Calm the dictates of the heart's desires. Define and focus only on the essentials of life. Keep life simple and transform the physical life into a spiritual and divine life. In order to achieve this, one has to practice meditation through yoga
2. Distinguish *wants* from *needs*. Transcend the insatiable wants and cravings. A confusion of the two realities of life will result to further earthly dissatisfaction
3. Patience and Perseverance The workings of the nature of materiality is

and will always attempt to shackle the focus of the minds towards the essentials of life. This is the reason why a person has to be conscious of the need to be armored by patience and perseverance to carry on.

4. **Discipline** Basically, the process of undoing or taming the ego in integral yoga is of paramount importance. This is done so that in all human activities a person can allow the (higher) Self to prevail at all times. Since it is a process; definitely, it requires certain skills and discipline so that one can enjoy the benefits of breathing, eating, and living in the Spirit. To be effective and efficient, it requires 24/7 practice. Practice. Practice. Practice. This is so because the road to perfection and holiness is perilous and full of challenges. Apparently, if one is to triumph over the ugly head of the ego, one has to be constantly watchful and alert, because the ego is like a little imp inside us that can and will attack our weakness and overwhelm the calling of the Self. Thus, anyone in quest of spiritual higher consciousness needs be enthusiastic and joyful in having to go through the process and pray that eventually he/she can achieve the spiritual height of bliss and happiness even while still on earth.
5. **Detachment from illusions of material reality.** Everything is transitory in nature and the material dimension creates a make-believe world that becomes the end-all of life.
6. **Consecrate everything to the Divine.** Open the mind, heart, and soul to the Divine.

Paradigm Shift from small ego (small “I”) to big ego (big “I”)

The transition of the mind is a transformation from “sense value to vital-mind values.” This is a conscious activity of our sensitive or sentient life where our responses, impulses, passions, mental processes, and will are self-directed towards a life Divine. It is not to a blind or half-conscious impulse to believe and follow the illusions of material forces. Aurobindo asserts that “Enlightenment brings to us the knowledge that the ego is only an instrument; we begin to perceive and feel that these things are our own in the sense that they belong to our supreme and integral Self, one with the Transcendent, not to the instrumental ego.”¹⁹

1. **Development of ego-sense or ego-consciousness** Man is enslaved by false identification of the “I” or the ego to the workings of material nature but the understanding, development, and enlargement of the

ego leads to the development of collective consciousness. Knowledge about what an ego is and how it operates is important if one has to achieve a higher level of consciousness. The battle between the Inner Self and the ego is constantly waged. This yin and yang apparently are the forces that bring about the essence of man's free will. Free will is only significant because there is an opportunity to exercise it. Come to think of it, the choice or chosen path taken by an individual defines building or destruction, frustration or success, joy or sadness, and so on. If love makes the world go round, then free will spins the world.

2. Individual transformation towards collective transformation The timetable for development in civilization and culture requires that development is not delimited to individual development; but rather the transformation of the integral self is geared towards being an instrument towards the transformation of the entire humanity.

Ascent of life

Individual and collective transformation require an evolutionary process of touching the mental, material, and vital life of an individual. This triple transformation is a stepping stone to humanity's conversion. The objective is to maintain the centrifugal force for the fullness of being, fullness of consciousness, and fullness of life -- ascent and integration.

Based on the premise of the significance of taming the ego and allowing the self to prevail in all the activities of our daily life, it has become incumbent upon us to see the importance of individual transformation in response to the rapid growth of science and technology. While some focus on the invention, discovery, and development of science and technology, some are involved in spiritual endeavors, and others more are busy with their own activities. This brings to the fore the realization that man metamorphoses in all his aspects for his survival and growth. The balancing factor in any human endeavor so that mankind would not be waylaid or fall into catastrophe is the balancing factor of those who in earnestness try to connect and be in union with the Divine Energy, the source of all life. A spiritual leader is infectious because he responds to the deep spiritual yearning that is embedded in the very nature of man. The spiritual imprimatur of the human soul makes man respond to his higher spiritual needs. This can be the reason why so many Christian charismatic groups have blossomed in almost all parts of the world. Catholics numbering about a billion faithful can spell the difference, not only in the realm of

evangelization, but can be made an effective tool by the Divine Creator in the transformation of the spiritual world. Foremost in Aurobindo's Integral Philosophy is his principle of elevating our natural self to higher Spiritual Awareness or higher Consciousness. Belief in the existence of the Divine Energy is primordial. This is not the monopoly of any religion. Believing in the existence of God and His essence is a universal concept. This belief is relevant to all human beings. For anyone who does not believe in the Divine does not change this truth. The Divine Presence and the individual integral self is real.

