

THE WORLD
WITHIN
THE YOUNG MIND



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One

In front of me on the wall hangs a piece of wood with these superwonderful words inscribed on it, 'Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday'.

Yet, who can resist at least being curious about 'what will happen tomorrow?' Have you not heard that even the scientifically most progressive countries of the West are witnessing a wholesale revival of fortune-telling and astrology? I suppose it is something like the weather-forecast!

This curiosity takes very many forms. Realistically we realise that the world of tomorrow will be inhabited, built, governed, messed up, or destroyed by our children and their children. We look at these children, and we pretend that we know what they will grow into, what their questions mean or indicate, and what their quest is. We draw conclusions from their commencements. We love conclusions - it is one of the signs of senility.

Do our conclusions have any relationship at all with the problems, the questions, of the youth? Of course, not! For, our conclusions can only be the outgrowth of our own conditioning. In this there is a confession! 'I did this and, well, I made a mess of everything and this young man does this, and surely he is going to make a mess of everything.' So did our own elders worry themselves when we were young. Perhaps we have loved them right; perhaps we have proved them wrong. In some sectors we have conformed. In others we have rebelled and deviated. We have modified tradition, but tradition remains. The young man today is endeavouring to modify tradition, but tradition will continue. The continuance and the modification are both necessary. They are the signs of life.

Tradition affords what tradition itself considers as 'security'. The family, the social structure, political institution institutionalised religion, governments, and international dis-united dis-organisations - all these and many more are held up as the guarantees of our security. We - the adults and the elders - have built them, often after departing from their own worn-out ancestors. And we cling to them, as our only armour, our only fortress, our only insurance, our only refuge, our only security. We are alive, and they are dead. To us, senile beings, a dead father is more real than an unborn son!

When we thus cease to live, tradition which strengthened us, strangles us, tradition which protected us, poisons us. We see it. Let us not deceive ourselves that we do not. We are afraid to confess it. We are afraid that the young ones have seen it, too! And the fear is greatly magnified by our own senile attitude, 'If these children throw the tradition away, they will be committing suicide.'

Are they throwing tradition away? Or, did we trample upon the tradition and kill it? It is much easier to light a lamp and put a flower at the feet of the statue of a dead saint than to meet a living one, light the lamp of our own wisdom from Him, and offer the flower of our heart at His Feet. It is much easier to recite the

Bhagavad Gita than to live it.

If the young ones are throwing the tradition away, then, is it not the only thing to do with it? But, you may very well ask what will be their security? You are afraid that there may be chaos, atheism, irreligion and the law of the jungle. Can we prevent it? Must we, the elders try to prevent it? Or, can and should we entrust the future into the hands of the young, confident that the world they want to live in is theirs to make?

Two

This month - December 1969 - I shall be entering the fiftieth year: what then is my qualification to peep into the world within the young mind?

Firstly, my love for the young which brings me into contact with them wherever I go. Secondly, as a Sanyasi, I am not emotionally involved either with the young or the aged, thus giving me a freedom that is vital to unbiased observation. Thirdly, age puts me in the adult bracket, and my 'civil status' in the sningle blessed) youth bracket. Yet, I am only going to voice the questions that the young ask, without considering myself wise or old enough to answer them.

The young man wakes up in the morning. Earlier, he was dreaming. But, while dreaming he was not aware that he was dreaming. But, here he is, in the world. The link between him and the world is tradition. Whatever might have been the posture and the dress or 'undress' while he slept, the moment he wakes up, he ensures that his dress and his posture in bed or out of it is proper. He should now wash his face, brush his teeth, greet his parents or elders, and mutter a prayer to God.

What are these formalities? Are they necessary? There was a certain freedom during sleep. Why have I been deprived of it by the simple act of waking up! The world keeps reminding me that I am a young man - or woman, and that a certain dress is appropriate, and certain other dress is indecent. And yet aren't these the inventions of man himself? Who is more uncivilised: the primitive man walking about naked and unashamed, in whom seeing other parts of another body produces no more sensuous excitation than seeing another's nose does, or the civilised man who, while insisting on the body being decently covered, yet makes and markets 'suggestive' clothes sex-oriented books, pictures and films?

Who are the elders in the family and what is my relation with them? Should I obey and respect my parents and elders just because they have been in this world for a little longer than I have been? May it not be that their world was different from my world? Yet, again, without their guidance, will I be able to avoid the blunders they made, and will I not lose the benefit of their experience? On the other hand, can I benefit from their experience? They are different from me, and their aim in life was also completely different from mine. Yet, again, I depend upon them completely for my livelihood, and this dependence does compel me to obey, and consequently to rebel.

