

Steps Towards Forming a Confederation of South Asia



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Steps Towards Forming a Confederation of South Asia

As stated previously, it is our firm conviction and belief that the partition of India will be undone by the sheer law of political forces. As a natural consequence many of the problems of the subcontinent will be resolved and this will ultimately lead towards the formation of a confederation of South Asia. This confederation will include all the SAARC countries, including Afghanistan and Myanmar.

We believe that this step will not only bring peace, harmony and economic growth to the region, but also be a major step in ushering in world unity based on a durable peace, justice and equality in the world. India can play its true and destined role only after this event takes place and this can happen only when the first step is taken, that is to say the partition of the two nations, India and Pakistan, is undone. This can be done by stages and in a gradual way.

The question that arises is whether this denouement will take place by the cooperation of the human agencies, that is to say the people and governments of India and Pakistan and all the other nations of the subcontinent? Or, will it need painful and crushing circumstances to bring this about?

We shall try to see in this article the steps and the process that could be taken by the different Governments in the region, and more particularly by the Government and the people of India that will lead to a peaceful and harmonious way of bringing about this reconciliation and fulfil the Divine plan.

Steps to Be Taken

The first step in this process is to establish friendly relations with Pakistan, then to move towards union and finally to move towards a confederation of South Asia. What will be the methods of moving towards this goal? In the words of Sri Aurobindo it has to be done: *by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form — the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, the division must and will go. For without it the destiny of India might be seriously impaired and even frustrated. But that must not be.*

The questions that naturally arise are, what are the conditions that we need to create both on the psychological and practical levels to bring about this fulfilment?

The steps mentioned by Sri Aurobindo are clear: the slackening of tension, a progressive understanding of the need and peace and concord, the constant necessity of common and concerted action and finally an instrument for that purpose.

The Hindu-Muslim Problem

But as should be evident, the first problem that needs to be resolved is the Hindu-Muslim problem and that needs to be taken up urgently. For this to happen, it must be made absolutely clear that Hindu-Muslim unity is not possible unless India-Pakistan relations improve radically; the two are intimately interlinked.

It is hoped that the present attempt to bring about a thaw in Indo-Pak relations will be carried forward to its logical conclusion. That conclusion will be that the State of Pakistan merges with India and once more becomes an indivisible part of India. For the very existence and foundation of Pakistan is that Hindus and Muslims cannot live together. It was on this basis that Pakistan was created. However, the history of the last 60 years has shown how unstable Pakistan is and the simple reason for this is the falsehood of the basic premise on which Pakistan is built. As a matter of fact, there are more Muslims in India than in Pakistan and they are living a life of dignity and harmony with the rest of the country.

It follows that steps have to be taken to establish a working and harmonious relation with Pakistan. This will lead automatically to discovering the means of a greater harmony between the two religions of Hinduism and Islam and finally between all religions. But it is evident and must always be kept in mind that all this cannot happen overnight; it needs a long psychological preparation and some practical steps on the external plane. We will have to start by becoming good neighbours and live peacefully. This will ultimately and inevitably lead to the creation of a united nation. What then are the steps to be taken towards Pakistan and what should the policy be?

Steps to be Taken Towards Pakistan

Our policy should base itself on the following planks:

1. It seems that one of the chief obstacles to unity in the subcontinent is the Pakistan Army and its sister establishment, the ISI – Inter Services Intelligence, in Pakistan. The first step would be, therefore, to weaken the influence of the military in Pakistan. This can be done by strongly supporting the return of genuine democracy in Pakistan.

It must be remembered that a genuine and true democracy means the respect of constitutionalism, rule of law, popular sovereignty and representative government.

Pakistan needs an 'all-encompassing formula' for stability. Every important political force should be on board for a fair and free election in Pakistan.

For in a democracy, the governments are obliged to respond to the basic needs of the people, and that will inevitably put pressure on large military budgets. And this is what the government of India must encourage by supporting the political forces that want democracy to be established in Pakistan.