The cultural or external manifestation of human endeavors is not being addressed here but rather the spiritual transformation essential in governing the mind, heart, and spirit of mankind so that this world will be a better place to live in - a world where love, joy, peace, and superabundance thrive. The concept of individual transformation through spiritual exercises like the quieting of the mind and silencing of the heart to place the soul in direct communication with the Divine Enlightenment if practiced faithfully can help transform an individual to a higher self -- where he and God are one. If each individual throughout the world lives in the Spirit, definitely, war, and poverty will be things of the past.

The desire to elevate one's self to a higher consciousness, a higher awareness is the beginning of change. The beginning of individual transformation in this respect, proceeds to provide guiding principles on how to elevate ourselves to higher consciousness and higher awareness that we are not only material, needing and wanting material self-indulgence but rather are spiritual beings and as such, will constantly crave to move toward the Divine. Longing for the Divine is imprinted in the soul and failure to see this will render the soul restless, despite material wealth, power, or fame. The belief that each human being before becoming human was, at first, a spirit infused with the Divine Spirit inspires spiritual practitioners to move on toward the Divine, the path to union and oneness with the Divine. This realization moves our spirit to understand the meaning and role of our earthly existence better. This inspires us to constantly give higher importance and emphasis on the need to see beyond the material world. The concept of a Divine is relevant in governing the world and in the life of each individual so that the transformation occurring will enhance peace, joy, love, and superabundance. The transformation happening in the individual defines the impending reality that each individual is also of the Spirit and therefore, being of the same spirit, we are all equal. The conventional word equality as used politically is just an illusion because the point of reference is

the equality in rights, material benefits, and privileges. We know this type of equality is an illusion at best. The only equality that is of man is the concept that we originated from the same Spirit and the Divine Energy is constantly open to anyone who desires to tap this unfathomable energy and thereby enjoy the unimaginable blessings and bliss.

Conclusion

Sri Aurobindo's methodology of raising or elevating the higher consciousness is perhaps an invaluable contribution to mankind. His integral yoga provides a necessary vehicle for us to help elevate ourselves to higher consciousness and awareness that we are one with the Spirit. How can we become one with the spirit in thoughts, words, and actions? It is a lifetime pursuit. We can learn from different gurus or spiritual leaders on how to do this. Aurobindo has prescriptions on this as well. But no amount of technique, technology, principles, concepts can become effective or alive without the consent, acceptance, and commitment of the free will. First and foremost, the person must accept his own truth and reality that there is a Divine Source, Divine Energy, God. The earnestness and passion to live and be in the Spirit is the first pre-condition. Everything else follows with ease and enlightenment. If transformation is to live in the Spirit, and this truth is happening to many people, then definitely, transformation will occur not only in the culture of a people but in all aspects of every human endeavor in business, politics, religion, technology, so on and so forth.

Each individual has a story to tell. Even those hardened criminals in prison have their own stories as well as priests, nuns, and religious leaders, as well as the ordinary folks on the street. All humans are basically the same and have basically the same need. Be it material or spiritual. But definitely, each might be basically the same in spirit but each is unique and different from the other. This uniqueness and difference although of the same spirit defines our role and meaning in life. The method of Aurobindo therefore may fit some and but not others. But overall, this method is devised to apparently help raise the consciousness to a higher level, that is of the Spirit. Once the higher consciousness or awareness is raised and lived in we see things differently. We see things through the eye of the Divine. We see love where there is none. We see opportunity where there is a burden. We see God in all things and everything. We see God in us as we see God in others. Religion? No. This is man's basic need for spiritual evolution and development. No religion can satisfy this inner yearning of man. Only by deciding to live in the Spirit can man find meaning in life. Religion has its own role just like any other institution and that is to help man find and re-discover himself and become a better citizen of the world and the universe.

Each role a person plays so well is a contribution to the bigger whole, which is the humanity of mankind. This level of transformation going on in the individual level will eventually permeate the soul and spirit of the bigger whole. As globalization sets in, as the world becomes smaller and smaller because of science and technology, the world is also becoming what it is to become, people of a higher level of Consciousness, operating as one in Spirit. We need people who have the wisdom and understanding that love and sharing is the path toward joy and peace. Once we learn and live the language of the spirit and be committed in dampening and controlling our ego so that the higher Self will prevail at all times, the world can become supramental. We become supramental beings in whom the Spirit rules and the material is subjugated for the betterment of the human condition and the world.

Unless we are of spirit or become of the Spirit, nothing is possible. But when one places himself in the Spirit, individual transformation will definitely occur. If one is in the Spirit, one sees the world differently. One can see love where there is hatred, love when there is greed, love where there is poverty. The principle of love is God Himself. No good deed can come from man alone. It must be divinely inspired and a prompting of the Spirit. It takes only one man to transform the world. What if Adolf Hitler discovered and accepted the Spirit in guiding him in his governance of world affairs? Could there have been no extermination of about 7 million Jews? What if Mussolini had been guided by and accepted the Spirit, could there have been fascism? What if Mao Tse Tung discovered and accepted the Spirit in his ideology, could there have been less suffering of the millions of Chinese? What if Christ was not guided and did not live in the Spirit, would there have been a world of love and new meaning among mankind? So, suffice it to say that it takes only one human being to change the face of the earth. It takes one man or woman to spin the world of change for better or for worse.