Above all, why should I accept my parents' God or religion or faith? Gods and goblins are being replaced by scientific formulae and psychological jargon which shall I believe - or, should I believe in any? What role, if any, does God play in my life? Will God enable me to pass an examination if I study well and do well at the examination, or will God actually write the examination on my behalf?

On the other hand, if I throw God and religion out of my life, what is left of it? Is

life a matter of consuming food and preserving the body, knowing full well that it cannot be preserved for long, building houses which will crumble one day, love or hate a member of the family or a neighbour, knowing we were all born, and we shall die as separate individuals! What is this life? What is death? Why do people suffer? Hunger, thirst, old age, disease, natural calamities like cyclone, and man-made calamities like riots and wars -all these cause fear in the human heart. What is fear in the first place? May it be that faith in God will banish this fear? Yet, how can I believe in something I do not know? On the other hand, how can I know something if I have not even the faith to investigate it? If 'religion' is such an investigation, can I belong to my father's religion, and is it a matter of inheritance? If not, how shall I go about such an investigation?

Three

'Religion' is bound up with such a lot of emotion and sentiment, that people hesitate to talk about it. All sorts of clever people utilise this opportunity to give a religious colouring to their social, political, and economic theories. Our young friend, therefore, asks terribly inconvenient questions.

Why is it - is the first question - that religion promotes what it condemns? In other words, why is there such a great gulf between theory and actuality? Is it because of ignorance or hypocrisy? If, for instance, war is irreligious, is it not the duty of religion not to support, sanction or bless war or any warlike enterprise at any cost? If, on the other hand, it condemns war, but sanctions and condones war to defeat 'the aggressor' - religion or politics aided by religion being itself the prosecutor and the judge, does it not make itself vulnerable to corruption? If, on the other hand, religion feels that in the world as at present constituted, corruption and war and such irreligious activity is inevitable, is it not better for religion to withdraw from worldly activity as a whole, and confine itself to its own realm of bringing Man closer to God?

Allied to this question is the next one: whereas every religion declares that God is one and humanity is one, each one proclaims that it alone has the monopoly of this truth. How can religion unite all mankind by dividing it, carving out a slice of its own, and then proclaiming that other slices are untruths or half truths? Does such polemical and proselytising activity promote peace and unity by any stretch of imagination? Does such activity which only succeeds in creating greater antagonism and worse bitterness than already exist, be considered religious at all?

On the other hand, if one sincerely believed that he 'saw' the truth, that he is intimately aware of the secret that will unite all mankind, and if one sincerely felt that his solution is the best, if not the only one, may we not perhaps lose the only saving factor? Who is the judge? If each one has to judge for oneself whether such a sole saving factor can or cannot be accepted, may we not again have many warring factions, each one claiming the monopoly of truth, each one convinced that if only its own doctrines are accepted by the whole of mankind, there would be peace, and till such time, it is its sacred duty to do everything that may be necessary - war and proselytisation - to hasten that great day when the whole of mankind will profess one faith and thus enjoy peace and brotherhood?

Where lies the solution? Is it possible to destroy the divisive forces, without getting involved in destruction? Or is it wise to ignore the divisive forces, thus running the risk of these forces joining the religious fold itself and masquerade as holiness? Or, shall we work for the abolition of institutionalised religion and throw each one to his or her own resources?

In that case, how can religion be conveyed to the masses? How again shall we be able to prevent the death of religion altogether, and the consequent prevalence of

utter inhumanity? Whatever substitute we may offer to mankind in place of religion, for awakening humanity, brotherly love, and an awareness of the divine essence in each person - that substitute will eventually organise itself into a religion, and mankind will soon find itself in the same position in which it is today.

If such difficulties beset religion that stands for unity, love, peace and goodwill, how much more confusing are the other fields of human activity, viz., commerce, politics, and social structure!

Four

One advantage - and disadvantage! - that a movement challenging religious institutions enjoys is that few people take serious notice of these institutions, anyway. It is an advantage because we get away with it. It is a disadvantage because the challenge passes unnoticed.

But when the challenge extends to commerce, politics and society, vested interests react sharply, calling the movement 'communism', 'anarchy' and 'immoral'. The young mind sees a victory in this vexation.

It is indeed true that the 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' contains these words: 'The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of old ones. 'But,' ask the young, 'is an idea bad simply because it is found in a document which contains other ideas unacceptable to us? Is this not unwarranted prejudice?'