2. Second, constituencies in Pakistan whose livelihood and prosperity depend upon good relations with India should be nurtured. That will mean that we have to develop the growing trade relations between India and Pakistan. In this, India should take the initiative. The example of West Germany is a living testimony of this approach. We should not allow the initiative to rest with Pakistan. A probable step in this direction could be by declaring unilateral freeing of trade.
3. Third, we should help the secular minded people in Pakistan to come closer to us — through people to people and professional contacts, by throwing open opportunities for education and training, and cultural activities. The disillusionment of the middle class with the

failure of Pakistan can play an important role in turning the tide in favour of India.

This is evidently already happening in Pakistan as can be seen from this extract in an article written by KuldipNayar in the Deccan Chronicle dated 10-9-07.

The message of universal peace attracted 65 of us, including eight MPs, from India to Buleshah's mazaar (grave). Although eventually buried at a place some eight kilometres from Kasur, the mazaar is now in the heart of the city. This was the people's catharsis for their prejudice and bigotry. They themselves moved their homes and shops to the mazaar.

It was partly his message and partly the desire to have friendly relations with India that made nearly the entire population of Kasur come out on the streets to welcome us. It was a tumultuous reception. Rose petals were showered on us all the way to the mazaar. We were loaded with garlands. "India-Pakistan dostizindabad," was the slogan that went up. Subsequently, at a large meeting the entire gathering raised hands in response to a question posed by Manzur Ali, a local MP: How many would like to visit India?

4. Fourth, on the political plane we must deepen our relations and understanding with the United States, Russia, China and other neighbouring countries that see Islamic fundamentalism as a threat to the stability of their societies. Obviously, this is a large agenda and it requires a steady purpose, and time to fructify. But above all, it needs a national consensus covering all parties, with secularism, economic success, and a strong national defence as the underpinnings of our future. We must set out therefore in building this consensus among all political parties and religious groups.
5. Finally, and most important, we must reinterpret all the religions practised in India – Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and all other religions, which are practised in the country – at a deeper level. The time has come when we have to begin to seriously consider what they all really mean and are in their soul, that is to say, in their very reality and essence. Once that is done, we shall realize that there are no real differences. This will be the first step towards going beyond religion and making spirituality the driving force of all life.

We shall take up each of these separately and try to see the conditions that need to be created for their fulfilment.

Slackening of Tension

The slackening of tension is possible only after we address the root causes of the tension. What then are the causes of tension? The root cause of the tension is the premise that Hindus and Muslims cannot live together. With partition, the two communities – Muslims and Hindus - that had lived together for hundreds of years were divided. As a result, a foundation of hatred was laid in the region, a foundation that has consequences even today.

The history of the last 60 years in India has proved that Hindus and Muslims can and are indeed living together more or less harmoniously. It is true that there are tensions among the two communities but in most cases they have their root outside India, emanating mainly from the neighbouring countries.

However, the problem remains and we shall now try to find out the steps to resolve this problem. The true and final solution between the two religions lies in going beyond religion into spirituality. Here in the words of Sri Aurobindo:

Each religion has helped mankind. Paganism increased in man the light of beauty, the largeness and height of his life, his aim at a many-sided perfection. Christianity gave him some vision of Divine love and charity, Buddhism has shown him a noble way

to be wiser, gentler and purer; Judaism and Islam, how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to God; Hinduism has opened to him the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities. A great thing would be done if all these God-visions could embrace and cast themselves into each other; but intellectual dogma and cult-egoism stand in the way.

All religions have saved a number of souls, but none yet has been able to spiritualise mankind. For that there is needed not cult and creed, but a sustained and all comprehending effort at spiritual self-evolution.

(CWSA VOL13 p211)

The question is whether we can put forward this solution to the nation and more particularly to the political parties and the masses, or is it premature? For politics is concerned with masses of mankind and not with individuals. To ask masses of mankind to move from religion to spirituality at this stage might seem premature.

