

Group-soul (2): Transitioning to the Subjective Age

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This excerpt is the continuation of the previous posting, SOCIOLOGY IN THE SPIRITUAL AGE, <https://www.auroville.org.in/article/55392>, elaborating further a key-concept in THE HUMAN CYCLE by Sri Aurobindo, and relating it to Auroville.

From Ruud Lohman, "THE SADHANA OF THE GROUP-SOUL – TOWARDS A SPIRITUAL SOCIOLOGY AND PLANNING", written for The Auroville Planning Group and other interested persons, 10 February 1972:

## TRANSITIONING TO THE SUBJECTIVE AGE

### 2.2. The group-soul and some considerations

2.2.1. After tentatively defining the field of a spiritual sociology within Integral Yoga and determining its object as the group-soul, we may now discuss some of the ways of dealing with the group-soul. We would have to find a framework of going about, and tools to be applied. It should again not be a mental framework, but one which is fully determined by the object (the group-soul) and therefore is an extension into the collective of what the individual sadhana means for the individual. Here we give only some preliminaries; groups that are going to work on and in the group-soul will come to their own discoveries on this subject, to a collective awareness of the below surface processes and forces, and many changes and corrections may be suggested to what is given here.

2.2.2. A first, obvious statement is: the group-soul does not become real to a group all of a sudden – it will not fall from heaven or emerge from the depths in one movement. Its coming about is usually a slow process, although it may be a fast one, but in any case is a process of several phases. These phases identify the transitions from the state Auroville is in now to that of the group-soul which will ultimately inhabit the Central Circle. In the first chapter it was suggested already that Auroville may grow in two stages: first the transition into the subjective stage (Auromodel?) and then into the spiritual stage (The Central Circle). Now we must go into detail, trying to determine the different phases in this two-step process. How this will influence the planning and the growth of Auroville is to be studied in the next two chapters.

2.2.3. Another consideration should be made before we go into a description of phases. Many people seem to come to Auroville for their own sadhana. At this point, as far as this is true and as long as this is truer a collective yoga would not come into everyone's scope yet. Therefore we must stress the point again that the individual soul and the group-soul are identical in nature, and therefore an individual sadhana in the Integral Yoga seems an incomplete one without the group-sadhana. The danger of interference with anybody's private way would therefore not exist, it is just that it cannot be done in a mere private way.

2.2.4. One more point of consideration in this context is how much the two processes, the individual and the collective, are simultaneous. Some individuals may reach a psychic level of development, which has not yet been realised for the group-psychic. But the relationship may work both ways: in order to develop personally one can work on the group-soul and the other way round. This may be true for every transition: first some individuals realise it in themselves and then the group as a group breaks through. But the inverse may also be true, that the transition of the group causes or stimulates the breakthrough of the individual consciousness from one stage to another. The Mother says about this that, "There is between the collectivity and the individual an interdependence from which one cannot be totally free (...) One can try to go ahead much faster (...) yet in spite of everything, the realisation even for him who is on the top (...) depends on the realisation (...), on the condition of the human collectivity."

Sri Aurobindo has also said that a double movement is necessary: with the effort for individual progress and realisation there must be united an effort to lift up the whole, enabling it to make the indispensable progress that would bring in a greater progress of the individual – a progress of the mass allowing the individual to take one step more."

### 2.3. Phases of the group-soul's development.

A first and rough description of the phases in which the group-soul might develop – and therefore of the phases in which Auroville might come into existence – is:

#### 2.3.1. From Many Egos Towards many Selves

Many people who join Auroville have gone through a considerable development in their lives. For each one this is very

different and also the motives which bring people together on the Auroville soil are different. Still, we may make some generalisations, guided by Sri Aurobindo's analysis of the processes of cultures.

It seems, then, that we have reached a state in which cultures stuck in a conventional or a rational, objective phase of their development are in the process of breaking open. Sri Aurobindo speaks about a subjective age as the next step in The Human Cycle. People who leave their old ways behind and search inward for meaning and depth, may be said to be in this transitional stage, between the old objective ways and patterns, and new subjective ones. This transition has two characteristics: it is a protest against the old, and a search for the new. It is a protest against being dominated by traditional and fixed or externally determined rational ways of living. It is a search for reality in depth. The individual studies the world and himself anew and, "in his study of himself, and the world he cannot but come face to face with the soul in himself and the soul in the world and find it to be an entity so profound, so complex, so full of hidden secrets and powers that his intellectual reason betrays itself as an insufficient light and a fumbling seeker (...). The need of a deeper knowledge must then turn him to the discovery of new powers and means within himself. He finds that he can only know himself entirely by becoming actively self-conscious and not merely self-critical, by more and more living in his soul and acting out of it rather than floundering on surfaces".

This process is a crucial one for the individual. He has to come to terms with his past and to reorganise all the parts of his being around a new centre, which in the beginning is still vague and subconscious or superconscious. Such a reorganisation is really the movement from the ego, which operates on the surface of the being; toward the self, which – being deep within – is the goal of the subjective impulse. All this consumes much energy and the tendency to somewhat close oneself off from the social dimensions is inevitable.

