

The Self and Self realisation
as the basis for Social change

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INTRODUCTION

The Self' comprises an individuals entire being-her body, mind, intellect as well as aspects of conciousness that are spiritual and psychic. The body, mind and intellect form the 'Ego' or what we relate to as our interface with the external world. The psychic and spritual are the inner, deeper levels of our conciousness through which, or when realised an individual experiences non duality, a letting go of boundaries and distinctions between the "I" and 'other', where all conciousness is one, centred and intergrated, whole and complete.

Self realisation' is the process by which one is able to gradually detach from the 'Ego' standpoint or the 'Ego' identity and move to larger spheres of identification. To move to greater levels of detachment from the material, the emotional and the intellectual.

The term 'Social change' has been used with reference to that in Society which is chaotic, disorderly and imbalanced. The aspect of society that is exploitative, communal ,criminal and violent. That aspect of society that is divisive ,divisional and disicriminatory. That aspect of society which builds walls and hierachies that make people "upper" or "lower" caste, worthy or unworthy of love, compassion and for- giveness. Deserving or undeserving of the right to a decent livelihood and justice.

REASON FOR TOPIC SELECTION

The reason for my choosing this subject has been the nature and area of my work. A year ago, I realised a life long dream of some how being involved with social change when I took up an important position in a young organisation that was involved in social work. A large part of the vision and structure thereof was already laid down, though very initial and therefore premature and unexplored.

It did not take me long to realise that this vision was a bit naïve and based on little experience. One of the main objectives of the organisation is to try to create a cultural shift among the young educated people in Delhi, whereby volunteering one or two hours a week for a social or community project becomes a part of the person's life. It seemed like a lofty ideal and the only way to address the challenge was to begin at the beginning. The first question therefore that arose in my mind was – what is it that motivates an individual to reach out? What is it that makes one individual do more for others than another Individual? What lies behind the different levels of human selflessness? etc.

In an endeavour to find answers to these questions, I chose to focus on the topic of this monograph - The self and self realisation as the basis for social change.

THREE LEVELS OF OUTER SELF

The self as outlined earlier is various levels of an individual encompassing his or her entire being. One's attachments and desires determine an individual's selfish or selflessness. These levels of attachments are sometimes referred to as circles of identification. The broader one's circles of identification the greater the individual's ability to reach out beyond himself.

For instance, a person who kills another for his own reasons would have the smallest circle of identification and therefore be the most selfish. The next level would be a person who might not harm another as such, but think only of himself with reference to profiteering etc. This person would be considered as having a slightly larger circle of identification and therefore a little less selfish than the person mentioned before. Another person could be one who would be concerned with himself and his family and no one else. This person's circle of identification would be larger.

Then there would be a person who would be concerned about his neighbourhood, another about his community, another for his state, the nation and so on where at every level the circle of identification expands to include more and more interconnectedness between people and all levels of consciousness.

The process of self realisation is to gradually drop all attachments and desires, so that one can realise the source of one's being that is pure and blissful and unaffected by the goings on of the external mundane life. Attachments and desires can be of all the aspects of the self, as in Sri Aurobindo's* work, listed below :

“The physical being – Though people generally attribute consciousness and intelligence only to the mind and look upon the body as something mechanical, the psychology of yoga* reveals that the body is endowed with its own characteristic consciousness and intelligence. However physical consciousness is relatively inert, obscure, narrow or limited and automatic in its functioning. Thus attitudes which are characterised by rigidity, narrowness, conservatism or slowness to change, and habitual modes of action and reaction are related to the physical part of our being.

The vital being – This is made up of life energies, sensations, instincts and impulses, desires, feelings and emotions. The vital is aptly so called because it is the source of life force and seeks after life for its own sake, clinging to life even if it brings more of

* Sri Aurobindo – One of India's most prominent political figures and spiritual thinkers.

suffering than pleasure. This state of consciousness is characterised by likes and dislikes, the search for pleasure and the avoidance of pain and discomfort. Besides the quest for pleasure, these are characterised by a need for perpetual variety and change, ambition, attachment and repulsion, aggression, fear and impulsiveness.

The mental – This part of our make up has to do with thoughts and ideas, facts and knowledge. When the mental consciousness is pre-dominant in an individual the attitudes are a rational outlook and based on moral and intellectual principles.

Self realisation then in the words of Menninger* “represents a further stage of psychological development when an individual no longer feels preyed upon by internal and external stresses, and meets the challenges of life with a clear sense of purpose, and with poise and serenity. From the view point of yoga psychology** such a state of mastery pertains to a deeper consciousness than that of the outer being. Mastery, from the view point of yoga psychology begins with the individual, no longer completely identified with the physical, vital and mental personality of the outer being, learns to live progressively in the deeper consciousness of the person within.

As the Mother remarked :

The vast majority of men are like prisoners with all the doors and windows shut, so they suffocate, which is quite natural.

But they have with them the source that opens the doors and windows.

The key to self realisation lies in being conscious of making a change. In observing one's actions in a witness way and slowly coming to experience one's own imperishable immortal blissful source. For transformation to be genuine, the difficulty has to be rejected by all the parts. The force can only help or enable them to do it, but it cannot replace the necessary action by a summary process. Your mind and inner being must impart their will the whole.”

THE THREE YOGAS

According to the Vedas (thy holy classical epics that expound the theory of Universal consciousness and Truth), there are broadly three methods by which one can increase or decrease levels of desire and attachment and therefore move towards Self – Realisation. Any of these methods are equally effective in reaching the goal of self

* Menninger – Source “Looking from Within” by A.S. Dalal.