Charity is exalted by all religious and social reformers; but exploitation continues in different forms. What is 'commerce'? What is trade? What is the idea of manufacturing goods to serve the people, to make available to them objects they really need, or to produce such goods as well tempt the people to fill the industrialist's pocket? If we are manufacturing and marketing goods which the people really need, why is there so much of such tantalising advertisements? What are the rules of competition in trade? More excitement, more debasing and sensual appeal? Or, greater solicitude to the physical, mental and moral welfare of the consumer? What greases the wheels of industry? The altruistic motive of making the products more healthy and wholesome, or the profit motive of making it more tempting; physically and morally corrupting and spiritually corroding? One has only to look at the advertisements put out by the tobacco and liquor industries to understand this problem. Who is at the root of the drug problem? Who finances the whole thing and distributes it 'wholesale'?

Cinema and book publishing and the newspaper have become industries now, have they not? Do they cater for the needs of the people, or do they arouse the baser instincts in man and then proclaim 'See, what can we do? The people want these things'? Here, again, do the different 'producers' compete for greater profit or for greater opportunities to serve the people? If these avenues of mass instruction are also subjected to the same corrupting influences of exploitation and profit, are we not left with the same old evils: the powerful exploits the weak, the haves even dictate what the have-nots will 'need'? Is it not true then that with the ultramodern techniques of 'persuasion', the battle for the human mind is on, and profiteers lure prospective buyers into believing 'Without this you cannot live, with this life will be great'?

Is profit-motive not the heart of the whole problem? And, is profit-motive not

the heart of commerce and industry? With this pervasive profit-motive all commerce and industry becomes a gambling, and gambling becomes industry, too!

Why has earning money become such an absorbing occupation of man? Is it not because there is a deep need in him, an emptiness in him whose nature he does not understand, and which he tries to fill with getting rich quickly, only to discover that unless he gets richer more quickly, this emptiness will, paradoxically, crush him?

Since getting rich and getting richer have made no difference, is it not time that man tried to drop the whole thing, without making any compromise with truth, without merely 'reducing his wants', at the same time cleverly raising his 'needs', thus too maintain the status quo? If each man offered his services to society in return for food, clothing, shelter and such essentials as medical care and healthy recreation, may we not have a commercial structure pure in its foundation, healthy in its structure, and ennobling in its function?

Five

Under the dispensation of the yester-era, youth had nothing to-do with politics. The father looked after that - and the father looked up to the leader - who was like his father - and so it went 'up' till everybody looked up to a king. The king can do no wrong. He was some sort of a 'universal father figure'. But, in course of time, machines went up, masses woke up, monarchy bowed out.

And, the world today is divided into two camps - democracy and dictatorship - the former is the famous 'government of the people, for the people, by the people' and the latter is where the people have no voice in the government. The young man asks: 'Who listens to me? Am I consulted?'

Of course, he has the right to vote, everyone has the right to vote. But, how does he cast that vote? How does he exercise that right? What are the criteria that motivate the hand that casts the vote? Is the average voter intelligent, educated and wise enough to appreciate the right, and make the right choice? Not giving him that right is not the solution; but having given him the right, should he not be equipped with the knowledge, the wisdom, and the education necessary to exercise that right properly?

In the absence of such equipment, what does he do? Does he not vote for the candidate who makes the most rosy promises, and holds out the worst threats? What does this mean? He votes for the man who says, in effect, 'If you put me in power, I will make you richer and live a more comfortable life.' Therefore, what motivates the vote? Personal ambition! And it is twofold: the personal ambition of the voter, and the personal ambition of the person he votes into power. Is such a person wise, intelligent, educated or mature? Can an immature person be trusted to exercise his franchise wisely? Does maturity depend upon biological age? Does it not involve the ability, willingness, and eagerness to rise above the self, and view the good of the whole community, nation, and the world itself? And, if a person who has attained such maturity ascends the ladder of power, how can society hope to be benefited from such a government? Can it be called government at all - leave alone examining whether it is of the people, for the people, or by the people?

The safety device is built into democracy, no doubt. People can express their disapproval or approval through the ballot box or through the press or through the platform. But, are the people - all the people - mature to do so? Or, are their own political views those of someone else's? If the political views of the people are themselves dictated by someone else, however intelligent or educated he may be, is that not also a form of dictatorship? Is it not a form of intellectual slavery?

On the other hand, can we ever evolve a system of education by which all the members of an electorate would be educated? Who devises such a system? Is he free from bias? Does he not even at the beginning sow the seeds of prejudice - which is unwisdom - in the minds of the young, and so condition their mind that

they tend to accept the status quo as the best in the world?

