Sri Aurobindo and Plato

The idea of a philosopher playing an important role in political affairs is not new. Thomas Jefferson was elected President of the United States in 1800 and Woodrow Wilson in 1912; between them the narrowly defeated and now forgotten Democratic candidate was Lewis Cass. Lord Balfour was an important philosopher before becoming Prime Minister of Great Britain. It is not generally known that his undoing came because of the great gap between the teachings of his writings and policy in office.

In our day Dr. Servepalli Radhakrishnan, selected a few years back as one of the seven greatest living philosophers, became President of India, and there is no doubt that most of the original founders of the Congress Party in India were either amateur philosophers or deep students. But there is no doubt that nearly all of them would step aside in respecting Sri Aurobindo Ghose as preeminent.

Sri Aurobindo Ghose was born in Bengal in 1872 and died in Pondicherry in 1950. He had the advantage of both an Occidental and Oriental education and his efforts at synthesis and integration make almost the whole of his life. Both his *Synthesis of Yoga*, and his *Integral Philosophy* are applications of what is called Vijnanayada in Sanskrit, and stand in contrast with the analytical and dialectical approaches which dominate the West.

He has been called "The Prophet of India" and Prof. Kelley who teaches in the field between Anthropology and Religion at the Extension, has admitted Sri Aurobindo fulfills all the matrices of a "prophet," however that word be defined. In some respects his career parallels adjoint Socrates and Plato rather than each being taken separately, and in this respect would parallel that of the "Socrates" of Plato rather than the strictly historical character. Only instead of drinking the hemlock, Sri Aurobindo spent years in prison and thus was not an historical martyr.

It is difficult to explain **Vijnanayada** to the Western world, which is remarkably ignorant of this history of India and is only now beginning to comprehend the depths of its philosophy. Most of the western writers have remained analysts or dialecticians utterly incomprehensive of the fundamental notion that Indian philosophies and particularly the Upanishads, are imbedded in human experience.

The Indian word "Darshan" means both philosophy and outlook. The first of the elements of Lord Buddha's "Eightfold Path," **Samma Dharthi** should be interpreted "Cosmic Outlook." It is totally non-dualistic and never meant "right views." It certainly applies to Sri Aurobindo who regarded himself as the "Last of the Rishis." (As non-follower I totally agree.)

Sri Aurobindo regarded himself as the "Last of the Rishis" because he saw a new race, a new culture, a new world as the result of the natural processes of cosmic evolution, itself an extension of the biological evolution. Thus he saw or foresaw coming into being a "tribe" corresponding to Plato's "Guardians."

Plato also had the mimic outlook and also included along with any theoretical metaphysics, ontology, etc. the application of teachings in practical affairs. (I once was kicked out of a school for advocating that Plato's "Republic," etc. may have been based on objective models. Now we have uncovered the Cretan and Mycenaean civilizations and this may have more than a glimmering of truth. But if Plato's teachings were based on either a cosmic or historical modal of the past, Sri. Aurobindo's pointed to the future. And if Plato and his disciples endeavored to apply the teachings in Syracuse, etc. the Indian government began at an early time to send emissaries to Pondicherry until now we find disciples in "Integral Yoga" playing ever greater roles in the government of India.

Plato's "Republic" may have been ideal and Pythagoras' Crotona is gone but Pondicherry is very much alive, and functioning. In both instances we have a complete world view, a recognition of various planes in the universe where the "soul" functions differently; some form of "reincarnation," human evolution and "deliverance" until man plays his rightful role among the gods (or Gods) themselves.

Each had its place for education and each considered the body as very important—thus the gymnasiums. Indeed a casual (or more permanent) visitor to Pondicherry can easily conceive he is living in a re-established Crotona.

The settlement at Pondicherry is self-subsisting and cannot be called "socialistic," "capitalistic" or by any of our stock analytical phrases. Indeed it is actually controlled by "Guardians" though another name may be used.

These Guardians themselves have had Yogic training. The regimen is all based on Yoga, including silences, meditations, ritual, food and all programs.

The children are treated "spiritually" which means that there is a program covering the physical, vital, subtle and psychic sides of the human being, and perhaps more. While education is in six languages, English, French and four of India, the children have worked out their own Integral speech which is used on the playground. The athletic field shows a heritage from Great Britain, but even that has been modified.

Naturally as Sri Aurobindo and thus his disciples have an appreciation of the roles of Joy and Peace as well as of physical, emotional and mental education, one can see the binding of all these phases of life into what is a harmony, and one hopes a joyous harmony.

Each year more high members of the Government at New Delhi consult the "guardians" and the devotees are now well represented even in the cabinet itself. The retired Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

lives at nearby Madras and is cooperating for service with the Ashram in its programs, local, Indian and worldwide.

There is now a program including the establishment of a sect for carrying on the spiritual and other traditions of all religions and cultures. Perhaps in a sense the greatest difference between Sri Aurobindo and Plato are the successive pragmatic programs. This is no doubt due to the "New Age" itself with mankind fulfilling the premises and principles of "Integral Yoga."