In this phase the individuals in the group are still largely unaware that they are part of a larger soul, and the group-soul cannot yet emerge. Quite a few elements of the now existing population – their behaviour pattern, social life – can be understood against the background of this first level of awareness, one that is preparatory for the emergence of a group-soul.

### 2.3.2. From Many Actualising Selves to An Objective Awareness of the Group-soul

The group-soul, Sri Aurobindo states, is more complex than the individual soul – though being identical with it in nature – "because it has a great number of partly self-conscious mental individuals for the constituents of its physical being, instead of an association of merely vital subconscious cells. Therefore it also seems more crude", he adds, "more primitive and artificial in the forms it takes". And, "it has a more difficult task before it, it needs a longer time to find itself, it is less fluid and less easily organic". For the time being the group-soul is very much subliminal and a huge effort is required to become aware of it, all the more so because all the constituent persons must be willing to work towards that awareness of something that goes beyond their first interest. It seems we have come now to a stage of development in Auroville where we must take up this "more difficult task" in a conscious way.

When the group-soul succeeds in getting out of the stage of vaguely conscious self-formation, Sri Aurobindo describes, its first definite self-consciousness is objective much more than subjective. And so far as it is subjective, it is apt to be superficial and loose and vague. As an example of this objectiveness Sri Aurobindo shows how it comes out very strongly in the ordinary emotional conception of the nation about its most outward and material aspect, the passion for the land and the soil, just for the shell of the body. In "Auroville this objectiveness would show in the tendency to lay great stress on the land, the structures, the outward aspects of communities and buildings, instead of on the inner process.

### 2.3.3. From An Objective Awareness to A First Subjective Awareness of The Group-soul

When we move away from the outer appreciations and when we begin to feel that the real body is the men and women who compose the unity a body ever changing yet always the same like that of the individual, we are on the way to a truly subjective communal consciousness. For then, Sri Aurobindo writes, we have some chance of realising that even the physical being of the community is a subjective power, not a mere objective existence. "Much more it is in the inner self a great corporate soul with all the possibilities and dangers of the soul-life."

"When Auroville is described as an experiment in collective sadhana, in finding the communal soul, it should grow into the awareness of these vague and obscure processes behind the surface, and bring these feelings which always existed in communities to the front. It has always been there; but never explicitly as a way to follow. It has remained subliminal, to the detriment of the communities and the individuals in it. A real community is one which lives from this inmost centre and is fully aware of it.

Sri Aurobindo describes how "there is always a vague sense of this subjective existence at work even on the surface of the communal mentality", but how it concerns itself mostly with details and unessentials. He calls it an "objective sense of subjectivity", and adds: As man has been accustomed to look on himself as a body and a life, the physical animal with a certain moral or immoral temperament, and the things of the mind have been regarded as a fine flower and attainment of the physical life rather than themselves anything essential or the sign of something essential, so and much more has the community regarded that small part of its subjective self of which it becomes aware. It clings indeed always to its idiosyncrasies, habits, prejudices, but in a blind objective fashion, insisting on their most external aspect and not at all going behind them to that for which they stand, that which they try blindly to express."

### 2.3.4. From A First Subjective Awareness to The Full Subjective Phase.

Only when individuals and groups come to a full subjective awareness of the deepest reality of their own being, can we

speak of entering into the Subjective Age. "The Subjective stage of human development is that critical juncture in which the group comes to see and feel what is behind the outside and below the surface and therefore to live from within. It is a step towards self-knowledge and towards living in and from the Self". Sri Aurobindo is convinced that now the time is coming for nations and communities to become fully aware of their deeper reality. Auroville would be a conscious experiment on these deeper levels for the sake of all other communities and nations which cannot break through so easily. "It opens the way", The Human Cycle tells us, "to great danger, and errors, but it is the essential condition for that which has now become the demand of the Time-Spirit on the human race, that it shall find subjectively, not only in the individual but in the nation and in the unity of the human race itself, its deeper being, its inner law, its real self".

The implications of the full subjectivity for both individuals and groups becomes even more clear from the way Sri Aurobindo compares the "objective view" and the "subjective view". (What this means for Auroville, particularly in planning, will be made more explicit in that chapter.) Both objectivism and subjectivism start from the same data, the individual and the collectivity, but from there they go different ways. The governing idea of objectivism is that life is to be managed, harmonised, perfected by an adjustment, a manipulation, by "machines". A law outside oneself, an ordering, perfection, a management by mechanical process – this is the conception of practice. Subjectivism proceeds from within and regards everything from the point of view of a containing and developing self-consciousness. Here the law is within ourselves; the principle of its progress is an increasing self-recognition, self-realisation and a resultant self-shaping. The whole impulse of subjectivism is to get at the self, to live in the self, to see by the self, to live out the truth of the self internally and externally but always from an internal initiation and centre.

But this is by far, not the end of the road, and is not the ultimate level on which Auroville will be built. The subjective phase, though much deeper and more developed than the first two phases, "may stop far short of spirituality, for the subjective turn is only a first condition, not the thing itself, not the end of the matter".

