



# In Search of the Soul of India

## THE SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIA TALKS SERIES

*Sponsored by Life Positive and Organised by The Gnostic Centre*

THE series of talks was conceptualised to introduce a hitherto ignored dimension to our education in schools and colleges - a true insight into our own cultural and spiritual heritage - not as mere euphemistic parables but as evidence and research based systematic sets of ideas and facts from our ancient history that have stood the test of time, invasions and paradigms and are now resurfacing to impact the course of future events on this earth. Especially, to present these in the modern context and their relevance to our daily life, study and work, with some directions on their practical application. The questions-answers that followed each of the talks (13 till now, with many more to come) have been the most revealing and fascinating feature as they clearly reflect the students' interest and the need to know. Most of these related to meditation, spiritual force, self-control, *karma*, destiny. This report lists some of these.

### **Sraddhalu Ranade**

The series was started off on 3rd August by Sraddhalu, a versatile youthful speaker from Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, combining in himself the rare qualities of a scientist and an artist. Sraddhalu spoke on the following topics:



#### **DYNAMICS OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN MANAGEMENT**

The talk emphasised the need to become a master of oneself if one wanted to master circumstances and life, as a good manager. It put forth the various dimensions of consciousness in an attempt to understand oneself, how one operates and what one needs to master. It presented the basics of a sound approach to management based on Consciousness - the only way to combine the principles of freedom and equality, based on a deep fraternity. Sraddhalu highlighted 3 Spiritual Laws of Business, which may be applied to all life:

1) The law of Action and Reaction: Not only at a physical level, but also in the psychological world. Whatever one thinks or the energy one puts out, returns to oneself. If as a manager, people suffer under you or through your company, the misery piles up and returns

upon you. *Karma* is not fatalism, it is freedom - as what happens in future depends on what you do now.

2) The principle of Wealth: Wealth is not the money or cheques or credit cards that one holds, but a force that uses these symbols. It originates from the Divine but is usurped for the uses of the Ego and Desire and is therefore perverted. One can enter into a conscious relation with it and use it for larger purposes.

3) The goal of Business: If it is a short-term goal (to make money), the decisions will be short-term as well and will result in eventual collapse. A larger goal will ensure long-term decisions. One will enter into harmony with the larger working and resources will flow wherever the need is - a larger power will come into play.

Finally, Sraddhalu clarified that spirituality is not what you do, but why and how you do what you do.



#### **EXPLORING INNER WORLDS**

Acknowledging the contribution of modern science which has shown us the difference between appearance and reality (matter is noth-



ing but atoms, protons, electrons, neutrons and that too is energy), Sraddhalu put forth the view of ancient Indian science that said that this too is not the whole truth. Energy too is a covering for Consciousness. It is for this reason that the ancients could command matter by the force of consciousness (transmutation of metals, 'nuclear' weapons in our great epics), without the use of heavy machinery. How was it done? Can we also do it? For this we first have to understand who we are.

Explaining the changing nature of mind, body, emotions, Sraddhalu invited the audience to go a step further till they touched the real 'I' within each one of us. During the course of his talk, he explained the potential and the limitation of the different ranges within our being, and how one may expand beyond these to tap into the inner, deeper and higher ranges - giving a greater significance and power to our surface life.

#### INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

The talk spanned the origin of the universe, the evolution of consciousness through matter, plant, animal, man to the next step in evolution. Pointing to prophecies from different religious traditions about the waning of religions towards the end of this millennium and the many predictions about massive destruction or end of the world, Sraddhalu drew our attention to the transition to a new state of being or consciousness that too has been predicted to take place between 1956 and year 2000.

He explained the current disintegration of the social, moral, political, economic fabric of nations the world over as an evolutionary crisis that is pushing us to go beyond the Mind to a higher level of consciousness (the Supermind) that alone has the power to resolve the present crises.

#### Questions asked by the Students

- \* Is spiritual force antithetical to physical force? How to bring it into effect?
- \* What is spirituality? What are its steps? How to become spiritual? Is it same as being religious?
- \* What is self-actualisation?
- \* What is the ultimate consciousness?
- \* For the growth of consciousness are rituals important?
- \* You talked of a new level of consciousness being the main cause of present degeneration - how?