** The psychology of yoga throws further light on the nature of attitudes. Unlike modern psychology which lumps all psychological functions into what is called “mind”, the psychology of yoga looks upon man's subjective nature as a composite of distinct though intermixed and interacting parts of the being, each with its own characteristic consciousness. This yoga concept of parts of the being is extremely helpful in understanding attitudes, because different attitudes are related to different parts of the being and their different types of consciousness. One's predominant attitudes depend on the part of the being which is dominant in one's nature.” – From “Looking from Within” by A.S Dalal.

realisation. The method followed should be the one most suitable to one's own "swadharma" (one's own law of being), or inner nature. Through each method one would move to greater levels of detachment from desires and therefore to greater levels of liberation leading finally to a realisation of the inner being. The happiness and bliss of this inner being is not dependent; it transcends all these and is completely sufficient on its own.

The first is Karmayoga – the course of action. Our lives are filled with activity, dynamism, action. Our choice of negative or positive action determines our journey to self-realisation. Negative actions are those that are selfish, self-centred and those that increase desires. These activities lack a higher goal, a common cause, a noble ideal.

Positive actions are those that are free of egoism and self-centeredness. These actions address one's inner being and help nurture one's connectedness to all others, to one's own higher ideals and creativity. These are actions that are non-judgmental, non-egoistic and compassionate.

If Karmayoga be an individual's path, then the choice of actions determines his journey either towards a higher level of realisation or away from it.

The second is Bhakti yoga – The course of devotion and emotions. This method applies to those who are predominantly emotional. Again here, Bhakti can be either destructive or constructive. In its destructive form Bhakti can mean fanaticism, cultism and blind superstition. Bhakti or devotion can also stem only from what one can gain from it by way of praying and chanting for more wealth, more prestige etc.

Constructive Bhakti is that which relates to the idol or object of devotion as a path to reach the ideal that the object represents. It is that which worships the manifest form in order to realise the unmanifest reality it represents. Real Bhakti is that which is emotionally detached from the ideal but deeply endeavors to realise the spiritual consciousness that is the basis of its form.

Bhakti is not different from unconditional love. If all idols in religion are representative of this love, then an individual on this path would realise the self through real devotion, real unattached, unconditional, un-egoistic, undivided love. In the words of A. Parthasarathy, "Try to recognise and feel the reality above your individuality, the eternal over the ephemeral, the transcendental beyond the terrestrial. That is devotion."

The third is Gnana yoga – the course of knowledge. This method applies to those who are intellectually oriented and those who seek higher knowledge. Gnana yoga goes beyond literacy and the ability to read or write difficult concepts. It is simply the tendency

to contemplate, reflect and observe the delicate nuances of Life ,Consciousness, Divinity and Universal truth.

Again, as in all other yogas one can either through Gnana yoga move towards a deeper realisation of the self, or further away from it. If an individual, by following this path becomes rigid about his or her knowledge, territorial or egoistic, then obviously, he or she has missed the point entirely. But if on the other hand this knowledge is truly realised and applied then the individual is closer to realising him or her self as being one with all others, being aware of the inter -connected -ness of all consciousness. A sincere journey through Gnana yoga would bring about humility, unpretentiousness, harmlessness, forgiveness and self realisation.

RENUNCIATION OF DESIRE

Self realisation is characterised by qualities of compassion, empathy understanding and love for others among other things. A lack of self realisation leads to hard divisiveness, separation and boundaries between one and the other.

If each individual was made aware of the possibilities of his / her self, and examples set in accordance with this awareness, each individual would have a chance to explore deeper levels of his/her being in the area of society.

If this were to happen, if we were to move away from desire and attachment, we would as a society be less selfish, less separated and more conscious of our inter-dependence on one another, our interconnectedness to one another and the Universe.

In Hinduism the only way to gain access to the realised self is through renunciation – a renunciation of the self asserting Ego, of the 'I' as does and controller of all things external and internal. In the book Vedanta Treatise, in the words of A. Parthasarathy "You must drop your ideas of 'me and 'mine'. Banish all attachments and anxieties. Brush aside fears of censure and hopes of appreciation. Consider yourself as you would any other person. Treat yourself as you would a stranger. Cast aside your cherished personal ego and pass disembodied out of yourself. Pass through the gate of indifference, through the door of knowledge into the grandeur of peace and bliss. The Isvasya Upanishad declared this truth in the first sentence, "May you enjoy bliss by that renunciation".

MY JOURNEY THROUGH SELF-REALISATION

For me, self realisation has been a gradual movement towards my ideals of Compassion, Humility and Love. With each passing year my understanding of each of these ideals

deepens, and I can't say that I shall ever be a perfect embodiment of any of them. I do however, consider my life to be an ongoing quest for not only mentally understanding these ideals but also making choices through which these can manifest. My decision to leave a destructive relationship, went hand in hand with complete forgiveness and detachment. It wasn't easy, to say the least, but a conscious effort to not enclose myself in an ego boundary filled with hurt and hatred helped me tremendously to grow as a person.

My decision to make a change in my professional life also was a result of examining my need to reach out and express myself in a larger human and social context. A need to try and give back to that from which I so abundantly and readily receive.

CONCLUSION

My study during this course has helped me to be more conscious and watchful of myself. It has helped to crystallise a lot of concepts, which will make them a lot easier to apply to my life.

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