Freedom of the press and of the platform may also be grossly abused. How far do newspapers represent the voice of the people, and to what extent do they misguide the people? If a small section of the population discovers that their own vested interests are threatened by a government, should they have the freedom to subvert that government under cover of freedom of speech? What is the dividing line between freedom of speech and sedition leading to violence? What is violence and what is non-violence? Is it a mere physical phenomenon or does it extend - in these days of psychological weapons - to subtle forms of perverted persuasion? If we permit these subtle forms, may it not lead us to the worst evils of a permissive society in the name of democracy?

If one wishes to halt this downward trend, who shall hold the halter? May he not be branded a dictator? And, may he not become a dictator? How can this be prevented?

In brief: how can we bring about a society in which every one of the citizens will be devoted every moment of his life to the welfare of all the citizens? If that is what democracy means!

Six

Fortunately, many of the unruly questions that disturb the peace of the Young Mind and the Decrepit Society abroad do not arise in many Mauritian minds. The Reason? A young man quickly answered: 'We are controlled by our parents.'

This 'control' implies a lot, and that is why control has been venerated as a desirable institution. It means submission - and submission is always suppression. The young man submits to the authority of his parents and his teachers. The members of a religious institution submit to the authority of the priest or religious leader. The members of a political party submit to the authority of the leader of that party. Submission therefore implies authority.

While this authority demands the surrender of freedom, it grants concessions in exchange. The parents are prepared to tolerate their children's eccentricities in the matter of dress and minor living habits; but major domestic issues are jealously guarded. Yet, it is possible in course of time that these major issues might become minor. The religious institution 'protects' the flock against certain forms of psychological stress and tension - by offering protection against ghosts and evil spirits - and earns divine grace for the flock, if necessary by using its secular influence with the powers that be - but the flock shall not question its authority in the matter of scriptural truths and rites, moral code or religious dogma. The political party, similarly, invites suggestions and advice, so long as the members work hard to return it to power.

In this process, one can see the 'other side' of this control. The authority has to yield somewhere at some time - and that is what has made change evolution or progress - or whatever you choose to call it - possible.

But, why control or authority at all, in the first place? This question has not so far been asked in Mauritius - at least openly. But with the Jumbo jet civilisation gate-crashing the doors of Mauritius, it is possible to visualise that the youth of tomorrow may become impatient with the slow evolution, and may want to quicken its pace. Rapid evolution is revolution, isn't it? Rapidity also tends to bring chaos and confusion in its trail. Can we forestall it?

And, so, why control or authority at all? Simply: it provides security. Years ago, in my own native district in South India, weddings were interminable five-day rituals. Conditioned to those rites, certain other forms of wedding did not seem valid to me! Yet, I must confess that several weddings of the latter type have been great success, to my knowledge, whereas many of the former type have failed. I am now prepared to accept almost anything! Yet, man clings to the institution of 'marriage', whatever be the interpretation and the ritual involved, for in it he sees security, a binding force. Again, in my native village in my own boyhood, I would have considered it a great sin if I did not go to the temple and recite certain prayers every evening at least. It did not take me long to discover that many that had the habit of temple-going were not religious, and others who did not have it

were deeply religious. Yet, man clings to the temple or a religious institution, for in it he sees a psychic or divine force, that keeps evil away and prosperity flowing in! Even so with political and economic organizations. Man seeks security. Security invents institution. Vested interests creep in, and the vicious circle is complete. The vested interest form the authority and they control - yielding a bit now and then. But society cannot do without them As a 'hippie' remarked to me in Paris: 'We acquired a lot of spiritual values in India, but we cannot apply them here.'

Such a frustrating situation might lead in two directions: either it quells the Youth Revolt or turns it into a violent revolution.

Therefore, the crucial question is: can we do without security at all? Or, can we evolve a new way of life to find true security without creating vested interests and institutions that will assume authority and exercise control?

To answer, a deeply spiritual heart is necessary. There is no real security in this world! Death, disease, and destruction in countless forms, are waiting at the door. What shall we lock against these? When you 'secure' something against someone else, you are alienating that someone, creating an enemy, without realising that he and you are one in truth!

Is it, then, difficult to see that love is the only source of unfailing security? Love is oneness. Love is the total negation of the 'me' - selfishness. Love does not exercise control nor impose its authority. Love is freedom. But this freedom is the freedom of the spirit which asserts this freedom in humility, unselfishness, and pure love, and not in revolts, revolutions and violence. This love is God. When this love rules, there will be perfect security without anyone seeking it, order without anyone imposing it, peace that passeth understanding.

The end - a new beginning.