- \* What is Mind? Is it a function of the brain?
- \* How can the mind be made free of thoughts?
- \* How to put force behind imagination?
- \* How to develop concentration? How to focus a confused mind?
- \* What is the difference between concentration and meditation?
- \* How to meditate? What is the right time for meditation?
- \* While meditating one feels good, but afterwards experiences the same problems?
- \* Can we control our emotions through deep breathing? How to proceed?
- \* Is it possible to detach ourselves during the daily self-evaluation? We tend to justify.
- \* What is the difference between selfishness and being a master of yourself?
- \* Will self-control (of emotions) kill spontaneity? What do you live for if you don't have desires?
- \* Why should one be detached? Why not be happy? Can you feel unhappy by being detached?
- \* Is it (living a higher life) going to be ambitious? Would it lead to frustration?
- \* How can one relate to the inner self?
- \* How to establish a long term relationship with our goal?



- \* How to work for a long time without getting tired? How can you maintain the level of energy?
- \* Is illness due to bad energies?
- \* Are you afraid of dying?
- \* Do you believe in destiny? Can it be changed?
- \* Are we victims of circumstances?
- \* What is *karma*? If one does something in self-defence, will it come under the karmic law?
- \* Do universal forces affect *karma*?
- \* Is *karma* pre-decided or do we decide it? How far are we puppets?
- \* Does psychological change lead to an end of the karmic cycle and so to *nirvana*?
- \* What is Conscience, Conscious, Consciousness? What role does conscience play?



- \* What is good and what is bad? Who is good and who is bad?
- \* While working in a group, comparison is always there. How can one work without it in a company?
- \* Once you experience silence within you – is this incompatible with the goals of business?
- \* Business aims at creating more needs. Higher consciousness aims at less needs – how to integrate?
- \* Are desires and higher consciousness incompatible?
- \* Is there a trade-off between spiritual enlightenment and material success?
- \* How do you define success? What is failure? What place has 'achieving targets'?
- \* How does SWOT analysis of management fit here?
- \* When I make a choice how can I know if it was my own decision or I was carried away by forces?
- \* We cannot avoid dynamics of group pressure etc. – some elements are beyond one's control – how to act?
- \* How to take difficult decisions – can cause pain to others?
- \* What is the Power of Wealth?
- \* How do you visualise god?
- \* How to prove 'I am God'? What is this sense of 'I'? How do you prove existence of god? Is the perception based on faith?
- \* Why is it said that the deity incarnates whenever there is a crisis?
- \* What is faith? Is it internal or external?
- \* Why are so many people leading a brutish life? Isn't something very wrong with the system?

## Dr. Makarand Paranjape

An associate professor at IIT, New Delhi and a well-acclaimed writer, poet, columnist and critic, Makarand spoke on:

### FOUNDATIONS OF INDIAN CULTURE

Makarand explained about the distinctive principles of Indian civilisation - Spirituality (as the key-note) along with Vitality and Intellectuality. The perception of the Infinite behind all things finite informed all activities of life and gave birth to the social structures where each had the freedom to pursue his/her own spiritual tradition that suited one's particular nature. The diversity ranged from non-belief in God to belief, from glorification of impurity to a highly purified code of living. Each activity of life was related to spiritual upliftment.

Makarand focused on the true purpose of art as understood by India (to portray the reality of the soul) - proceeding from intuition rather than the intellect or imagination. The true artist had to be a *dikshit*, a yogi - leading a very special life.