For while the highest spirituality moves in a free and wide air far above that stage of seeking which is governed by religious form and dogma, man does not arrive immediately at that highest inner elevation and, if it were demanded from him at once, he would never arrive there. At first he needs lower supports and stages of ascent; he asks for some scaffolding of

dogma, worship, image, sign, form, symbol, some indulgence and permission of mixed half-natural motive on which he can stand while he builds up in him the temple of the spirit. Only when the temple is completed, can the supports be removed, the scaffolding disappear.

On the other hand, there are suggestions in some quarters that we should abandon religion and give it up completely. But in the subcontinent and in a country like India it is not possible to eliminate religion. It is too deep rooted in the psyche of the people and is a powerful motivating force. Therefore one has to find other means to solve the problem. That solution is to graduate from religion to spirituality, to bring an awareness in the nation that religion is only the first step and that we must move towards spirituality.

In the early part of the twentieth century, when Sri Aurobindo was in active politics, Sri Aurobindo had written:

"Of one thing we may be certain, that Hindu-Muslim unity cannot be effected by political adjustments or Congress flatteries. It must be sought deeper down in the heart and in the mind, for where the causes of disunion are there the remedies must be sought.

We shall do well in trying to solve the problem to remember that misunderstanding is the most fruitful cause of our

differences, that love compels love and that strength conciliates the strong. We must strive to remove the causes of misunderstanding by a better mutual knowledge and sympathy; we must extend the unfaltering love of the patriot to our Mussulman brother, remembering always that in him too Narayana dwells and to him too our Mother has given a permanent place in her bosom; but we must cease to approach him falsely or flatter out of a selfish weakness and cowardice. We believe this to be the only practical way of dealing with the difficulty.

As a political question the Hindu-Muslim problem does not interest us at all, as a national problem it is of supreme importance. We shall make it a main part of our work to place Mohammed and Islam in a new light before our readers to spread juster views of Mohammedan history and civilization, to appreciate the Mussulman's place in our national development and the means of harmonizing his communal life with our own, not ignoring the difficulties that stand in the way of the possibilities of brotherhood and mutual understanding. Intellectual sympathy can only draw together; the sympathy of the heart can alone unite. But the one is a good preparation for the other.”

(SABCL VOL2 P24)

Let us see what can be done in the light of this statement.

The first thing to be clearly understood is that it is not by political means that any understanding or harmony can be brought about. It is not by reservations or vote-bank politics that any true understanding will take place. For this is not a political issue and these steps only divide the communities further. It must be emphasised that this is not a political problem; rather it is a national problem and has to be treated as such with as little interference as possible from the political class.

All misunderstandings between the religious communities should be removed and the one way to do this is by a continued discussion and dialogue among the leaders of the different communities. Regular meetings should be held among the religious leaders of different communities to find out the common points in the religions and stress on them; as for the differences, they can be sorted out by a dialogue. For it is in the interest of all the religious communities to create an atmosphere of harmony and good will in the nation.

In this context, it is being suggested that a Central University be created to study all the religions in the subcontinent and the world; this can be a forum for a deep study of the essence of all the religions and their final integration. Scholars from all over the world may be invited to teach in the University thus

creating the platform for a new age which goes beyond religion to culminate into an integral spirituality.

It is to be noted that the age of religions is coming to an end and we are at the beginning of an age where spirituality will dominate; and this spirituality will be all embracing and will include all life in its fold. Let us prepare and work for the advent of the new Age.

In this context, a good example is India's own history of the Sufi movement. One might say that it was India's first strong experiment in recent times to see how far the spiritual force can unite even extremely diverse groups such as the Hindu and Mussulman, diverse not only in language, customs, traditions and beliefs, but also in temperamental cast of the inner being. One comes from a large spiritual calm, and richly complex refreshingly rejuvenating spiritual striving of the Hindu, the other is born of a fiery and passionate spirit of an exclusive religious outlook, full of zeal and sometimes an aggressive fervour. Yet, the Sufi mystics found no contradictions in it and easily reconciled the two.