The premise of individual transformation changing or transforming culture is a great possibility. It takes the leadership of an individual to transform the world. Sometimes martyrdom is an essential element in the propagation of an advocacy. These infamous and great people of history had acted out their roles in the learning process of humanity. Each one has definitely done his or her own share in painting the destiny of mankind. Now it lies with the conscience and social conscience of each individual to respond to his or her ultimate calling to draw towards the invitation of the Spirit. What every man or woman has to do is to cooperate with the Spirit. Sri Aurobindo has defined his principles in integral yoga. He devised a

methodology, a process, and a system so that we can enhance our spiritual quest towards perfection and holiness. The Spirit guide that we constantly invoke and seek in the determination of the rightness and appropriateness of our decisions and actions will weigh heavily in favor of humanity for God is perfect and cannot go wrong. If in invoking the name of God in the crucial point of decision-making and action, man still commits follies, he has simply become a victim of his own weakness. He allows his ego to prevail over the higher Self. Thus, it is imperative that someone, who despite consistency in spiritual exercises and practice, must be vigilant and alert that he is always responding to the Spirit rather than allowing his own ego to rule his thinking and decision. This dynamism is a reality that each individual has to grapple with. The wisdom of the integral yoga in this regard cannot be overstated. Again, it is a spiritual tool to help man to raise his level of awareness and increase his higher consciousness.

Living in the Spirit is tantamount to being a co-creator in active form. Because being in the Spirit makes one operate in the level of God and see things from God's perspective. The concept of being a co-creator imbibes in man and woman a new (or renewed) sense of mission. Doing his role to the maximum for all human beings is of the same spirit. What affects one affects the whole. What infects one affects the other members. This sense elicits a new sense of social responsibility in the individuals. The connectedness and interconnectedness of mankind cannot be denied. Thus, living in the spirit makes it possible to eliminate graft and corruption, eliminate violence and war, lust and so on. God cannot be in between. It is either you are for Him or against Him. This is a tall order, a great mission to serve God and humanity in our thoughts words and action. For us to be one in the Spirit we have, therefore, to cooperate with His grace of inspiration and love.

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End Notes:

1. Sri Aurobindo Ghose, *The Human Cycle*, (THC), *Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo*, (CWSA) (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, India), Volume: 25, Chapter IX, pp. 84-85, 1999 electronic edition. *The Human Cycle* was first published in monthly installments in the review *Arya* between August 1916 and July 1918 under the title *The Psychology of Social Development*. The text was revised during the late 1930s and again, more lightly, in 1949. In 1970 *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity and War and Self-Determination* were published together as volume 15 of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL) under the title *Social and Political Thought*. In 1998 *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity and War and Self-Determination* were brought out as volume 25 of The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo.
2. CWSA, THC, p. 86.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, (TLD), SABCL, (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, India), Volume 18-19. p. 1047, electronic edition 1999. *The Life Divine* first appeared serially in the *Arya* from August 1914 to January 1919. Volume I, revised and enlarged, was first published in book form in November 1939; Volume II, recast and enlarged, followed in July 1940, in two parts. These were reprinted in 1943 and 1947. The Sri Aurobindo Library, New York, issued a single volume edition in 1949 and reprinted it in 1951.
4. Aurobindo, TLD, *Ibid.*, p. 1031.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
6. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, [TSY], (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, India), Volume: 23-24, p. 95, 1999 electronic edition. This first appeared serially in the monthly review *Arya* between August 1914 and January 1921 and was published as volumes 20 and 21 of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
8. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Volume 12, p. 416, electronic edition 1999. *Essays Divine and Human* consists of short prose pieces written by Sri Aurobindo after his arrival in Pondicherry in 1910 but not published before his passing in 1950. Short prose works written during the same period and published during his lifetime appear in *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, volume 13 of The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo.
9. Op. Cit., THC, vol. 25, p. 82.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 84
11. TLD, p. 286.
12. Op. Cit., THC, p. 214.
13. Op. Cit., TLD, p. 1032.
14. Op. Cit., THC, p. 267.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
17. Op. Cit., TSY, p. 45.
18. Aurobindo, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo*, (CWSA) (Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, India), 1999 electronic edition. This consists

of short works in prose written between 1909 and 1950 and published during his lifetime. In 1971 most of the contents of the present volume were published in *The Supramental Manifestation and Other Writings*, volume 16 of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library

19. Op. Cit., TSY, p. 59.