### Questions asked by the Students

- \* Human being is necessarily incomplete. Is not perfection an illusion?
- \* What we are doing to the earth - is it a step towards spiritual evolution?
- \* What is spirituality? Is it exclusive to man?
- \* What is spirit? Is it divine? How is it different from soul?
- \* Only the best minds can achieve spirituality (*rishis, munis*) – is it possible to stratify now (in terms of *devatas, rishis*) – is it relevant?
- \* What scope have we left for the redemption of the *shudra*?
- \* Is spirit connected to scientific discoveries and technology?
- \* In Science, it is first knowledge, then faith. In Spirituality it is first faith, then knowledge. Today, why do we explain knowledge in terms of science?
- \* Learning about the surface of moon led to a loss of the feeling of beauty it had evoked as a child. Does knowledge hinder the feelings of the artist or helps it?
- \* As we grow up, we come across a clash of Arts and Sciences. Is there a holistic way of





looking at life - where both science and art meet?

- \* How is the modern notion of freedom different from the traditional one? How do we validate it and move forward with it - in the context of contemporary Indian culture?
- \* According to Sri Aurobindo what is culture and what is civilisation? What are the special features in Indian civilisation which can lead the world?
- \* India has been undermined (though it has been the home of great thinkers and has a great role). In our present reality, how can we assert ourselves, who is going to listen

to us - when we do not even have the basic amenities?

- \* Are we using words like 'India will be the leader of the world' etc. for commercial ends? We have never tried to project ourselves, why are we doing it now? Is only a special class of people doing it?
- \* Westerners ask about yogis or *suttee* and communal riots - how can the two be reconciled?
- \* You mentioned a dialectical struggle between the two power blocs - what does it mean?

## Ameeta Mehra

By this time, the word of the Series spread informally and we suddenly received a call to invite us to hold a talk for the teaching staff of Bal Bharati Public School. Ameeta (an educator, business executive, facilitator of self-development workshops and courses) spoke on:



### EDUCATION AND SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Ameeta explained the three principles of true education as enumerated by Sri Aurobindo: Nothing can be taught, Mind has to be consulted in its own growth, From the near to the far. She emphasised that the first attention must be paid to the growth of the teacher - unless the teacher progresses, the children cannot progress truly. The teacher is the most important resource and has to be a living example.

To be a good teacher, one has to become an integrated being - to develop one's own mental faculties, train one's emotional and physical being, come in touch with the psychic or the deeper self within. Therefore, the first step is self-development - to observe oneself, to understand the different movements in oneself and to self-exceed.

Quoting the Mother, she enumerated the personality traits of a successful teacher: self-control (never to lose one's temper or scold a child), continuous progress, sense of relativity of one's importance, absence of preference for one child or another, essential oneness.

### Questions asked by the Teachers

- \* Who is a yogi and what are the qualities of a yogi?
- \* The realisation that I have to grow has come late. Given the pressures and competition, how do I grow, and help my child to grow?
- \* The Seagull (Jonathan Livingston's quest) and the real life - there is a conflict. How to make the bridge?



- \* In today's world, what is the teacher's role? How to give values - the world around you does not accept them?
- \* You say that try not to show any anger in class. But some students won't listen. Will such a thing work?
- \* Anger is natural - if we suppress it, isn't that putting an obstacle?
- \* Anger makes me more energetic. I want to be good too. How?
- \* Most of us who might be doing a good job with students, fail as parents. Why?
- \* Young children are very vibrant. What is a practical way of guiding them?
- \* You said there is a reason why most teachers here are female - what is it?
- \* What is the role of destiny in a person's life?



## Prof. Arabinda Basu

A sadhak of Integral Yoga at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, and a widely travelled speaker on philosophy, comparative religions, Prof. Arabinda Basu spoke on the following topics (of these, the first talk was at the Gnostic Centre, to a group of varied ages and professions):



### WHAT IS YOGA?

Arindam da (Prof. Arabinda Basu) explained the essential meaning of yoga ('union') and that it has the same relationship with the inner nature of man as physics has with outer facts and forces. If you want to know yourself, you have to do yoga. Arindam da emphasised the fact that yoga is systematic - it is scientific, verifiable by experimentation.