The Kashmir problem could be solved by encouraging the Sufi tradition to grow there. It will inevitably bring about a reconciliation of the Hindus and Muslims; the temptation to strive for a political solution has to be forgone once and for all. Handing over a part or the whole Kashmir to Pakistan will only

encourage the perverse two nation theory and that will not be good for any of the two nations.

Another point to note is that one of the characteristics of Indian culture down the ages is its power of assimilation. When one studies Indian history it will be noted that India has assimilated elements from all those who invaded the country, be it, the Greeks, the Persians or others. But she assimilates when her Central Truth is recognised by the other party, and even while assimilating she does it in such a way that the elements absorbed are no longer recognizable as foreign but become part of herself. Instances of this are what we took from the Greek architecture, from the Persian painting.

However, after the advent of the Muslim civilization into India, a new problem was created which came in the way of a complete assimilation and a politically united India. This was the clash of two civilizations and religions, one ancient and the other medieval. The real problem introduced by the Muslim conquest was not that of subjection to a foreign rule and the ability to recover freedom, but the struggle between two civilizations, one ancient and indigenous, the other mediaeval and brought in from outside.

That which apparently rendered the problem insoluble was the attachment of each to a powerful religion, the one militant and aggressive, the other spiritually tolerant indeed and flexible,

but obstinately faithful in its discipline to its own principle and standing on the defense behind a barrier of social forms.

There are two conceivable solutions - one is the rise of a greater spiritual principle and formation, which could reconcile the two religions and the second, is a political patriotism surmounting the religious struggle and uniting the two communities.

During the freedom struggle an attempt was made to create this political patriotism and feeling of nationalism; it was partially successful but in the end religious intolerance and mistrust took over and the result was the partition of the country.

Regarding the process of assimilation, Sri Aurobindo says, *“the assimilation of the Mahomedan culture also was done in the mind to a great extent and it would have perhaps gone further. But in order that the process may be complete it is necessary that a change in the Mahomedan mentality should come. The conflict is in the outer life and unless the Mahomedans learn tolerance I do not think the assimilation is possible. The Hindu is ready to tolerate. He is open to new ideas and his culture has got a wonderful capacity for assimilation, but always provided that her Central Truth is recognised.”*

(A.B. Purani, Evening Talks, 2nd series, p. 48, 1961)

We are presenting here a passage from a well-known writer, Nolini Kanta Gupta (Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta – p.94-95) on what makes a nation.

Common love, common labour, and above all as the great French thinker Ernest Renan pointed out, common suffering, that is the cement which welds together the disparate elements of a nation- a nation is not formed otherwise.

A nation means peoples differing in race and religion, caste and creed and even language, fused together into a composite but indivisible unit. Not pact or balancing of interests nor sharing of power can permanently combine and unify conflicting groups and collectivities.

Hindus and Muslims, the two major sections that are at loggerheads today in India, must be given a field, indeed more than one field where they can work together; they must be made to come in contact with each other, to coalesce and dovetail into each other in as many ways and directions as possible. Instead of keeping them separate in water tight compartments, in barred cages, as it were, lest they pounce upon each other like wild beasts, it would be wiser to throw them together; let them breathe the same air, live the same life, share the same troubles, the same difficulties, solve the same problems. That is how they will best understand, appreciate,

and even love each other, become comrades and companions, not rivals and opponents.

To have union, one must unite – division can never lead to unity. Also this unity is established automatically and irrevocably, not by any abstract sense of justice and equality, nor by any romantic or imaginative feeling of fraternity, but by a dynamic living together. A common political and economic life creates a field of force that can draw together into a harmonious working the most contrary and refractory elements.

(Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta p 94-95)

Let us find out more and more areas, first in India and then in the subcontinent, where we can all work together irrespective of religion, caste or creed and share our lives as citizens of a great culture and civilisation, first and always. It is not by reservations but working together that understanding and trust can be built.

A wonderful example of this is the Armed Forces in India, for they are a living example of this unity and national integration in the nation. It will not be out of place to take into account some remarks made by the Mother regarding the Indian Army. In a certain situation that arose in 1969, She felt it necessary to send a message to the then Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi.

So I had to send someone immediately to tell her, "For heaven's sake, support the army. It's India's only hope..."

(April 19 1969)

It will therefore be worthwhile to make a detailed study of the working and training in the Armed Forces and incorporate whatever is possible into the mainstream of the national life. Some of the qualities which are strongly present there can be usefully incorporated into the national life. These are discipline, courage, team-spirit, professionalism, secularism and patriotism.

One could also suggest a close working together of the Armed Forces of the different nations in the subcontinent, at least wherever it is possible.

It is now high time to attempt the solution of the problem on both these lines, that is to say, firstly, create a nationalism that unites the whole nation going beyond religion, caste and creed and second, take steps to move and graduate from religion to spirituality.

The institution of SAARC is itself a first step and opportunity in this direction and this forum can be used to create patriotism on both political and economic lines. It must be also emphasised strongly that there is already an underlying unity between the nations of SAARC. This unity is geographical,

economic, cultural and spiritual. We must stress on these aspects and take advantage and work on them in building a confederation of South Asia.

As for religion, we shall quote this passage from the Mother to illustrate the solution.

"The conflict of religions arises because each one claims the exclusive truth and demands a complete adherence to it by the method of dogma, ritual, ceremony and prescribed acts.

The solution would be, first to recognise that the truth of religion is in the spiritual experiences of which it is an outer formulation. To transcend therefore the outer form, and insist on the spiritual experience and in addition to recognise that there can be infinite and valid varieties of spiritual experiences is the important step in the solution. It is not by insisting on religion that India and the world can be reconstructed. The new world will transcend religions and will insist on the purity of spiritual experience.

Instead of taking religions in their outward forms, which are precisely dogmas and intellectual conceptions, if we take them in their spirit, in the principle they represent there is no difficulty in unifying them. They are simply different aspects of human progress, which complete each other perfectly well and should

be united with many others yet to form a more total and more complete progress, a more integral approach to the Divine.

(CWM Vol 9 p76-77)

India's attempt in her religion was to some extent directed to this inner perception; it is at present lost but we must now place forward this perception clearly and radically, not revive religion or religious spirit, but present the ideal of spiritual perfection which consists of an integral realisation of the spirit and its full manifestation on physical life".

(From Complete Works of the Mother)

However, all this needs a preparation and these ideas and concepts must be introduced in the education system, in the schools and colleges. Sometime in 1960s the Mother gave the following messages to the Government of India.

I would like the Government to recognise yoga as a subject of education, because it would be good for the country.

Matter will be transformed; it will be a solid base. Life will be divinised. Let India take the lead of the movement.

(Aug 5 1965)

And again: India has or rather had the knowledge of the Spirit, but it has neglected matter and suffered for it.

The West has the knowledge of Matter but rejected the Spirit and has suffered badly for it.

An integral education, which could, with some variations, be adapted to all the nations of the world, must bring back the legitimate authority of the Spirit over matter fully developed and utilised. (July 26 1965)

As already stated earlier, to pursue this to its logical conclusion, we have to set up institutions, which will make a detailed study of all religions in their deeper meaning and bring about a reconciliation of all religions. More it has to lead to the generalisation of Yoga, which is a practical way of attaining to the spiritual consciousness. **Yoga has to be generalised.**

This is the line of thought and action that the political leaders and more particularly the religious heads of these two communities should stress. If this is done with sincerity and persistence, it should be possible to create the conditions for the emergence of a great synthesis of all the religions and thus open the way for a true spiritual flowering of India and eventually of the world.