He further enumerated the different systems of yoga - *hathayoga*, *rajayoga*, *karmayoga*, *jnanayoga*, *bhaktiyoga* - right up to Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, which unlike other yogas is not other worldly and aims to effect a fundamental change in the human being and the world. Nothing is left out - even the body has to become completely conscious (of the divine). It integrates all other yogas (love, knowledge, power) and goes beyond to fulfil the Divine's purpose in this world - complete overt manifestation, down to the very cells - a totality of spiritual realisation.

### ON DHARMA

Dharma (from *dhri*: to hold, support, maintain) is that which supports the whole universe - quite different from 'religion' - a belief in God is not necessary in this case. *Sanatana Dharma* includes schools of philosophy which do not believe in god. Discipline (individual, collective) is dharma. Human nature is varied and each may follow the dharma particular to his/her nature.

Arindam da explained about the three modes (*gunas*) of Nature of which everything is composed - *sattwa*, *rajas*, *tamas*. Sanatana Dharma has 3 quartets: the four *Varnas* (basic types of character determined by which guna is predominant); the four *Ashramas* (gradations of desire, moving up to spiritual); the four *Purusharthas* (values worth pursuing). Thus, Dharma is a comprehensive concept. It comes into being not by chance but through the central intelligence that guides - the will of god expressed as the rhythm of universe.

### SRI AUROBINDO'S CONCEPT OF PHILOSOPHY



Arindam da shared Sri Aurobindo's statements on Philosophy - that it is concerned with the fundamental truth of existence and the forms in which that existence presents itself to us. Its realm is fixation of truth (material, vital, psychological, spiritual). The material for Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is not based on abstractions but on concrete, spiritual experience

tested and tried repeatedly, systematically. It is not mere speculation, but is verifiable by experimentation. Unlike western philosophy which is divorced from life, Indian philosophy has always been practical - as it has emerged from yogis - the practitioners of spiritual life. Philosophy can purify the reason, stabilise the nature, create a tranquillity through contact with the infinite. A truth once found must be realisable by our inner being and outer activities.



### Questions asked were:

- \* Which is the best yoga to follow in the modern world?
  - \* What is meant by self-realisation?
  - \* A yogi is not fit for the world?
  - \* Can we say man is body and mind and soul – and not that he is not body, not mind?
  - \* I know that *karma* should be *niskama* – but, how can one work without desire (for result)?
  - \* Motivation and Desire – are these the same?
  - \* *Karmayoga* – is there a different dimension?
  - \* If *Dharma* is god's will, then even *adharma* will be part of god's will – an unfolding of a higher will?
  - \* In the practical context, how does one follow a quest for *dharma*?
  - \* *Dharma* is not equal to religion. How come people mistake it for religion?
  - \* Is religion only a way of living? Living for humanity?
  - \* If we follow *dharma* for *moksha* – can self-satisfaction and self-gratification be part of it?
  - \* Divine mind is non-material, spiritual. But, what is its nature? Is it an entity or force? How is it related to material world as we experience it?
  - \* Is Sri Aurobindo's interpretation an improvement on Shankara?
- \* Sri Aurobindo's concept of philosophy is based on yogic experience. If all had yogic experience, why did not they see reality as one, why these different explanations?
  - \* Is the thinker the thought or thought the thinker?
  - \* What is consciousness?
  - \* If there is no conclusion at the end of philosophy, what is the need of studying philosophy?
  - \* If Sri Aurobindo's conception is based on yogic experience, what is that experience that makes the conception? What is that Reality? Is it One or Many?
  - \* What is *Chit-Shakti*? Has it anything to do with the four states mentioned in Upanishads (*susupti, turiya...*)?
  - \* Yoga – is it the same as '*yogah karmasu kausalam*' or is it different?
  - \* Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of future evolution of man – how to relate it to philosophy?



As can be glimpsed from the above the series has sparked a further quest in the youth. Their need to know, to go deeper was evident at the information and book sale counters set up by the Centre at each venue. Not only those who attended the talk, but even others from the college or institute were keen to learn about meditation, Indian culture, right attitude in work, living within and related topics, through the books that were displayed.

It is the Centre's endeavour to further and deepen this movement by organising a similar series each year, and by offering short courses and workshops to facilitate an in-depth involvement and holistic learning.