Finally, as a first practical step some suggestions are being made which one can start implementing immediately.

- Ensure that a uniform civil law is put in place. This has to be done by a detailed discussion with all the communities.

- Eliminate the policy of reservations in gradual steps. There should be no reservations based on caste or religion. The only reservations made should be for the economically handicapped and the physically handicapped.
- Stop all religious conversions. Let each citizen of India follow his own religion without hindrance. Why should there be conversions at all? What is the motivation behind most seeking of conversions that is coming out of the religious background? It is the belief that my religion is the only true religion and my God is the only saviour of humanity.

This is not a policy of harmony and tolerance but a blueprint for disharmony and conflict. What ultimately happens when someone who has that attitude comes into a community and converts people? People are taught to reject their ancestors and their traditions. Families are broken up. Division and conflict almost inevitably occur wherever this missionary business goes on. Therefore stop all conversion.

- Create a Central University and institutions with the purpose of studying, integrating, harmonising and synthesising all religions.

If these steps are pursued sincerely and steadfastly, there will inevitably come about a deep psychological unity leading to a confederation of India, which will include all the countries of the subcontinent. This will be the natural and final outcome and culminate in a lasting and durable political unification.

The Need to Move towards a Confederation of India

In 1965, the Mother had remarked:

(Certain events were) Set in motion by and under the impulsion of the forces of Truth that wanted to create a great Asian Federation. It was a federation that, as a matter of fact, needed the return of Pakistan and all those regions, and which includes Nepal, Tibet, also Burma, and in the South Ceylon. A great federation with each country having its autonomous development, perfectly free, but which would be united in a common single aspiration for peace and fight against the invasion of the forces of dissolution. This was very clear, it was willed.

As these steps are taken and a sense of unity begins to prevail in the subcontinent, there will result a movement towards creating a confederation. This confederation of India will include all the States within SAARC and at a later stage could even include Afghanistan and Myanmar. However, certain conditions have to be kept in mind and scrupulously

fulfilled. The first condition is that the Indian government must scrupulously respect the free internal life and will, the social, cultural, economic tendencies of the sub-nations while giving them an equal part with herself in the management of the great common questions of the confederation. India, herself can be nothing more than a clamp and nodus of this new type of aggregate. Given this orientation nothing short of some unforeseen cataclysm can prevent the formation of a true and living confederation of South Asia.

This is at least the hope and dream that we cherish. Time alone will show how and when this will become a reality.

As for religion, we shall quote this passage from the Mother to illustrate the solution.

Instead of taking religions in their outward forms, which are precisely dogmas and intellectual conceptions, if we take them in their spirit, in the principle they represent there is no difficulty in unifying them. They are simply different aspects of human progress, which complete each other perfectly well and should be united with many others yet to form a more total and more complete progress, a more integral approach to the Divine. And even this unification which already demands a return to the Spirit behind things, is not enough; there must be added to it a vision of the future, the goal towards which

humanity is moving, the future realisation of the world, that last "spiritual revolution".

(CWM Vol 9 p76-77)

*"The conflict of religions arises because each one claims the exclusive truth and demands a complete adherence to it by the method of dogma, ritual, ceremony and prescribed acts. The solution would be, first to recognise that **the truth of religion is in the spiritual experiences** of which it is an outer formulation. To transcend therefore the outer form, and insist on the spiritual experience and in addition to recognise that there can be infinite and valid varieties of spiritual experiences is the important step in the solution. It is not by insisting on religion that India and the world can be reconstructed. The new world will transcend religions and will insist on the purity of spiritual experience.*

India's attempt in her religion was to some extent directed to this inner perception; it is at present lost but we must now place forward this perception clearly and radically, not revive religion or religious spirit, but present the ideal of spiritual perfection which consists of an integral realisation of the spirit and its full manifestation on physical life".

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